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Mr I Hylan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hylan

Schools Where the Pupils' Behaviour has been identified as a Concern by Inspection: Monitoring Inspection of Cox Green School

Introduction

Following my visit with Pauline Robins HMI to your school on 22 and 23 June 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring inspection as part of the programme of visits to schools where the pupils' behaviour has been identified as a concern by inspection.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, and a representative from the LEA.

Context

Cox Green School is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school of average size with a growing sixth form. The school serves the south-western area of Maidenhead and the nearby villages; the socio-economic circumstances of the area are above average. Most of pupils are of white British heritage. The number of students with English as an additional language is low. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below the national average and the number of pupils identified as having special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average. Pupil mobility is low. Cox Green school will become a performing arts specialist

school in September 2005. The school is part of the DfES-funded Maidenhead Federation; the headteacher of Cox Green has led the federation until recently.

Achievement and standards

In the statutory Key Stage 3 tests in 2004, attainment was above the national average in each subject. In English, 74 per cent of the pupils achieved the expected Level 5, while the corresponding figures in mathematics and science were 83 and 79 per cent respectively. However, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 6 in English was well below schools in which pupils had similar prior attainment and was significantly below their performance in mathematics and science.

In terms of the pupils' average points score, attainment in the 2004 GCSE examinations was in line with the national average and that of schools in which the pupils had similar levels of prior attainment at Key Stage 3. The proportions of pupils achieving five higher grade passes or five overall pass grades was in line with schools with similar prior attainment. The proportion of pupils achieving one overall pass grade was well below such schools. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A*-C GCSE grades improved by two per cent to 57 per cent in 2004. The schools performance was well below that of schools in similar socio-economic contexts. The trend in the school's results over the last five years has declined from 16 points above the national figures to a position of five points above the national data. The performance of pupils studying advanced level courses was just below the national average.

The pupils' progress was satisfactory or better in 19 of the 26 lessons. It was unsatisfactory in six lessons and poor in one. In the lessons in which progress was satisfactory or better, the pupils were motivated by the brisk pace of the learning and the clear connection between the activities and the precise learning objectives. The pupils' speaking and listening skills are generally good; however, the quality of their written work varies considerably. The pupils are sufficiently confident in their ability to calculate in various contexts, to make good use of their data handling skills in science and to apply their knowledge of space and shape in design technology graphics. Higher achieving pupils in Year 10 responded well to demanding mathematical mental exercises.

Personal development and well-being

In lessons, the pupils' personal development was at least satisfactory in 21 of the 26 lessons; it was very good in three lessons, good in nine, unsatisfactory in three and poor in two. The staff report that the pupils' attitudes and behaviour have improved since the beginning of the school year; the school's incident log, the

responses to a pupils' questionnaire and written feedback from recent visitors to the school provide evidence that this is the case. During this inspection the great majority of the pupils responded well to effective teaching. Most pupils are keen to learn. Behaviour was only unsatisfactory when the teaching was weak; there were occasions when the pupils behaved appropriately despite unsatisfactory teaching and very warm weather conditions. However, in some lessons in which the teachers failed to provide challenging and engaging tasks, pupils often ignored the staff's requests for silence or task direction; the pupils' progress was unsatisfactory or poor in consequence. The pupils move around the school in an orderly manner and behaviour in public areas is generally well supervised.

The school now has clear policies and expectations about the management of behaviour. An active programme of senior and middle manager site tours was developed from a review which identified a pattern of disruptive incidents. The school operates a policy of departmental detentions and internal exclusions. The mentoring of disaffected pupils is satisfactory.

The number of fixed-term exclusions remains above average. A total of 55 fixed-term exclusions have been recorded since the start of the school year, eight more than in the corresponding period last year. There have been four permanent exclusions since September 2005. The total number of days lost to exclusion so far this year, 453, is already 26 days higher than the total for the whole of the previous school year.

Attendance on the first day of this monitoring inspection was 91.6 per cent, very close to the average for the year to date. There is, however, significant variation between the attendance rates of different year groups; attendance in Year 7 was at 93.46 per cent but in Year 10 it was 89.27 per cent. Significantly such variations have existed all year and notably Year 10 has failed to record 90 per cent attendance. A small number of pupils have recorded very low attendance; however, the LEA reports that there are no fast track prosecutions pending.

