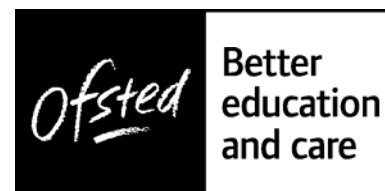


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21 July 2005

Mrs C M Forsey
Headteacher
St Joseph's RC (A) Primary School
Station Road
Tadcaster
North Yorkshire
LS24 9JG

Dear Mrs Forsey

Implementation of St Joseph's RC (A) Primary School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 11 and 12 July 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 ten lessons or part lessons; attended a registration period; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions on the areas for improvement identified in the section 10 inspection. I also examined a range of pupils' work.

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

The standards attained by the pupils in the most recent National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 1 were above average in reading, average in mathematics and well below average in writing. Although cohort sizes make comparative data unreliable, a high proportion of the pupils reach the higher levels in reading and mathematics. However, the significant gap in the levels of attainment between reading and writing is a persistent factor in this school's performance and is an issue which requires urgent attention.

The standards attained by the pupils in the tests at the end of Key Stage 2 were average in mathematics and above average in science. In the latter subject all the

pupils achieved the nationally expected level and a high proportion attained the higher level (Level 5). The national examination authority has lost the pupils' test scripts for English. This unacceptable situation, particularly for a vulnerable school, has caused the school to rely on teacher assessments in English. These indicate that pupils' attainments are at an average level and this is borne out by the scrutiny of pupils' previous work in English, the standards attained in the lessons in Year 6 and the accuracy of teacher assessment.

In seven of the lessons observed, standards of attainment were broadly in line with national expectations. Standards were low in the Foundation Stage and Year 1. However, the progress made by the pupils was satisfactory in only half the lessons, the majority being in Years 5 and 6. The variable progress made by the pupils relates directly to the quality of teaching: this was broadly satisfactory in eight of the lessons but in half of this number there were counter balancing strengths and weaknesses. There was no good teaching and the school needs to consider the nature of its current targets in this regard. At the moment, these targets relate to the removal of unsatisfactory teaching; the emphasis now needs to change to a focus on raising satisfactory teaching to good, in line with LEA and national trends. Particular attention needs to be given to the pace, balance and expectation in lessons; the context, relevance and continuity of pupils' learning; and an emphasis on higher order learning skills, particularly with more able pupils. The quality of education should be better overall given the behaviour and attitude of the majority of pupils and the small, well supported classes in which they are registered.

The leadership and management of the school are sound on a day-to-day basis. The action plan, produced in response to the issues raised in the full inspection, is coherent and well constructed. The identification of key responsibilities, resource implications and targets enable the joint partnership of headteacher, governors, LEA and diocese to monitor the school's progress in targeted areas for improvement. The school's action plan which has now been developed further into a more broadly based development plan, is closely linked to the LEA's action plan for school improvement. Both action plans are satisfactory overall but have some weaknesses. Whereas the joint action plans are appropriately structured to support the monitoring and tracking of progress in meeting deadlines, a number of factors have impeded the pace of improvement. The teacher with leadership responsibilities for the Foundation Stage and information and communication technology (ICT) has been absent over an extended period. Additionally, a succession of changes in the advisory support for the school have been unhelpful to progress, although this situation is now resolved and the school is receiving good quality support. Many of the school's initiatives for improvement focus on the completion of identified tasks and on organisational issues and resourcing. The current focuses are insufficiently linked to an evaluation of the impact of the initiatives in the action plan and what, if any, subsequent actions are necessary. In order to progress further, the joint partners need to review the emphases in the action plan rather than its content.

The headteacher has devised a well phased programme for curriculum development. In view of the school's size and the number of teachers, the opportunities for a more fluid curriculum leadership, monitoring and in-service training should be considered as a means of making progress.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: improve the quality of teaching across the school, most particularly for pupils in Year R, Year 1 and Year 2

The school's progress is limited. The quality of teaching overall, and particularly in the class containing the pupils in the Foundation Stage and Year 1, is too inconsistent with some significant weaknesses referred to earlier in this letter. While attempting to raise the quality of teaching through recruitment and training, it is now necessary to give early attention to a number of key elements which are likely to cause improvement. It is particularly important that a more coherent and rational curriculum is provided at the interface between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Additionally, the cycles of planning for the National Curriculum subjects at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 need to be reviewed and rationalised taking into account the continuing problems created by mixed age, cross-key stage classes. The LEA has good experience and proven qualities in this regard and these factors need to be asserted in this school. There is a tentative programme of classroom observation which needs to be developed and improved. In view of the continuing concerns about the quality of teaching in the early years' class, the standards attained, and the range of scope of some of the school's work, it is important that a regular scrutiny of pupils' work is included within a systematic monitoring programme undertaken by the headteacher and LEA.

2: raise standards in English and ICT across the school and improve provision for pupils in the Foundation Stage

The school's progress is reasonable in the short period since the full inspection. Although there are major weaknesses in the quality of education provided in the Foundation Stage and Year 1, the recently appointed, newly qualified teacher has made significant improvements in the material provision for the youngest pupils. There is a stimulating, well arranged classroom environment and a ready access to a range of materials to support pupils' first-hand experience and their individual enquiry. The potential which exists for effective learning now needs to be realised through a more coherent curricular provision.

The school is receiving good assistance from the governors and from voluntary parental support in order to improve the quality, range and scope of the work in ICT. The work inspected was of satisfactory quality and effective use of ICT occurred in the course of lessons in Year 5 and 6. Although the inventory of ICT resources is good for the number of pupils on roll, the reliability of some of the computers impedes the pace of the work and the standards achieved.

The school has taken a number of key actions to improve the work in English, though the majority are more closely related to organisational arrangements and resourcing rather than to raising standards. The continuing major gap between pupils' attainment in reading and writing at the end of Key Stage 1 is compounded by the inadequate work in Year 1. Additionally, the range and scope of written work in science, history and geography in Key Stage 2 needs early review in order further to raise standards.

3: further develop assessment procedures across both the school and the curriculum

The school's progress is reasonable. There are comprehensive arrangements for the individual tracking of a pupil's progress and for the setting of curricular targets. The differentiation of tasks in Year 2 and in Key Stage 2 is appropriately informed by this process and by the teachers' continuous and accurate assessment of pupils' progress. The marking of pupils' completed work is systematic and, in the main, constructive. However, there is little if any reference back to the targets set for pupils' performance or indications of the level attained and this should be reviewed in the link to raising standards.

4: develop the role of the governing body to play a stronger part in school improvement and in monitoring and evaluating the school's work

The school's progress is good. While retaining the high level of support for the school, the governors' information base has been improved to a level where they are increasingly able to hold the school to account and to seek to improve standards and quality. The work of the governing body is orderly and well led, with a good committee structure and effective financial management. The governors have confidence in the recently appointed headteacher, as well as effective links with the LEA and diocese. A number of proposed initiatives in creating a loose federation with other neighbouring Roman Catholic primary schools is well linked to the governors' strategic planning and an overview of the school's viability. The joint partners have been effective in putting in place secure structures to support the school's further progress together with appropriate review arrangements.

Reasonable progress has been made overall in implementing the action plan and removing the causes of the school's serious weaknesses. Nevertheless, the visit has raised some continuing concerns about the quality of education provided and the school's performance will be monitored. Some recent developments, particularly in association with the LEA, suggest that the school has a capacity to improve further.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education for North Yorkshire and the Diocesan Director of Education for Leeds. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

RON WEIR
Additional Inspector

cc: chair of governors
LEA
diocese