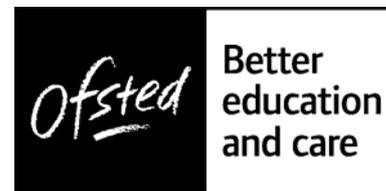


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Mrs B Kondal
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Kondal

Implementation of Oldknow Junior School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Mrs S Morris-King HMI, Mr R Blatchford HMI, and Mr T Winskill HMI to your school on 27 and 28 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 second 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 good progress since the last monitoring inspection and reasonable progress overall since being subject to special measures.

The school is permitted to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Strategic Director of Learning and Culture for Birmingham. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF OLDKNOW JUNIOR SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit 22 lessons or parts of lessons, two registration sessions and two assemblies were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, the chair of governors, a senior adviser from the LEA and the school's link adviser. 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, a member of the leadership team, and two representatives from the LEA. The chair of the governing body was unable to attend.

The performance of the pupils in English, mathematics and science in the 2004 Key Stage 2 tests was very low in comparison with schools with similar prior attainment. Standards in lessons remain generally below average, although the higher attaining pupils in all year groups are achieving broadly in line with national standards. Where the teaching was particularly strong, some of the pupils' oral and written work was above the standards found generally in this age group. The progress of the pupils was satisfactory in almost all of the lessons and consistently good where the pupils encountered good or very good teaching.

In the 2005 national tests, the school anticipates that around 45 per cent of the pupils will gain a Level 4 or above in English, a similar figure in mathematics, and around 68 per cent in science. Gaps and weaknesses in the pupils' knowledge and skills, especially their language skills in English and science, continue to hinder progress in Year 6, and higher attaining pupils are underachieving. Scrutiny of the school's assessment records and observation of lessons indicate that the school has a realistic grasp of the standards being achieved. The co-ordinators for the core subjects, liaising productively with the heads of year, have been unswerving in their efforts to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. Their monitoring and reviewing of the teachers' planning is meticulous; training sessions for staff, supported by the LEA, have been suitably focused; and initiatives for the pupils, such as the provision of booster classes and the further literacy support programme, have been well executed. The regular sampling of the pupils' work to monitor progress, and the systematic moderation of standards within year groups and across the key stage, have contributed further to a gradual acceleration in the progress most pupils are making. However, attainment in Year 6 remains stubbornly low.

The staff have recognised the value of open, evaluative discussions about the quality of teaching and learning, and are well poised to raise standards further in English, mathematics and science. Staff have acknowledged the central importance of harnessing assessment to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and the school has continued to improve the accuracy of the data about

the pupils' prior and current attainment. Good assessment practice is beginning to be rooted in everyday teaching, and the senior leadership team has a sound understanding of national performance data and the school's comparative performance. Each teacher's individual class assessment folder is comprehensive and tracking sheets are kept carefully up-to-date, although learning activities are not consistently well matched to the pupils' individual needs and starting points. Targets set for the pupils are both challenging and plausible, and arise from assessments each term in the core subjects. Where whole-school testing has identified a particular weakness among the pupils, for example in writing, subject co-ordinators have provided additional training and support for the teachers. Assessment portfolios, based on key learning objectives, have been produced in the core subjects and are well judged, although these are at an early stage of development.

Planning throughout the school has improved, and procedures for regular and rigorous assessment are an integral part of effective lesson plans. The teachers have an improved understanding of the critical role of sharing key lesson objectives with the pupils and reviewing progress, in each lesson, against these objectives; however, this practice is inconsistent. Similarly, while lesson plans usually identified how knowledge and skills can be interpreted through different tasks for different pupils, too few lessons provided meaningful differentiation, particularly for those pupils with English as an additional language. Some staff are starting to use 'talk partners' as a technique for enabling the pupils to assess effectively their own progress in individual lessons.

Marking is unduly variable. The best practice, particularly to be found in the core subjects, offers formative comments to the pupils, suggests how improvements can be made, and makes suitable reference to national curriculum levels. In some exercise books, general targets and subject level descriptions for the subject are helpfully printed out for the pupils. Many pupils are able to talk confidently about the levels they are achieving and in Year 6 classes most pupils have a clear appreciation of what they need to do in the core subjects in order to consolidate and improve their potential grades.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 20 of the 22 lessons observed, including 12 in which it was good or very good. This is a significant improvement in the proportion of good and better teaching compared to the previous monitoring inspection. All teaching which was satisfactory or better was characterised by a warm, enthusiastic and often energetic approach which ensured the pupils were well motivated and keen to learn.

Where teaching was good or very good there was effective planning based on good subject knowledge and recent prior attainment data. Coupled with good use of time, this ensured that pupils with different learning needs were able to make good progress. Teachers were clear and consistent in their expectation that pupils should be actively listening to explanations and instructions as well as to answers from other pupils. High quality interventions and support by teachers and teaching

assistants enabled them to assess the pupils' progress and understanding and to reinforce key learning points. Whole class teaching was most effective where teachers asked targeted questions of individual pupils ensuring that both boys and girls, including the more reticent pupils, were actively engaged and challenged. Learning was further improved by good use of pair and group work to allow pupils to discuss answers briefly before responding to the teacher's questions. Teaching assistants were used to good effect throughout the lesson to support individual pupils and groups.

In satisfactory lessons there was a balance of strengths and weaknesses. All lessons showed evidence of planning for different needs but this planning was not always effectively implemented. Teaching assistants were not always fully utilised, particularly during some lengthy starter activities, although they provided appropriate support at other times.

Where teaching was unsatisfactory, provision for pupils with different needs was inadequate, leading to insufficient progress being made by too many of the pupils. Where whole class teaching was ineffective, more able pupils were not sufficiently challenged. The teachers' expectations of the pupils' progress was not high enough, and combined with weak subject knowledge this further hindered progress. Progress was not reviewed during the lesson. Relationships between pupils and teachers were strained and there was unsatisfactory classroom management.