The school reports an improvement in the pupils' punctuality to school. On the second day of this inspection, HMI noted considerably more pupils entering the school after the registration bell than was recorded by the staff on duty; the number of pupils who had signed in late did not match either record. Senior staff are in evidence in the local community before the start of morning school and a similar high-profile presence around the site during the school day discourages late arrival to lessons. Overall, the culture and ethos of the school has improved from the inspection of November 2003.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2003:

- Establish a whole school approach to the management of attitudes to learning and the behaviour of a minority of pupils in some classes - satisfactory progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 18 of the 26 lessons; it was very good in two lessons and good in nine. Teaching was unsatisfactory in six and two were judged to be poor. The best teaching was seen in modern foreign languages, geography and the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Teaching was less than satisfactory in drama, humanities and citizenship.

In the best lessons the teachers had good subject knowledge and their enthusiasm encouraged the pupils to engage with their learning. Lessons began promptly and moved forward at a brisk pace. Questioning was used effectively to confirm the pupils' level of understanding and assess their acquisition of knowledge. The teachers clearly communicated their high expectations of the pupils. The judicious use of praise reinforced good behaviour, created a calm working environment, and encouraged debate. In these lessons progress was appropriate and often good.

In less successful lessons, the teachers' expectations were too low. Tasks were not well matched to the differing learning needs of the pupils and in some instances time was wasted on activities which did nothing to further the pupils learning. Learning objectives were not made clear at the start of the lesson and as a result the pupils were unclear about what they should be learning. Too frequently the teachers failed to secure the attention of the class before giving instructions. Where teaching was poor, staff were unable to establish order and did not command the respect of the pupils. Poor time keeping resulted in lessons over-running or finishing too early. The learning environment created in these classrooms was unsatisfactory; there was little work on display and a general appearance of untidiness.

The quality of the teachers' planning is inconsistent across the school and within subjects. In many instances it was superficial and did not provide sufficient information. Too frequently the match of task to the pupils' learning needs is unsatisfactory. Although the school has ascertained the learning style of each pupil, this was not utilised. There is a new assessment for learning policy in place for the next academic year. Currently, however, the use of assessment is underdeveloped. The school is unable to track the progress made by pupils; insufficient use is made of National Curriculum level exemplification to inform

teaching and the pupils' learning. Too few pupils know the standard at which they are working or what they need to do to improve. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 offers a limited choice of vocational opportunities, although there are plans to extend this provision as part of the specialist school development. A leisure and tourism vocational course has been successfully introduced. A group of approximately 33 pupils, from Years 10 and 11 are enrolled on courses at the local agricultural college. A further three pupils, who are at risk of exclusion, have individual programmes combining work experience, and school and college provision.

Leadership and management

The school has worked hard to address the weaknesses in attitudes to learning and behaviour management noted in the inspection of November 2003. The pupils' personal development is now satisfactory and many display a positive attitude to learning. The pupils respond well to effective teaching and are often compliant even when the opportunities to learn are less than inspiring.

The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is neither systematic nor rigorous. The programme of lesson observations undertaken as a result of performance management is haphazard. A review of the lesson observations conducted by the school reveal: inconsistencies in style and content; contradictions between areas considered a strength and others requiring development; overly generous grades awarded for teaching when the pupils progress was recorded as being only satisfactory; and in some cases the absence of a clear judgement.

The school has successfully achieved specialist school status in the performing arts. Senior managers have put a great deal of effort into this process and into the school's contribution to the Maidenhead Federation. However, the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory and was, moreover, an area of weakness in the inspection of 2003. The use of assessment to inform teaching and learning is inconsistent.

External support

The LEA National strategy consultants have worked consistently in the school. The LEA has supported the monitoring and evaluation of teaching.

Main Judgements

This visit has raised serious concerns about the standard of education provided by the school and I am recommending a return visit.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, and introduce systematic monitoring and evaluation procedures.
- Continue to develop the use of assessment to inform teaching and learning.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Windsor and Maidenhead.

Yours sincerely

David Jones
HM Inspector of Schools