



25 April 2005

Mr J O'Donnell
Headteacher
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Aylesbury Street West
Wolverton
Milton Keynes
MK12 5BT

Dear Mr O'Donnell

Implementation of The Radcliffe School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Mr C J Redman HMI, Mr K Gilbert, Additional Inspector, Ms C Rodney HMI and Mr P Dowgill HMI to your school on 18 and 19 April 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings which are recorded in the attached note.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the school; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

The school has made reasonable progress since the last monitoring inspection and reasonable progress overall since being subject to special measures.

The school can appoint newly qualified teachers in consultation with the monitoring HMI.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education and Early Years for Milton Keynes.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RADCLIFFE SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

Findings of the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures

During the visit, 39 parts of lessons and three registration sessions were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the chair of governors, nominated staff and a representative from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils, and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, the chair of the governing body, three representative from the LEA, and two deputy headteachers.

Standards in lessons were similar to those observed on the previous visit and below those typical for the pupils' age. Where the teaching was good or better, standards were rising and some met or exceeded national expectations.

The quality of learning, including the progress made by the pupils, was sound or better in 29 lessons; it was good in 12 and very good in three lessons. The proportion of good or better learning had increased since the last monitoring inspection, but there remained about a quarter of the lessons where learning was unsatisfactory. Weak literacy skills, particularly listening, speaking, writing and extracting information from texts, continued to restrict too many pupils' progress. A significant minority of predominantly less able pupils were over-dependent on adult help to make adequate progress. Unsatisfactory behaviour and inadequate attitudes continued to be a feature that restricted learning in some lessons.

The quality of teaching was similar to the previous visit. It was satisfactory or better in 31 lessons, including 18 where it was good or very good. Very good teaching occurred in four lessons, two in English and two in physical education. All of the teaching in the sixth form was good. However, in seven lessons the teaching was unsatisfactory and it was poor in a Year 8 history lesson.

Many of the characteristics of teaching described in the previous monitoring letter were apparent again. There was wide variation in the teaching approaches adopted across the school; while some were good, too many were ineffective. Where there were weaknesses, the dominant issue was the unsatisfactory involvement of the pupils in active learning. In several lessons, the teachers did not model good presentation in their own writing. The frequency and quality of marking varied from good in English, art and history, to unsatisfactory in mathematics, science and geography.

The pupils' attitudes to work and their behaviour were similar to that observed on the previous visit; they were satisfactory or better in three quarters of the lessons and good in just less than half. Where the teaching was very good, the pupils were highly motivated and actively involved in learning. However, too often the pupils showed little enthusiasm for study and completed the tasks set by the teacher

compliantly but sometimes at too slow a pace. A minority, often pupils in lower sets, achieved very little in the hour-long lesson. Behaviour around the school had improved noticeably.

Exclusions for the spring term declined by nearly 40 per cent compared to the previous term although there was a significant increase in Year 8. There were two permanent exclusions in the spring term.

Attendance in the spring term 2005 had declined nearly two per cent compared with the same period in 2004; it was nearly four percent below target. Attendance was very low in Year 11, a notable feature during the inspection. Punctuality to lessons overall was good.

The new headteacher has been in post for just one week. In that short time, he has gained the confidence of staff and governors, and identified key issues that need to be addressed if the school is to quicken the pace of improvement. The quality of leadership and management elsewhere in the school varies too widely; at its best it is perceptive, energetic, proactive and effective, but in some areas this level has yet to be achieved.

Continued problems with staff recruitment, retention and sickness are limiting the pace at which the school is securing improvements and adversely affect the standards achieved by the pupils. Currently, there are four vacancies, but successful recruitment for September 2005 suggests the staffing situation will improve significantly.

The possibility that part of the school site could be sold soon has eased the complex financial situation that led to a projected deficit of £450,000 by April 2006. In addition, transitional grants amounting to £150,000 have been awarded.

Two additional governors have been placed on the governing body by the LEA and a third is being sought. The governors' monitoring continues to become more perceptive; for example, after two presentations from subject leaders, the governors have organised task groups to look at how the school can be supported to secure the necessary improvements in provision.

