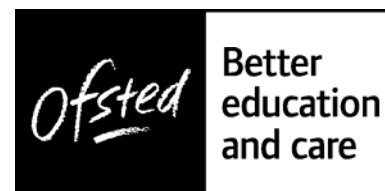


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5 July 2005

Mr P Barton
Headteacher
Pear Tree Junior School
Pear Tree Street
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Dear Mr Barton

Implementation of Pear Tree Junior School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 27 and 28 June 2005, with my colleague Mr J Francis, Additional Inspector, 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 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 we inspected 17 lessons or part lessons; attended two registration periods, an assembly; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions with you, the chair of governors, a representative of the LEA and nominated staff on the areas for improvement identified in the section 10 inspection. We 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 chair of governors and representatives of the LEA.

The school continues to experience considerable turnover of pupils, some who only stay in the school for a very short time and many of whom come with little English. Two thirds of pupils do not have English as their first language and fifteen home languages are represented. The school manages the induction of the new pupils effectively so that they cope well with their new situation.

Standards in English are still very low but the pupils are beginning to make better progress in most classes. Attainment is particularly low in Years 5 and 6, but standards are closer to those expected in Years 3 and 4. The school is focusing, appropriately, on speaking and listening as the key area for urgent action. While most listen attentively, standards in speaking are low. There are still some pupils, particularly those who have emotional and behavioural difficulties, who do not find it easy to listen to others and take turns in speaking. More opportunities were given to pupils to speak at length in lessons, and to discuss their views with each other before speaking in public. However, there were many occasions when the pupils were allowed to respond with a single word or phrase and the teachers did not model good spoken language often enough. In addition, opportunities were sometimes missed to develop the pupils' understanding of the new vocabulary.

More time has been given to the teaching of reading and writing and teachers are now paying greater attention to developing the skills of inference and deduction, as, apart from the most able, the pupils' reading rarely reaches beyond the superficial. Progress in writing has varied between classes but has been satisfactory overall. The pupils are writing in a wider range of styles and improving the vocabulary they use. The less able in Year 6 have achieved well over the year, because the teaching they have received has been precise and focused on the skills they need to develop. However, the progress made by the older pupils, overall, has not been enough to eliminate the significant legacy of underachievement and the opportunity to write at length and in a variety of styles varies between sets. Although the content of the most able pupils' work is interesting, complex and well-structured, remaining weaknesses in spelling, punctuation and layout mean that they are not reaching their potential. The school is more aware of the urgent need to strengthen the pupils' phonic skills, as considerable shortcomings are hampering their progress in reading and writing, and consequently throughout the curriculum.

Attainment in mathematics is well below national expectations and few pupils are working at the higher levels. Work following national guidance covers all aspects of the subject, but there are significant weaknesses evident in pupils' understanding of written questions. Pupils' recall of tables and number bonds is often poor and slows their rate of work. However, during the opening oral and mental parts of the lessons teachers are attempting to give pupils strategies that would help them work out mental problems more quickly. Some good examples were seen where teachers encouraged pupils to develop their own approaches to calculations during oral sessions.

Improvements to assessment mean that teachers have a better understanding of what the next steps are that the pupils need to take. However, there is still work to be done in matching work more closely to pupils' needs and not just, for example, the age-related levels within the National Numeracy Strategy. This is not appropriate for many pupils, as it does not address sufficiently well the gaps in their knowledge and understanding from earlier years. As a result, some aspects of the part of the lesson where pupils work independently were not always sufficiently well matched to their prior attainment. For example, many Year 6 pupils working

on fractions of numbers lacked the understanding of the function of the numerator and denominator when calculating fractions of whole numbers in various units of measure.

Teaching and learning have improved since the last visit and were at least satisfactory in 15 of the 17 lessons observed. However, the proportion where the teaching was good or better, about a quarter, was still lower than in most schools. When the teaching was most successful, the learning objectives were shared with the pupils, making it apparent what they were to learn from the lesson. There was a brisk pace and high expectations were demonstrated by challenging tasks. The teaching was lively, energetic and enthusiastic, with good subject knowledge and imaginative strategies, inspiring the pupils to be totally involved. The teachers used questions well to promote thinking, draw out and check understanding, and develop concepts. The use of setting was mainly effective in the core subjects, although scrutiny of the pupils' books and the school's own tracking demonstrates that the progress made has been very variable between sets.

Where there were shortcomings, the pace was slow and the work undemanding. The lessons were unbalanced and the pupils sometimes spent too long listening to the teacher. In one lesson, the teacher's subject knowledge was insecure and therefore the pupils were confused and misinformed. In many lessons, even when the teaching was satisfactory, the objectives were imprecise, usually stating only the activity, so that the pupils did not know what they were to learn from the task. In many lessons, the teachers did not display the learning objectives or make reference to them during the lesson. Most classrooms are now bright, attractive and tidy, and most teachers have made more effort to develop them as interesting, stimulating places where the display supported the learning, using and celebrating the pupils' own work. Teachers usually planned a plenary at the end of the lesson and are developing their skill in using these, although not all were focused sufficiently on building on the learning that had taken place. Planning has improved and is now consistent, although was more detailed and informative in some classes than others, and in some it was very skimpy.

