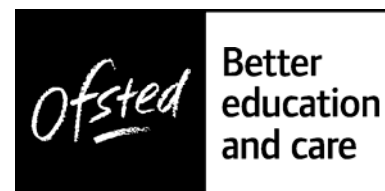


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10 June 2005

Ms B Saddington
Headteacher
Birtenshaw Hall School
Darwen Road
Bromley Cross
Bolton
BL7 9AB

Dear Ms Saddington

Implementation of Birtenshaw Hall School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 23 and 24 May 2005, I write to confirm the findings and to notify you of the outcomes.

As you know, the inspection was part of a policy involving a broader series of visits by HMI and Additional Inspectors to check on the development and improvement of schools which have been designated by their section 10 inspection as having serious weaknesses. You will recall that the focus of the inspection was to assess: the quality of the action plan; 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 and removing the causes of the serious weaknesses.

During the visit I inspected four teaching sessions; attended an assembly; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions with you and the other three teachers in the school on the areas for improvement identified in the section 10 inspection. I also spoke informally with other staff and pupils, and met a visiting parent.

On the basis of the evidence gathered during the visit, I made the following observations to you, the chair of governors and the chair of the curriculum committee.

Most pupils who attend Birtenshaw Hall have profound and multiple learning difficulties, and their attainment on entry to the school is very low. Overall, their achievement is satisfactory although it is limited. Some of the older pupils achieve well and gain external accreditation through AQA and ASDAN.

The quality of the teaching was never less than satisfactory; most of the teaching sessions were good. In the main, lessons were carefully planned and had clear objectives. Teachers and other staff worked well together in providing an appropriate learning environment to ensure that pupils could play as full a part as possible in the learning. High levels of staffing meant that each pupil was well supported by an adult throughout the day. Support staff are clear about their roles and team work is good. In general, the pupils feel comfortable and safe and are able to make suitable progress. Effective use is made of a wide range of resources to stimulate them and increase their involvement. Few of the pupils are able to speak clearly but some show their interest in other ways; for instance, by facial expressions or making choices in the lesson by head movements.

The pupils' behaviour in lessons is satisfactory and they display positive attitudes to school. Staff consistently provide good role models and show respect to the pupils and each other. Relationships are very good.

Of the 18 pupils in the school, only three are day pupils; attendance is good at almost 97 per cent and there have been no exclusions.

There have been recent changes in the leadership and management of the school. The principal, who had been responsible for both education and care, retired at the end of the spring term, and was replaced by two staff members with distinct but complementary roles. The new headteacher and the residential care manager regularly share information on the pupils but make different contributions to their welfare. They meet weekly as the core of the senior management team, which includes the senior teacher and the school administrator. There are separate weekly meetings for the teaching staff which focus solely on educational concerns. The action plan was drawn up prior to the headteacher's arrival. It includes all the areas for improvement identified in the report, and specifies separate and appropriate monitoring and evaluation activities. Some of the success criteria could be sharper but the review dates will be useful in checking progress. The timescales are generally suitable. The plan is satisfactory. Implementation of the plan had begun before the new headteacher arrived but she has produced a further document which adds details and interim steps to make the implementation more manageable for the small number of named, responsible staff. She has re-allocated subject responsibilities but will play the lead role in curriculum development herself.

The headteacher is well supported by the chair of the governing body. The governing body has an appropriate committee structure and is capable of holding the school to account.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: ensure that staff take account of the most recent developments in planning and assessing the curriculum for pupils with complex needs

Suitable up-to-date curricular documentation has been provided for education staff and a training day on effective subject leadership is to take place this week. Subject action plans have been drawn up for each core curriculum area but are not yet embedded in practice.

Progress is reasonable.

2: develop a clear curriculum policy that shows what the school intends to provide and establishes priorities for development

A curriculum development policy has been written by the new headteacher. It outlines priorities and specifies what is to be done over time. The document is at an early stage of implementation.

Progress is limited.

3: develop plans for the full range of National Curriculum subjects and personal, social and health education (PSHE)

Work on this area of improvement is under way but progress needs to be accelerated.

Progress is reasonable.

4: develop assessment procedures that identify the small gains that students make in all subjects and introduce the use of P levels

The use of P levels is increasing. Staff have a better understanding of how they relate to the National Curriculum and how they are used to measure progress incrementally.

Progress is reasonable.

5: develop procedures that enable the school to systematically review and evaluate the provision

An appointment has been made of an external consultant. She has undertaken a school improvement audit with the headteacher and a training day on leadership and management has been planned for next month. These recent steps are positive but the school does not have systematic review procedures in place.

Progress is limited.

6: develop a school improvement plan that shows developments over a period greater than one year and identifies the cost implications

The headteacher has augmented the action plan and set it within a larger timescale. It is a useful working document.

Progress is reasonable.

7: ensure that requirements are met in mathematics in Years 7 to 11

The former headteacher produced a draft policy for mathematics but it is currently in the process of revision. The new headteacher is making good headway with this task.

Progress is reasonable.

8: ensure that pupils' progress reports, the governors' annual report and the prospectus contain all the information required by law

Reasonable progress has been made on this area for improvement although the annual review pro forma has not yet been finalised.

Although the school made a slow start, reasonable progress has been made in implementing the action plan and removing the causes of the school's serious weaknesses.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State and the chair of governors. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

SUE HANDS
Additional Inspector

cc: chair of governors