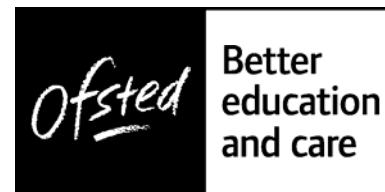


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6 May 2005

Mrs J Connor
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Dear Mrs Connor

Implementation of Highters Heath Primary School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Cathy Kirby 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 reasonable progress since the last monitoring inspection and good 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 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 HIGHTERS HEATH PRIMARY SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit ten lessons or parts of lessons, one registration session and one assembly were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the chair of governors, members of the senior leadership team, the information and communication technology (ICT) co-ordinator, and a representative from 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 teaching and learning consultant, the chair of the governing body and a representative from the LEA.

The school's action plan has been amended and the weaknesses previously identified have been addressed. Individuals responsible for implementing each action have been identified and responsibility for monitoring the progress of actions has been delegated more widely.

The LEA statement of action now has quantified success criteria and clear procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of actions.

At Key Stage 1 targets for standardised test results at Level 2 and above in 2005 have been set. At 90 per cent for reading and 93 per cent for both writing and mathematics, these represent challenging targets which, if achieved would indicate significant improvement on results in 2004. Recent assessments and practice tests indicate that standards of attainment are rising but are still some way off the target levels. The school is confident that with the recent introduction of intervention strategies to raise attainment, these targets are achievable.

At Key Stage 2 there is a similar picture; challenging targets have been set but current assessment data indicates that the pupils' attainment is lagging behind these targets. As in Key Stage 1, strategies to raise attainment are expected to improve results to near to the target figures.

In lessons, most higher-attaining pupils reached the standard expected for their ages, but many other pupils produced work that was well below the expected standard. In many cases, this was attributable to weaknesses in their use of spoken language and an inability to sustain concentration in tasks which required independent learning.

Improvements in the quality of teaching reported in the last monitoring letter have been sustained. Teaching was very good in two lessons, good in three, satisfactory in three and unsatisfactory in two lessons. One factor responsible for improvement is the work staff have done to identify the characteristics of good teaching and to

make sure that lessons incorporate these. Another factor has been a rigorous lesson observation programme with honest feedback combined with appropriate support to develop areas of weakness. In the best lessons learning objectives were shared with the pupils in language they could understand. Good use of assessment for learning had enabled teachers to plan activities which were accurately matched to ability groups; this helped ensure pupils remained engaged with their work. Another feature of these lessons was a variety of well planned activities which incorporated a variety of learning styles. Teaching assistants were used well to support specific groups of pupils. Teaching in the reception class is consistently good and although attainment on entry is below national expectations most pupils make gains in lessons.

In some of the satisfactory lessons the teacher was not sufficiently assertive to ensure pupils working independently remained on task; the attention of some pupils drifted away from their work and this slowed the pace of their learning. The use of questioning was at times cursory and teachers too readily accepted a one word answer and did not probe sufficiently to extend thinking.

The unsatisfactory teaching arose from inadequacies in lesson planning, poor time management and the use of mundane tasks which failed to capture the interest of some pupils or retain the attention of others; consequently learning was limited.

The quality of learning lagged behind the quality of teaching. Progress was good in two lessons, satisfactory in six and unsatisfactory in two lessons. The poor literacy skills of some pupils continue to be a barrier to their learning across the curriculum. Whilst some pupils are beginning to respond well to the focus on independent learning a significant number do not have the skills to sustain the concentration required to get the most from this approach.

Since the last monitoring visit there has been rapid progress in improving unsatisfactory elements of teaching in ICT. The ICT suite has been upgraded and interactive whiteboards installed in all teaching rooms. Appropriate staff training has been provided by the ICT curriculum leader who has been developing his leadership role with commitment.

