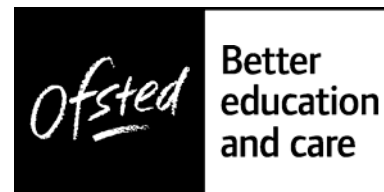


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3 June 2005

Mrs S Woodrow
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Woodrow

Implementation of Weobley High School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Mr A Harrett HMI, and Mr P Playfair, Additional Inspector, to your school on 25 and 26 May 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 third 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.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF WEOBLEY HIGH SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit 22 lessons or parts of lessons, two registration sessions and two tutor periods were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, nominated staff and a representative of the LEA. 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, the chair of the governing body, a representative from the LEA, and the senior leadership team.

In most lessons the pupils achieved standards in line with the expectations for their age. However, for those pupils capable of attaining the highest standards there was sometimes a lack of challenge in what was expected of them. In science and in information and communication technology (ICT) the pupils still have to overcome the legacy of significant gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 18 lessons, including nine in which it was good and four in which it was very good. In these lessons, an enthusiastic and engaging presentation of the learning activities was linked to high expectations of what the pupils could achieve. They were encouraged to think independently and to give reasons for their answers. The pupils were offered opportunities to evaluate their work and to suggest improvements. Precise lesson planning ensured that the pupils knew exactly what they had to do. Varied activities, combined with frequent opportunities to confirm the pupils' understanding, kept the whole class interested in their learning. The pace of these lessons was brisk and purposeful.

In the unsatisfactory lessons the teaching failed to engage the pupils' interest and did not facilitate their learning. There was insufficient reference to prior learning and the starting point for the lesson was not established, for instance by asking pupils to recall pertinent points from a previous lesson. As a result, progress could not be adequately evaluated and difficulties in learning could not be pinpointed. Explanations lacked precision and exposed weaknesses in the teachers' subject knowledge. The pace of the lessons flagged and the plenary gave only cursory coverage to what had been achieved.

The leadership and management of the headteacher are very good. She is leading the process of improvement with clarity and purpose. Her decisions are based on a sound and rigorous evaluation of evidence. She has established a clear vision for the future of the school and has a good understanding of how to achieve her goals.

Her expectations of the students and of the staff are explicit, which has had a positive impact on the behaviour of the pupils and on the working atmosphere of the school. Relationships with the community are good. Parents are welcome in the school and have ample opportunities to express their views. The headteacher has worked hard to make suitable appointments to the school and was able to attract well-qualified applicants, supported by strong references, for recent vacancies. Under the headteacher's guidance, the leadership and management of the senior team have continued to improve since the last monitoring inspection: they are now confidently and effectively leading and managing particular aspects of the school's improvement, working effectively as a coherent team and providing appropriate challenge and support for the school's middle leaders.

The headteacher has organised effective training for heads of department to enable them to monitor the work in their subjects more effectively. The quality of middle leadership has continued to improve as their understanding of their roles has developed. Some inconsistencies persist, but the further training planned for middle managers is well conceived.

The governing body is working effectively with the school. Governors understand their role as critical friends. The senior management team has briefed them well on the school's progress. Governors have had appropriate training from the LEA and from the senior leadership team which has improved their knowledge and their effectiveness. The fruitful partnership between the school and the governing body is enabling them to provide effective challenge and support.

Standards of behaviour are good. The headteacher has made her expectations of the pupils' behaviour very clear and they have responded positively and responsibly. The school promotes the benefits of mutual respect and trust effectively and this has improved the pupils' confidence, self-esteem and sense of belonging to a community. Behaviour between lessons and around the school is orderly and the pupils are courteous, helpful and responsible. They have responded well to the many opportunities to exercise responsibility and to the positive ethos that prevails.

