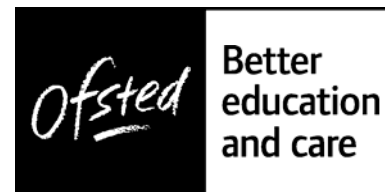


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Mr A J Smith
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Smith

Implementation of Putteridge High School and Community College's Action Plan

Following the visit of Mrs P Robins HMI, Mr S Harford HMI, Mr C Barnett HMI and Mr N Warwick, Additional Inspector, to your school on 8 and 9 June 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 reasonable 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, chair of governors and the Corporate Director – Lifelong Learning for Luton. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF PUTTERIDGE HIGH SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit 42 lessons or parts of lessons, eight registration sessions and two assemblies were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the chair of governors, senior and middle managers 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 chair of the governing body and a representative from the LEA.

There has been no significant change in the pupils' standards of attainment since the last monitoring inspection.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 35 of the 41 lessons that were graded; it was good in 12 and very good in four. In six lessons the teaching was less than satisfactory, including four in which it was poor. These figures broadly represent a consolidation of the teaching that is satisfactory or better, and a modest improvement in the proportion that is at least good.

The school continues to monitor the quality of teaching closely through a comprehensive programme of lesson observations. This is well documented and the resulting information is used effectively as a basis for further improvement and to implement a suitable coaching programme. The observers' judgements have been moderated through joint observations with LEA consultants. The school's view of the quality of teaching is broadly accurate; however, the school has not identified the level of poor teaching seen by HMI during this visit.

Most lessons were planned using the school's common pro-forma, but the quality of the short-term planning was variable. The best plans, for example in a Year 7 history lesson: made a clear distinction between the learning objectives and the outcomes for the lesson; provided for a range of activities matched accurately to the different need of the pupils; and made an appropriate amount of time available for the pupils to reflect upon and evaluate their learning. This quality was too rarely evident. A number of the short-term plans were lists of textbook references or tasks to be completed, and too little consideration had been given to how the pupils would learn effectively. Additionally, despite the guidance given to teachers for writing learning objectives and planning for the varying needs of the pupils, there continues to be some confusion between objectives, outcomes and, in a few instances, differentiation. As reported at the last visit, the use of assessment data to help plan lessons remains patchy.

The quality of learning, including the pupils' progress was satisfactory or better in 32 lessons; it was good in 15 and very good in one. The quality of learning did not

consistently match that of the teaching. In the lessons where learning was weaker, the teaching failed to engage the pupils adequately or the pupils' attitudes to learning were unsatisfactory.

Training for the whole teaching staff has been provided to improve the use of assessment for learning; the impact has been limited. Questioning techniques have improved; in many lessons, teachers used good questions to gauge and deepen effectively the pupils' understanding. In history, religious education and science, good opportunities were given for the pupils to evaluate each other's work. Some departments, for example science, have improved marking by ensuring that the pupils are given regular comments that set out the next steps for improvement. However, the use of assessment to improve learning remains underdeveloped.

Academic review days involving form tutors, parents and their children provide a strong focus for the development of assessment practice, and the use of assessment data. On these days, parents are now able to view, on-screen information about their children's current levels, grades, and targets based on prior attainment data.

The school continues to develop its database of pupils' attainment information, and is addressing the issue of access to this data. This is well supported by the data manager. The collection of termly attainment data, in sub-levels and grades, is providing a good basis for monitoring and tracking pupils' progress. It has the potential to enhance the academic tutoring role for form tutors. The provision of an electronic mark book to all teachers from September 2005, also has the potential to improve the consistency of teachers' records and use of attainment data. Some departments are developing their own attainment databases. Whereas meeting the specialist needs of departments is important, there is the danger of unnecessary duplication and even confusion which needs to be minimised as far as possible.

The pupils' awareness of their current levels of attainment and their targets is being addressed, not only through the academic review days, but also by a developing system of target cards in their work books. However, this system is at an early stage, and there were only a few examples seen. There is not yet sufficient engagement of pupils with their attainment information and, too often, pupils seem to be unable to talk about their current attainment levels. The overall quality of marking is unsatisfactory. The marking policy has an expectation that the purpose of marking is to provide feedback to pupils on how to improve their work. However, although some improvement was seen in the quality of marking in science, both the frequency and quality of marking continue to be variable within and across departments.

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better in 35 of the 42 lessons seen and of those they were good or better in 23. This figure is similar to the last visit, and as before reflected the quality of teaching. The pupils generally behave well but where the teaching is weak or lacks sufficient challenge, the pupils

become restless and low level disruptive behaviour, such as fidgeting, chatter and inattention develops. The teachers are now consistent in their application of the rewards and sanctions policies. There is greater use of praise and positive reinforcement given during lessons.