Displays are vibrant and relevant throughout the school. In the best classrooms there was a wealth of learning prompts, and good use of the pupils' work for display. The use of high quality pupil work on display to provide exemplary materials illustrating best practice is limited.

The pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour were satisfactory or better in all of the 22 lessons observed, including 18 in which they were good or better. Almost all of the pupils were keen to learn. They responded very well to the positive approach from the staff; they were keen to answer questions and enjoyed participating in the lessons. Many of the pupils' books demonstrated a pride in their work. The pupils' movement around the classrooms was very good; they were calm, sensible and mature. They co-operated very well with each other when they were asked to work in pairs or in groups, showing an increased confidence in their abilities to ask and answer questions.

The pupils' behaviour around the school was very good. At lunchtime they behaved very well in the dining room and in the playground. The pupil monitors took their role seriously and reminded other pupils of the school's expectations. In the assemblies the pupils' behaviour and attitudes were impeccable. The school has taken a number of positive actions to help the pupils to develop their confidence and their social skills. Several clubs and societies are giving the pupils a range of extracurricular opportunities.

Attendance from the start of the autumn term 2004 to the end of the spring term 2005 was 94.4 per cent, which is broadly in line with the national average for primary schools. Unauthorised absence for this period was 0.37 per cent which was slightly higher than the national average. There were no exclusions during the spring term 2005.

The headteacher is providing the school with increasingly effective leadership. She has paid careful attention to the development needs of the newer members of the senior leadership team. Her enabling leadership style is welcomed by the leadership team and by the staff; this style is allowing the staff to flourish. The headteacher's well structured programme of monitoring and evaluation has enabled her to gain a realistic view of the school's strengths and the areas which need further development. Her records of lesson observations are evaluative and include helpful suggestions for improvement. Importantly, the headteacher follows up any identified areas of weakness in her next lesson observations. Her analysis of lesson observations includes helpful targets for each year group. The leadership team have initiated a valuable programme of peer observation which supports the teachers' development. These well-integrated systems have injected greater rigour into the process of improving teaching and learning and have begun to have a significant impact. The whole-staff training programme is much improved.

The senior leadership team are clearly focused on school improvement and continue to work very hard to make the necessary changes to the school, with increasing impact. They have a good understanding of their leadership roles and have taken many significant actions to raise standards. Their growing confidence as leaders and their cohesion as a team are pivotal in the school's continued drive to raise standards. They share the headteacher's vision for the school's future and are making a significant contribution to the school's direction. The staff are working together as an increasingly effective team.

The headteacher has taken a number of suitable actions to improve the management of the school. New arrangements for accommodation have resulted in a greatly improved reception area and office space. The regular newsletter to parents is informative. A recent questionnaire enabled the parents to express their views and concerns; the school has responded well to the parents' views. The management of the budget has improved and the headteacher has a clearer view of the school's financial priorities. The senior team value the headteacher's efficient management of meetings.

The school's provision for the pupils who have special educational needs has improved. There are increasingly rigorous arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the pupils' progress. Some weaknesses remain in the provision for the many pupils who speak English as an additional language. The headteacher has rightly ensured that the staff who are employed to work with pupils who are at the early stages of English acquisition are enabled to focus on their role. The improved teaching in the school and the increased understanding of the pupils' learning

needs make the school well placed to undertake a constructive review of this area of its work, and to take the necessary actions to secure improvement.

The chair of the governing body has increased his understanding of the school's issues and strengths. He provides the governing body with effective leadership and has actively sought to recruit suitable new members, with recent success. The governors are committed to their role and have increased their knowledge of the ways in which they can support and challenge the school. A helpful weekend training session was well attended. Sensibly, the governors have invited each of the heads of year to attend one of their meetings to report on standards and progress. This has extended their knowledge of the actions which the school is taking to raise standards.

The LEA's recent review of the school's progress is thorough and includes clear recommendations for the school. These recommendations have already had an impact on the school's actions. The review includes a suitable evaluation of the impact of the LEA's input on securing improvement. The LEA's monitoring and intervention group meets on a regular basis with the headteacher and chair of governors to discuss the school's progress. This group includes LEA officers with a variety of roles. The minutes of the meetings indicate that the group's discussions are valuable in determining and co-ordinating the intervention which the school needs. Moreover, the group provides challenge and support to the headteacher. The consultants for the core subjects have provided the senior leadership team with valuable support. The senior adviser continues to provide the leadership team with high quality advice. This advice has been influential in developing the team's capacity for improvement and is greatly valued by the school. The school's link adviser has a clear understanding of the school's needs and provides effective support.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: raise standards and increase the rate of the pupils' progress, particularly in English, mathematics and science

This area for improvement is reported on above.

Progress is reasonable.

2: develop the role and skills of the senior managers to ensure they work effectively as a team to eradicate urgently the weaknesses in provision

The senior managers have formed an effective team. They have a clear understanding of the remaining weaknesses in the school and are taking rigorous action to ameliorate them.

Progress is good.

3: improve the quality of teaching and learning to eliminate the unsatisfactory elements and increase the proportion which is good or better

The proportion of teaching which was good or better has increased significantly since the previous monitoring visit. The school's and the LEA's observations suggest that the quality of teaching is continually improving. Although some unsatisfactory teaching remains, the school and the LEA are taking appropriate action to ensure that unsatisfactory teaching is eradicated and that satisfactory teaching improves.

Progress is good.

4: improve the systems for and use of assessment to track progress and to ensure that the teaching appropriately matches the pupils' needs

This area for improvement is reported on above.

Progress is reasonable.