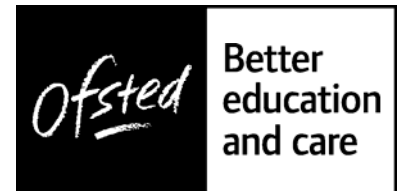


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7 June 2005

Mrs F Hart
St James' High School
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Dear Mrs Hart

Schools Where the Pupils' Behaviour has been Identified as a Concern by Inspection: Monitoring Inspection of St James' High School

Introduction

Following my visit with Mr M Rhowbotham HMI to your school on 25 and 26 May 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 17 lessons or parts of lessons, visited two registrations, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the senior management team, selected staff members, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and representatives from the LEA.

Context

St James' High School is a smaller than average mixed secondary school for pupils aged between 12 and 16 years. It draws from a catchment area which includes some of the highest levels of social and economic deprivation in Devon. Exeter is in the process of reorganising much of its school provision. From September 2005, the school will take pupils from Year 7 onwards; this will mean an intake of two year groups for the coming academic year. Adjacent to the current site, a new school has been built as part of a city wide privately funded finance initiative (PFI).

These premises are due to be opened and ready for use in September 2005. St James' has just gained specialist school status for mathematics and computing which will also commence in September. These major changes have necessitated a big commitment from the headteacher both in terms of her time and increased work load. The challenges this has brought for the school have been exacerbated by the long-term absence of the deputy headteacher which, in turn, has limited the capacity of the senior management team.

Achievement and standards

The proportion of the pupils achieving five or more higher grade GCSE passes in 2004 was 40.6 per cent. This figure was an improvement of three percentage points on the previous year, but three percentage points below the school's target. The percentage of pupils gaining one or more grades A* to G at GCSE was 85.9 per cent, which is below the national average. When compared to similar schools, value-added data indicates that the school is successful in building on the prior attainment of the pupils' who gain five or more higher grades at GCSE. It is less successful in adding value for pupils who gain one or more grades A* to G, where the school's performance is well below the national average. GNVQ results are good.

At Key Stage 3 the school did not achieve its targets for the proportions of pupils achieving level 5 or better in the core subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour around the school was often satisfactory though not consistently so. Some of the pupils, while not overly boisterous, have a disregard for adults and do not show some of the usual courtesies in the corridors like holding open doors. During the break time some pupils were seen smoking blatantly in the playground and jumping over the school wall into the street. There was a strong staff presence inside the school building at such times but not outside. Behaviour in lessons was unsatisfactory and in general reflected the quality of the teaching. In too many lessons the pupils were inattentive, defiant, challenged the teachers' authority and prevented others from learning. In a minority of lessons a few pupils did no work at all, did not participate and achieved nothing from the lesson. Strategies to manage the pupils' behaviour were inconsistently applied and the school's code of conduct was not referred to. In discussion with the pupils, they often found it hard to identify the good things about their school and claimed to be unsure of the school rules or the consequences of poor behaviour.

A small group of heads of department and heads of year are working together to improve the pupils' behaviour. Initially they have targeted the two things which, as a staff, they agreed wasted most time and caused most confrontation; swearing

and the wearing of trainers in school. The strategies which have been developed and are now in place, involve staff being on duty before school begins and being on call during some of their non-contact time. Monitoring has shown a rapid reduction in the number of referrals for swearing and fewer pupils are wearing trainers. However, an additional benefit was reported by a number of younger pupils. They are happier about coming to school in the mornings; the increased teacher presence at the school gates has resulted in a reduction of harassment from older pupils. The same group of staff are piloting a new rewards system which has been received enthusiastically by the pupils. Credits for good behaviour are 'banked' to be used to purchase stationery or saved towards a school trip to the local adventure park. It is still too early to judge the impact of this reward system.

The school has invested heavily in personnel and systems to improve the way absence is monitored and followed up. Despite being below both the national and Devon averages for attendance in 2003-04, the school had improved attendance by two percentage points. Rigorous tracking systems, which include first day telephone calls to parents and close liaison with the educational welfare officer, have contributed to this continuing improvement. Punctuality to lessons is poor; too many lessons fail to start on time or are disrupted by the pupils arriving late, sometimes by as much as ten minutes. There has been one permanent exclusion so far this academic year and a high level of fixed-term exclusions: 70 in the spring term and 83 in the autumn term. Some pupils have been excluded on more than one occasion.

