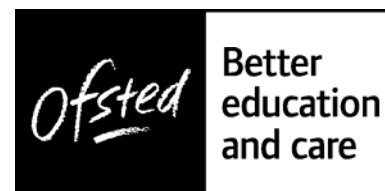


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27 June 2005

Mrs Jane Bolton
Acting Headteacher
Crockerne CE Primary School
Westward Drive
Pill
North Somerset
BS20 0JP

Dear Mrs Bolton

Implementation of Crockerne CE Primary School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 6 and 7 June, 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 eleven parts of lessons; attended a registration period and an assembly; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions with you and nominated staff on the areas for improvement identified in the section 10 inspection. I also examined a range of pupils' work and spoke informally with other staff and pupils.

On the basis of the evidence gathered during the visit, I made the following observations to you, the substantive headteacher, the chair of governors and a representative of the LEA.

Since the inspection of June 2004, the school has experienced a period of considerable disruption which was outside of its control. Asbestos contamination in the Key Stage 2 block meant that all of the junior classes had to move to alternative premises some miles away, for several months. Many resources, teaching materials and records were destroyed. The pupils returned to the

Crockerne site in January of this year, but the disruption meant that some teaching time was lost in travelling every day, and the drive for improvement was hindered by other, pressing problems. This led to some slippage in the implementation of the action plan.

Standards in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are generally close to what is expected for the pupils' ages, although in all classes there is a wide span of attainment. Observations of the pupils' work in lessons and scrutiny of the school's assessment information show that standards are generally lower in Key Stage 2 and are below what is expected, overall. This is a similar picture to that found in the inspection of June 2004.

The pupils are given a good start in the nursery class and their social development and skills in speaking and listening are well fostered. The pupils have a good disposition to learn. Pupils make satisfactory progress in the reception classes and through Key Stage 1; by Year 2 many of the pupils are confident to count in threes and fours, usually using number squares or their fingers to help them. Their handwriting is developing appropriately and some pupils read with understanding and growing expression.

In lessons in Key Stage 2, there was a clear correlation between the quality of the teaching and the standards the pupils attained. Better teaching enabled the pupils to demonstrate what they were capable of and build effectively on their prior learning; for example, in Year 6 the pupils had a good knowledge of devices and techniques used in persuasive writing and were confident to apply this to their analysis of pieces of text. Where the teaching was less strong, standards were lower, and progress was slower. In addition, the progress the pupils made in lessons was sometimes less than the teaching deserved, and the lack of enthusiasm shown by some pupils about learning had an adverse affect on their achievement.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in ten of the lessons, including two in which the teaching was good and one where it was very good. The good and better teaching was characterised by a confident and assured manner and a brisk and businesslike approach to the lesson. Subject knowledge was secure and the content of the lesson built well on what the pupils had learned before. Expectations of the standard of work and the pupils' behaviour were suitably high; potential disruptions were dealt with quickly and unobtrusively. The school has a core of good teaching; other staff are well placed to learn from their colleagues.

Much of the teaching was sound, enabling the pupils to make reasonable progress in the lesson. The lesson plans made clear what the pupils were to learn and how they would be supported, and the tasks and activities were generally appropriate. However, a sense of urgency and pace was missing, and activities more often consolidated what the pupils already knew rather than extending their learning. Higher attaining pupils were not always sufficiently challenged. Plenary sessions at the end of lessons did not always round off the learning and point to the next

steps. Some of the teachers had difficulty in establishing a calm, working atmosphere and resorted to talking over the pupils' chatter rather than insisting on silence. Where the teaching was unsatisfactory, too few of the pupils were able to make progress in their independent work because the tasks were too complex or because their previous learning was not secure enough for them to move on; this meant that they did not fully understand what they were doing.

The pupils' attitudes and their behaviour were satisfactory overall. The pupils responded well to good teaching, but lacked enthusiasm and commitment in other lessons. The youngest pupils were keen to learn and responded positively to the tasks and activities that were provided for them. They listened attentively to their teachers and behaved well and responsibly in lessons. This standard of behaviour and positive attitudes were not sustained in all classes; in Key Stage 2 there is a small but significant minority of pupils who had little interest in learning and whose behaviour could be challenging. Many of the older pupils had short concentration spans and quickly switched off. The good work habits which have been learned in the early years of the school have been undermined and the teachers had to work hard to keep the pupils' attention. Towards the end of the first day of this inspection, there was a noticeable degree of low-level disruption with pupils getting up from their seats too often, slouching at their desks or fidgeting with whatever was to hand. Although the pupils' attitudes and their behaviour were not highlighted as significant areas for development in the inspection, the school has rightly recognised that rapid improvements need to be made. An action plan to tackle this issue has been drawn up, and the LEA is to provide support for the teachers in managing the pupils' behaviour.

At the moment, the substantive headteacher is on maternity leave. The acting headteacher is seconded from a successful school in the authority. She is providing good leadership and a clear direction, which is focused on the need to raise standards as a key priority. The school's evaluation of progress so far is detailed and honest, with a clear focus on impact and well as implementation.