The quality of learning follows teaching closely. Where the teaching was lively and enthusiastic, the pupils concentrated well and were fully involved in the activity. They worked well together and were eager to respond to questions. Where the teaching was dull or less effective, the pupils' attention sometimes waned and they became listless. In some lessons, few pupils volunteered to answer questions, with the majority content to allow others to respond. Most teachers had not yet developed their questioning skills to ensure that all the pupils were involved at their own level in the question and answer part of the lesson and consequently many remained passive.

Sound analysis of test and assessment data has enabled the school to identify more clearly what is needed to move pupils' learning forward. This is now being used well to identify weaknesses in learning and set accurate targets for pupils. Teachers now have good quality information on which to base their planning.

Revised recording systems are good and provide a clear focus for planning. However, this data shows that too few pupils have made the expected rate of progress over the year. For example, progress of one sub-level is recorded as improvement, whereas pupils need to make two sub-levels each year just to maintain progress, and more than this to enable them to make up lost ground.

Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and most make supportive comments. However, this is still too variable in quality and perceptiveness and sometimes over-praises work where no real improvements have taken place over time. Teachers are now using information from their marking more effectively to adjust their lesson planning and address weaknesses they have identified. The targets in pupils' books are helpful in showing teachers and pupils what is needed to make progress. Where the achievement of the target is recorded and dated, this is helpful to both teachers and pupils to judge the rate of progress they are making more clearly.

Pupils' attitudes were generally good. They concentrated well in most lessons, were polite and helpful to each other and adults and worked well together in lessons. The pupils settled to their independent work quickly, and when required co-operated well. They worked co-operatively on many occasions. Behaviour in and around school was good and pupils moved around school sensibly. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is suitably promoted through a number of initiatives. The assembly observed contributed suitably to the spiritual and moral development of pupils and promoted a sense of belonging. The pupils responded well with their concentration and contribution. Singing of good quality added a further spiritual dimension to the assembly. Moral development is good. However, attendance remains well below the national average, despite the work put in by the school and learning mentors. Lateness is still a problem, with a significant number of pupils arriving after the start of morning school.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall and have improved since the previous visit. There is now a clear educational direction and some urgency in the drive to raise standards. The staff show a sense of enthusiasm that was entirely lacking previously. The headteacher and senior staff work closely as a team and have developed the effectiveness of the delegation of responsibilities. New arrangements for the structure and organisation of management are sensible and demonstrate the role of each individual in the school team. Importantly, monitoring and scrutiny of work are becoming a regular part of management and are therefore helping to identify shortcomings in performance. In addition, suitable support and challenge have resulted from more rigorous evaluation, so that there have been some improvements in teaching and learning. While assessment for tracking is at an early stage, it is becoming a key management tool to pinpoint where teaching is more or less effective.

Subject leadership is also developing satisfactorily. Senior staff are eager to contribute to the school's development and have made good progress in their development as leaders since the last visit. Core subject leaders write action plans to show how the necessary developments in their subjects are to be brought about.

The leaders of the foundation subjects do not yet write their own plans but have a suitable involvement in development planning. However, there is still some way to go in ensuring that all subject and aspect leaders take full responsibility for standards and improvement.

Planning for school improvement is somewhat limited in scope at present. The action plan is at the end of its term, and further plans have been drawn up for those areas for the coming year. However, this planning is at an early stage and much remains to be done. The school has made some progress in developing the teachers' understanding of the nature of good teaching and learning. However, the teaching and learning policy does not give them adequate guidance because too much of the content is superficial. Similar shortcomings are evident in the marking policy, which is not sufficiently focused on marking as a key part of assessment.

The governing body has an appropriate committee structure and is supportive of the work of the school. The chair of governors is active and informed about school issues. There are now indications that the governing body is developing a structure that will enable them to gather information for themselves. However, the majority of governors are relatively inexperienced. At present they still rely too heavily on information from others and are not yet in a position to gather enough of this for themselves. The governing body's systems for monitoring its own effectiveness are underdeveloped.

The school's self-evaluation showed in brief the actions that had been taken since the previous visit in a number of areas and the impact of those initiatives. This was an adequate review, demonstrating the improvements in teaching and areas where there was room for improvement. It was more focused than the previous version, particularly in showing the next steps to be taken.

The LEA has continued to provide sound support for the school, helping to guide development and support a better understanding of what is required. Importantly, there has been more challenge to the school and consequently this has enabled the senior management to develop greater independence in considering how improvements were to be brought about.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: improve the quality of teaching and learning in English, mathematics and science by:

- **making more rigorous checks and disseminating good practice**
- **making better use of assessment information**
- **improving the quality of marking**

This issue has been dealt with above. Although considerable work remains to be done, progress has been reasonable in all aspects since the previous visit.

2: develop subject and leadership expertise amongst key staff to enable them to be more effective

Leadership and management of key staff have been evaluated above. Reasonable progress has been made overall in developing their capacity to lead.

3: ensure that the school development plan concentrates on raising standards and improving achievement in all core subjects, especially mathematics, and sets out more clearly how success can be achieved

While progress in writing a suitable school development plan has been limited, the school has made reasonable progress in raising expectations and understanding how to bring about the required improvements.

Overall, 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 the City of Derby. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Pat Cox
Additional Inspector

cc: chair of governors
LEA