The LEA has continued to monitor the school's progress effectively and to provide advice on teaching, learning, behaviour and management; however, the impact of this help remains too variable.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: improve monitoring and evaluation and management effectiveness

The arrangements for monitoring teaching and learning have improved. Most subject leaders have received further training in lesson observation to support a greater consistency in making evaluations; nevertheless, some middle managers

are not expecting sufficient quality when judging teaching or learning as satisfactory or good. Lesson grades are recorded so that the school can point to a sound picture of improvements in teaching and learning. However, the extent of this improvement was not replicated by HMI monitoring. For example, only four per cent of teaching and learning was unsatisfactory in the lessons observed by staff in the spring term, but it was 20 per cent during the inspection. The school's lesson grades do not distinguish between teaching and learning so that the different rates of development between the two characteristics have not been clearly identified. Nevertheless, lesson observations together with other monitoring, such as the scrutiny of pupils' books, have helped each subject department to identify key priorities for development although these vary widely in quality and relevance. Overall, the school's capacity for self-evaluation has improved and the structures to support self-evaluation are good.

Progress has been reasonable.

2: improve teaching and learning

A wide range of proposals have been made to change the structure of the school day. This has the potential to increase the number of times that the pupils have to move around the site as well as reduce the available teaching time to less than the minimum recommended for Key Stages 3 and 4. A careful evaluation of these proposals is required if they are not to be detrimental to the school's educational provision.

A curriculum model for the Year 7, which the school will receive for the first time in September 2005, uses a small team of teachers to deliver the whole curriculum; the team includes two advanced skills teachers recruited from local middle schools. Specialists will not always be delivering the subjects taught to Year 7. A review of this strategy, including its management, will be an essential ingredient in its implementation.

A review of the curriculum for the rest of Key Stage 3 has taken place. Some curriculum team leaders have discussed changes to the allocation of subject time; for example, design and technology. There will be a reduction in time allocated for others subjects. Half-hour slots of time are to be introduced for specific literacy and numeracy teaching in Years 7 to 9 and modern foreign languages will move to half-hour periods. The effectiveness of these changes will be an emphasis on the next monitoring visit. Changes will also take place within the Key Stage 4 curriculum with a reduction in the number of GCSEs taken by some pupils with more time allocated to those remaining. Other accredited courses will be introduced to meet the needs of the range of abilities. A review of the sixth form curriculum will take place with the appointment of the head of Key Stage 5.

The longer morning session will enable the school to assemble more regularly than the once a week at present. This is an essential period of time during the day to

develop the ethos and to further the pupils' understanding of how they can participate more fully in their own learning.

The refurbishment of the design and technology suite is valued by the pupils; the new equipment offers a breadth of experiences and the pupils can see that considerable investment in their learning has taken place.

Although the curriculum initiatives are a positive step forward, the quality of teaching and learning has not improved significantly; hence, there has been only limited progress on this area for improvement.

3: improve behaviour management

The strategies to improve behaviour management are becoming embedded and the majority of staff understand their purpose and use them appropriately. A strategic management group has been constituted to drive forward initiatives related to learning and behaviour and evaluate current practice. This group has already introduced a useful 'behaviour for learning audit' to identify pupils who are not prepared for learning and presented suitable strategies for staff to give assistance. Parents are kept suitably informed about the developments in behaviour management and the expectations of the school.

The school continues to implement its formal rewards policy well, celebrates pupils' achievements and informs parents of their successes. In lessons, the use of praise was good in English, design and technology, and physical education, but it was inadequate in other subjects.

The DATE room is providing an effective alternative to exclusion and is managed well. It is having a positive impact as the number of re-offenders is small and there are few lengthy placements. Work is usually provided for pupils, although it is not always of sufficient quantity or challenge. The issue of setting work for pupils in the time out room has been successfully addressed and pupils work in silence. The use of the time out room and after school detentions remains very high particularly in Years 8 and 9, with considerable numbers of repeat offenders.

There is detailed analysis of a good range of data relating to behaviour that is helping managers identify patterns and provide targeted support for both pupils and staff.

Progress with this key area is reasonable.

4: implement a consistent and rigorous approach to social inclusion

The provision for special educational needs continues to be given high priority for development; for example, additional staff have been appointed. Recent training has increased the teachers' awareness in identifying and meeting the needs of these pupils. A working party has been established with a clear remit for special

needs. Individual education plans have been reorganised. A useful reference guide on inclusion has been issued, but this does not include all the aspects that would help teachers. Effective curriculum links have been established with local combined schools and external agencies. While much has been accomplished within a short time, there is inconsistency in the provision across the curriculum so that too often the needs of these pupils are not met adequately.

Appropriate actions have been taken to improve the provision for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) since the last monitoring inspection. Suitable projects are in place to target those at risk of underachieving and there is an increased use of assessment data to track the progress of EAL pupils and other minority ethnic pupils. The recent curriculum audit, specialist support from the LEA consultant and the additional EAL assistant have begun to have a positive impact on the pupils' learning in English, but elsewhere there was little impact.

Progress on this area for improvement is reasonable.