The behaviour around the school site continues to improve and, overall, pupils behave in a calm and purposeful fashion. This is helped by the prominence of staff at the beginning and end of the school day as well as during break times. Even when staff are not present, pupils generally act in an orderly way. Few examples were seen of unacceptably boisterous behaviour in the corridors and, when they occurred, staff moved quickly and effectively to isolate the problem. Relationships between staff and the pupils are greatly improved and there was an absence of the confrontational situations witnessed on earlier visits. The continued settled ethos of the school owes much to the revised behaviour policy, the use of stepped sanctions and initiatives such as the Gold Club and the Guardian Angels scheme, both of which are valued by pupils; membership of the Gold Club in Year 10 is a prerequisite for becoming a prefect and the Guardian Angels scheme provides an effective means whereby older pupils can support and encourage younger ones.

A new assistant headteacher has joined the school this half term, which will increase the capacity of the existing team. The headteacher and other senior managers have acted appropriately on comments made by HMI in the previous monitoring letter. The headteacher feels that as systems within the school have become embedded and stronger, he is able to be more reflective in his thinking and act strategically rather than reactively. The senior managers recognise the need to develop themselves as a team and acknowledge their own individual training needs. They have made progress in tackling issues which directly appertain to the pupils, such as behaviour. They recognise that the next phase in moving the school forward is to improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, this is proving more difficult to implement. Part of this difficulty steams from the inconsistency in the quality of leadership and management shown by middle managers.

Governors undertake a programme of monitoring visits to the school and report back to the full governing body. They are clear about the questions they need to ask and now have the confidence to seek exemplification and explanation of the answers they receive. Three new parent governors have been appointed since Christmas and the governing body is now at full complement.

The LEA continues to offer satisfactory and in some instances good support to the school. The school appreciates and makes good use of the support it is given but would welcome further input, particularly at Key Stage 3. The headteacher particularly values the support provided to senior leaders by the LEA consultant.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: leadership and management

Members of the senior management team understand what is expected of them and feel empowered to carry out their roles. The headteacher provides stability and has a clear sense of purpose and the educational direction he wishes the school to take. He is firmly committed to the school but recognises there is still some distance to travel. The team acknowledges that removal from special measures is only one step in the future development plan of the school.

Progress is reasonable.

2: managing challenging behaviour and bullying

The school has achieved greater consistency in the use of the code of conduct. Both staff and pupils are clear about the incremental stages of sanctions and the stepped rewards system. Where staff continue to experience difficulties in managing classroom behaviour they are being supported and coached using a variety of carefully considered strategies.

The boundaries of acceptable behaviour are now acknowledged by staff and pupils.

Progress is reasonable.

3: strengthen partnership with parents

The school has pushed ahead with its efforts to increase the involvement of parents and to improve its relations with the wider community. Existing initiatives have been consolidated and new ones introduced. The Putteridge Partnership's six working parties cover fundraising and extracurricular activities, special needs, curriculum development, information and communication technology, communications and the school environment, and homework, careers and guidance. They are already making their presence felt: the first edition of the parents' own newsletter '*Partnership News*' has been published; the curriculum group is producing support materials for parents to use; a new pupil planner has been designed; a team of parents is supporting pupils who have difficulty reading. The parents interviewed were very positive about these developments both in themselves and as a means of strengthening the relationship between parents and the school. They also spoke enthusiastically about the monthly parents' and carers' clinic, the quality of the school's weekly newsletter, and the approachability and helpfulness of school staff. Because the standard of pupils' behaviour has improved, parents are much happier about visiting the school site at the beginning and end of the day. Parents feel that most staff act as good role models for the pupils and comment favourably on the improvement in the school's atmosphere over the last year.

The school has strengthened its links with neighbouring schools and the wider community. The pre-school group is now well established and liaison with other local schools is much better. Parents consider that the arrangements for transfer from feeder schools at the start of Year 7 are very effective.

Parents feel that some areas for development remain. Some parents and form tutors are more conscientious than others about checking the use of the pupil planners. Some of the information given in reports is not always correct. There is inconsistency in the marking of pupils' exercise books and assignments, which parents and pupils find demotivating. The school is not yet making full use of the internet to communicate with parents. Whilst the academic review days and the developing role of the tutor in monitoring pupils' progress have been welcomed, some parents now complain that it is not as easy as it was to meet subject teachers at key stages in their children's education.

Progress is reasonable.

4: improve provision for students with learning difficulties and emotional and behaviour difficulties

The various elements of special educational needs provision have now been brought together into one faculty with the umbrella title of inclusion. Although there are plans for a major relaunch of the faculty in September, much of the preparatory work has taken place. A member of the senior management team now has line management responsibility for the faculty. The team have spent valuable time together away from the school environment to resolve the issues from the previous monitoring letter. The first of a series of booklets 'Think Inclusion' has been distributed giving information about the departments and good news stories.