The school's action plan is satisfactory with several good features. The plan has sensibly combined the areas for improvement under three broad headings, which avoids repetition and cross-referencing. The plan is clear and succinct, and supplemented by more detailed plans for improvement in English, mathematics and science. Actions are appropriately staged, although there is much to do in the short term. Targets are appropriate. There is a minor weakness in the arrangements for monitoring and evaluation, in that what is to be done does not always correlate directly to the criteria for measuring success; for example, one success criterion relates to the pupils having an understanding of their targets and what they need to do to improve, but there are no evaluation procedures which will help the school form a judgement about this aspect.

The LEA has provided a good deal of support for the school since the inspection, including the secondment of the acting headteacher and an assistant deputy headteacher. This has been effective in strengthening leadership and

management. Further support has been provided by consultants and advisers. The support has been well received by the school, although it has been intense. A focused approach to supporting individual teachers has been adopted, which is sensible. The LEA's support has helped to improve the quality of teaching, but the impact on learning and standards is less evident.

The LEA's commentary on the school's action plan and their statement of action are good. There is a clear and close correlation between the school's plans and those of the LEA, and appropriate criteria for measuring success. In addition, the school's progress has been kept under regular review.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: raise standards in Years 1 to 6, particularly in English, mathematics and science, and for the boys and the more able pupils

The school has a much clearer understanding of what the pupils should achieve in Key Stages 1 and 2. Appropriate steps have been taken to ensure that what is taught is appropriate and better matched to the pupils' learning needs. For example, the pupils across Key Stage 2 are grouped by ability for their lessons in mathematics, which the teachers feel has been effective in improving their expectations of what the pupils should know and be able to do, and has helped with the planning of lessons. The subject leaders have a better knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching in their subjects, and of where there are gaps in the pupils' prior learning, and are tackling these as their action plans are implemented. For example, in order to tackle weaknesses in reading, the school is to implement a "synthetic phonics" programme at the start of the new academic year. Each class has curricular targets for English and mathematics. Targets for the pupils' achievements have been included in the teachers' performance management agreements.

There is evidence that the pupils are making satisfactory progress in mathematics, and about half of the pupils in Key Stage 2 are making satisfactory progress in reading and writing. The school is aware that progress in English especially is not good enough, and the school is unlikely to meet its targets for achievement in the national tests this year.

The school has made reasonable progress in tackling the causes of the serious weaknesses in standards, although as yet the impact of the work is not strongly evident. The rate of the pupils' progress over time must accelerate, if underachievement is to be eradicated.

2: improve teaching in Years 1 to 6

The quality of teaching has been evaluated above. Although the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has been reduced and improvements have been made to planning and the use of assessment, the proportion of teaching that is good or

better is not yet large enough to ensure that the pupils' progress is accelerated - a necessary precursor to raised standards.

Overall, progress on this area for improvement is reasonable.

3: provide a coherent and broad curriculum

The school's curriculum framework has been reviewed in order to make sure that the programmes of study are addressed systematically and take account of the mixed-age classes in both key stages. Nationally agreed guidance is being used as a basis for planning. The school has plans to improve cross-curricular links in future years, once the teachers have become familiar with the content and structure of the current system. Reasonable progress has been made.

4: improve the accuracy and use of assessment

Senior staff have rightly recognised that the effective use of assessment is key to improving teaching and raising standards. There have been two main thrusts: firstly, to develop a tracking system which monitors attainment and progress, and secondly to improve marking so that both teachers and pupils have a better understanding of the next small steps in the pupils' learning. Useful information has been collected and the school can now see which pupils have made appropriate progress during this academic year and, for the pupils in Key Stage 2, since they took part in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 1. The data shows that many of the pupils have fallen behind. Each class teacher has a list of those pupils whose attainment is below what is expected, which highlights areas of concern. The information is being used to inform groupings for intervention programmes.

Good progress has been made on this area for improvement.

5: ensure that the co-ordinators take responsibility for standards in their subjects

The co-ordinators for English, mathematics and science are all relatively new in post. They have developed their roles quickly and well. They talk with knowledge and confidence about standards, teaching and learning in their subjects, identifying strengths and weaknesses. Their work is beginning to have a positive impact on classroom practice. Good progress has been made on this area for improvement.

6: develop the role of governors so that they provide challenge

The governors have their own action plan as part of the school's overall plan, and a supplementary development plan. Training sessions provided by the LEA have helped governors develop a better understanding of their role in holding the school to account. Governors are improving their knowledge of the school's work in a number of ways: each governor has a particular responsibility and some have met with co-ordinators to discuss this aspect of their work; co-ordinators have made

presentations to the governing body; and some governors have made visits to the school or attended training sessions alongside the teachers. However, much of the work has been done by a small group of governors and collective responsibility is not firmly established. Reasonable progress has been made on this area for improvement.

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, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for North Somerset. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
HM Inspector of Schools