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

- To insist that pupils display higher standards of conduct and responsibility to reduce harassment in lessons and around the school.

Inadequate progress has been made on improving the pupils' conduct in lessons and consistently around the school. However, satisfactory progress has been made on reducing harassment, particularly at the beginning of the school day.

Quality of provision

Of the 17 lessons, two were very good, three were good, six were satisfactory, four were unsatisfactory and two were poor. In most lessons the quality of the learning reflected the quality of the teaching, however in several the quality of the teaching was better than the learning. In these lessons, the teachers were working hard but the pupils lacked study skills and did not have positive attitudes towards their learning.

In the best lessons the teachers' had good subject knowledge and tasks were well matched to the learning objectives and needs of the pupils. Their expectations of the pupils' behaviour and application to learning were high. They used praise to encourage further effort from the pupils and positive reinforcement to acknowledge

good behaviour. In these lessons the pupils responded well, were motivated and made good progress.

In the weaker lessons, the teachers lesson plans were sparse and learning objectives were sometimes confused with activities. The pupils' work was not matched to their differing learning needs, expectations were far too low and the pace of learning was slow. The pupils work was marked superficially and in some instances it had not been marked for some time. The pupils' presentation of their work was poor and they had little pride in, or regard for their exercise books which were scruffy. Few pupils were aware of the level at which they were working, or precisely what they needed to do to improve, other than listening more and working harder.

A new manager for inclusion joined the school at the beginning of this term. This role brings together the line management for both learning and behavioural support and overall responsibility for pupils who have special educational needs. The inclusion manager is already implementing new referral systems, which were welcomed by the teaching staff, and is clear about her priorities and the future development of the department.

The quality of pastoral care within the school is good and draws on a range of outside agencies and specialist staff appointed by the school, such as a counsellor and family liaison worker.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory overall. The senior management team is dedicated to the school, but currently lacks sufficient capacity to ensure the consistent implementation of school policies and secure improvement at a fast enough rate. At a time when so many major initiatives are under way, the headteacher is heavily engaged in preparing for the school's reorganisation and the move to the new building. The remaining senior staff are engaged in day-to-day management rather than monitoring, evaluating and planning for the future. This is restricting the school's development; for example, the systems to monitor behaviour, by checking for consistency in management and analysing data, are insufficiently robust.

A group of middle managers has recognised that strategies to improve behaviour need to be developed and implemented at a more rapid pace, which led to them taking initiatives to target swearing and the wearing of trainers.

Staff training on classroom management and the use of strategies to promote appropriate behaviour has taken place. However, the impact and effectiveness of the training has not yet been evaluated.

A number of initiatives have been planned to begin in the new school year. These include work with the educational psychology service that will use a coaching model

to observe and identify good practice in managing behaviour for learning. In addition, the inclusion manager intends to extend the existing provision for disaffected pupils and provide enhanced support for younger pupils and further alternative programmes in Key Stage 4.

External support

The LEA is currently providing satisfactory support to the school. In agreement with the school, the LEA has placed St. James' on its list of schools causing concern to ensure appropriate support is provided at a challenging time in the school's evolution. Much of the LEA support is quite recent and though valued by the school has yet to show impact. A range of support is being provided, including the secondment of a senior Key Stage 3 consultant for three days a week to support the implementation of the specialist status. Specific work on improving attendance and behaviour has been provided which includes further consultant support and enhanced finances to assist intervention within the school and provide off-site provision to prevent permanent exclusions.

Main Judgements

This visit has raised serious concerns about the standard of education provided by the school and I am recommending a return visit. The school and LEA should send a short report to the lead HMI outlining the actions they have taken to improve the pupils' behaviour and the impact they have had within twenty working days of the end of this monitoring inspection. This report will inform the timing of the return visit.

Priorities for further improvement

- Strengthen the systems and procedures for school self-evaluation.
- Establish expectations of behaviour and develop behaviour management strategies which are understood and applied consistently by all staff.
- Continue to improve the levels of attendance and improve the pupils' punctuality to lessons.

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

Yours sincerely

PAULINE ROBINS
HM Inspector of Schools