Behaviour was satisfactory or better in 21 lessons, including eight in which it was good and seven in which it was very good. In the one lesson in which it was unsatisfactory, the quality of the teaching was poor. Attitudes to learning have improved since the last monitoring inspection, but they still lagged behind behaviour, particularly when the teaching did not require the pupils to participate in activities that demanded independent thinking or purposeful collaboration. When they were given the opportunity to get involved in their learning, attitudes were markedly better.

The LEA continues to provide regular support to the school, with a clear focus on improving the effectiveness of leadership and management and the quality of teaching and learning. The LEA's analysis of the quality of the school's provision is accurate and its responses have been timely, focused and effective. A detailed

survey of the quality of assessment in departments across the school has highlighted specific areas for improvement. Support for subjects has concentrated on raising achievement in the most needy areas and this is having a positive impact. Support and training for subject leaders has also been beneficial.

Action taken to address the key issues

Key Issue 1: improve the quality of leadership and management by heads of department; ensure that all parents receive reports on their child's progress in ICT and religious education (RE)

The leadership and management of heads of department have improved since the last monitoring inspection. The weekly line management meetings with the senior leadership team have had a positive impact on the pace of improvement and a programme of suitable training has increased their confidence and ability to reach accurate conclusions. Most heads of department have produced sound and accurate evaluations of the provision in their subjects. Some inconsistencies persist, but improvement is nevertheless clear and evident.

Reports on progress in ICT and RE are now sent to parents. Although many of these were satisfactory, some ICT reports consisted of formulaic statements describing the work done by the class, with little attempt to evaluate the standards achieved and no advice on how to improve their work in the future.

Although the school is not yet fully meeting the requirements for report writing, the significant improvements in middle management make progress on this key issue good.

Key Issue 2: raise achievement by improving the quality of teaching, especially in science, religious education and ICT; ensure that all work is marked thoroughly

The school's assessment of the quality of teaching is accurate and reflects the detailed and rigorous monitoring undertaken by the senior leadership team. They have organised carefully targeted training sessions for the teachers which have been well received. Most subject leaders are now able to identify clearly where there is underachievement and what needs to be done to remedy the weaknesses. Some unsatisfactory teaching persists in science and ICT, but the school anticipates that new appointments in these subjects, together with the very effective support provided by the LEA, will improve provision in these departments.

There have been significant improvements in the way that assessment data is collected and analysed at a whole-school level. However, the quality of marking continues to be extremely variable and is inconsistent across the school. The

school recognises that this is in part due to the need to revise the assessment policy so that a common understanding of purposes and procedures is achieved.

Progress on this key issue is reasonable.

Key Issue 3: ensure that teachers set work of an appropriate standard for their pupils, and manage their behaviour

The improved pace and challenge of the majority of lessons demonstrate that there is a better understanding of the pupils' potential. However, in some lessons there was insufficient differentiation to cater for all the pupils and in too many lessons there was insufficient challenge for the more able.

Behaviour around the school and in lessons is now good. The school continues to make good use of information technology to monitor and analyse incidents of misbehaviour and takes appropriate action to deal with them. The behaviour of targeted individuals is closely monitored and good advice is given to teachers on how to improve the behaviour and achievement of particular individuals. However, this is still not being followed up with sufficient rigour to ensure that the teaching and learning are appropriately modified. The promotion of positive values throughout the school has had a beneficial impact on the pupils' behaviour. The number of incidents of misbehaviour is on a downward trend, as is the number of fixed-term exclusions.

Progress on this key issue is reasonable

Key Issue 4: modify the curriculum to meet the needs of all the pupils; provide a daily act of collective worship

The plans for the significant modification of the Key Stage 4 curriculum noted at the time of the last visit have now been confirmed. Through effective collaboration, good work has been done to expand accredited vocational opportunities for the pupils.

The school has made significant progress in meeting its responsibilities with regard to collective worship. Pupils on the school council have contributed to identifying core values related to the ethos being promoted by the school. These have been developed into a programme presented to pupils through assemblies and tutor periods. The programme is well considered and provides opportunities for reflection.

Progress on this key issue is good.