The quality of assessment is improving; consequently the school is using increasingly accurate data to inform planning. Data from assessment is being used very well in some areas to target interventions aimed at raising attainment, for example in Year 6 mathematics where pupils are taught in matched ability groups which are better able to meet individuals' learning needs. Targeted one-to-one support with reading is also provided for lower attaining Year 2 pupils and the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs in Year 3 is well supported by the co-ordinator for special educational needs.

The curriculum offered by the school is sufficiently broad to meet statutory requirements; the timetable is carefully planned to give an appropriate balance to both the core and the wider curriculum.

The headteacher has shown good leadership during a period of change and some uncertainty. She has ensured that the school has followed the agenda set out in the action plan with urgency and rigour. Her self-evaluation describes the actions that have been taken, what their impact has been and considers strategies for further improvement. A clear and shared vision has united staff and governors towards a common goal and a culture of high expectation is tempered with appropriately balanced guidance and support; consequently staff morale is good.

The current senior leadership team has the capacity to drive further improvement, building on recent work, although uncertainties remain over the staffing of this team for September.

At middle management level some staff are rising well to the challenge of increased accountability for their areas of responsibility. For all middle managers training is planned for the summer and autumn terms.

Members of the governing body have received further training provided by the LEA to enable them to fulfil their role more effectively. A sub-committee reports to the full governing body on the progress of the school's action plan. However, minutes of these meetings suggest that there is insufficient rigour in tracking the progress of actions through the analysis of quantitative data. Plans are in place to involve all governors in the life of the school more fully through a coherent system of links.

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were never less than satisfactory and were good in five lessons. Teaching strategies which reduce the amount of time pupils spend sitting passively have improved levels of concentration in class.

Behaviour around the school and at break times was good. A significant investment in outdoor equipment has considerably improved the playground area and has greatly increased the opportunities for social play. The use of this new equipment is well managed by the supervisors to ensure all year groups and individuals have equal access. The school values the pupils' achievements and individual successes are displayed prominently around the school. The assembly on the Passover was led by the Year 5 class which helped develop their sense of responsibility and self esteem. All pupils were able to contribute in this assembly and, with the exception of a few, did so with enthusiasm.

Attendance, at 95 per cent so far this school year continues to be above the national figure. So far there have been no permanent exclusions and four fixed-term exclusions for a total of 11 days.

The LEA has responded rapidly to weaknesses identified on the last monitoring visit and has provided considerable financial support for the purchase of new ICT resources and equipment for the playground. The LEA continues to provide a range of suitably targeted interventions to support school improvement, planned in consultation with the headteacher and has produced a well considered evaluation of the school's progress to date.

Action taken to address the key issues

Key Issue 1: raise standards, particularly in English, mathematics and science, at Key Stages 1 and 2

Improvements in the quality of teaching and learning are beginning to raise standards from a low base. Developments in the use of assessment to inform planning and to target intervention strategies are beginning to making an impact in most year groups particularly in mathematics. Year 2 and Year 6 classes are, however, not yet at their target levels set for 2005.

Progress is reasonable.

Key Issue 2: improve the quality of teaching at Key Stages 1 and 2

Action to improve teaching has been effective. The proportion of teaching that is satisfactory or better is 80 per cent and that which is good or better has risen to 50 per cent. A rigorous lesson observation programme together with the input of a range of consultants and advanced skills teachers have also made a useful contribution. The quality of teaching in some foundation subjects lags behind that in mathematics and literacy.

Progress is good.

Key Issue 3: develop the leadership and management of the school, below the level of the headteacher

The headteacher has begun to delegate responsibility to middle managers. Some are rising well to the challenge of increased accountability for their areas of responsibility. There remains some uncertainty around the staffing of co-ordinator roles.

Progress is reasonable.

Key Issue 4: improve the accuracy and use of teachers' assessments

Assessment for learning continues to improve as the school's increasingly accurate data is used to inform lesson planning. This data is being used well to target intervention strategies intended to raise attainment. However, marking is not used consistently as a tool to inform pupils of their level of performance and what they need to do to improve.

Progress is good.