A new approach to the allocation of support staff is being put in place. The changing nature of the teaching assistants' role is being recognised alongside the need for further training. They are now being allocated to departments to promote continuity and a better understanding of the curriculum. This should enable them to support pupils more effectively and work alongside teaching staff on differentiation within departments.

Provision for the more vulnerable pupils' who will transfer at the end of Key Stage 2, has been given greater stability and is now cited by the LEA as an example of good practice. The teacher for the transition group has been offered a longer term contract and will continue to run a nurture group in the next academic year.

Progress is reasonable.

5: raise standards in English, mathematics, science, French and religious education

In addition to issues addressed elsewhere in this letter, the drive to raise standards continues to be through improving the quality of teaching and learning. The school is developing a coaching process, with some external inputs, initially for teachers in English, mathematics and modern foreign languages. A need has been identified for at least ten school staff to be intensively trained as coaches, to consolidate and extend this initiative. There is not yet sufficient evidence of opportunities for sharing good practice in teaching and learning.

The school is making positive moves to increase the involvement of parents in their children's learning, for example in publishing homework tasks on its website, and in running workshops for parents on a range of issues which have good potential for increasing the support which parents can provide for their children.

Intervention plans for pupils towards the ends of key stages have included after-school and weekend classes for pupils identified as in need of additional support, and are reportedly showing improvements in outcomes of assessment, which the school believes will have a positive impact on the 2005 results.

Progress on this area of improvement against the action plan continues to be reasonable, but there is not yet sufficient evidence of consistent impact on standards, or on the quality of teaching and learning, across the range of subjects.

Progress is reasonable.

6: improve the quality of teaching, especially in Key Stage 3

This has been evaluated above.

Progress is reasonable.

7: ensure that National Curriculum requirements are met in physical education

On this inspection visit, the quality of teaching in PE was at least sound and often very good. The quality of pupils' learning was also at least sound and sometimes good.

Following the appointment of an additional teacher in PE, dance is now provided across the curriculum, for all pupils in Key Stage 3 and some in Key Stage 4. Gymnastics is also on the curriculum for all pupils. Schemes of work have been modified to reflect these developments, and this area for improvement is now fully addressed.

8: provide a daily act of collective worship

The school has continued to develop its provision for collective worship. Staff are required to address the '*Thought for the Week*' in tutorials. This was seen in all the tutorials observed but some staff are more committed to the programme than others. The '*Thought for the Week*' programme is now published at the start of each half-term and includes helpful suggestions to tutors about the sort of approaches that they might use. Together with examples of good practice, this is valued by staff, as is the support offered by heads of year and the assistant headteacher. Much work still needs to be done to embed good practice and ensure higher quality.

Formal monitoring of collective worship in assemblies and tutorials by the senior leadership team and heads of year now takes place. This is recorded, although the records are incomplete and their evaluations lack rigour. This monitoring has highlighted continuing inconsistency in the approach of those who lead acts of collective worship, for example, with regards the use of music, symbols and artefacts. Insufficient progress has been made since the last visit in this respect.

Two year group assemblies were observed. In one, there was little to indicate that an act of worship was about to take place. The assembly started late and one tutor group failed to attend. After a brief talk by a member of staff, pupils were given the opportunity to reflect on the '*Thought for the Week*' but were not encouraged to contribute to the assembly in any way. By contrast, in the second assembly, a school brass ensemble played as the tutor groups entered, very effective use was made of an interactive whiteboard to remind pupils of the weekly theme by means of a series of quotations and symbols, a poem was read, a group of pupils acted out a brief drama based on the parable of '*The Good Samaritan*', pupils were asked what they thought this story told them about the choices they have to make, and another pupil sang a song on the same theme. Throughout, pupils were fully involved and engaged.

Progress is reasonable.

9: establish an ethos in which learning has a higher profile and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development ensures more positive attitudes

The school has continued to develop strategies to encourage and reward pupils, for example the letters of commendation and the Putteridge Information System which is sited in key positions around the school. The latter is used to publicise the achievements of individuals and groups of pupils. Parents as well as the pupils welcome these developments although the school recognises that it needs to do more to embed the use of positive encouragement by staff. The pupils are very positive about their school, as demonstrated by the encouraging response from Year 10 Gold Club pupils to the recent request for applications for the posts of head boy and head girl. The school has also continued to develop the role of the school

and year councils; photographs of their members are prominently displayed around the site and the school council is now represented on the Putteridge Partnership. Again, the school recognises that more needs to be done to develop the work of these bodies and is planning accordingly.

Pupils' social and cultural awareness is developed in other ways as well. For example, the recent One World Evening was very successful, as shown by the photographs of the event that are on display. This is contributing to the school's efforts to celebrate the diversity of its pupils.

Progress is reasonable.