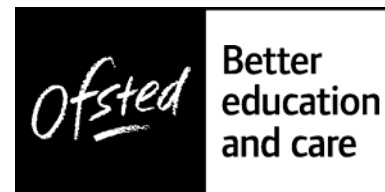


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Ms G Cartwright
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Cartwright

Implementation of Old Park School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Janet Thompson HMI and Maureen York HMI to your school on 8 June and Janet Thompson HMI on 10 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.

The school should be allowed to appoint newly qualified teachers within the following agreed conditions: the teacher works within a department for statutory school age pupils and mentoring is undertaken by a member of the senior leadership team.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF OLD PARK SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit 16 lessons or parts of lessons, a snack time, a play time and two lunchtimes were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the senior management team, a subject leader, the chair of governors and the school's development adviser 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, deputy headteacher, the chair of the governing body and a representative from the LEA.

The pupils' standards of attainment remain well below national expectations for their age, as is expected in a school catering for pupils who have severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple difficulties. Progress in lessons is at a similar level as at the last monitoring inspection. In 13 out of 16 lessons progress was satisfactory or better, including five lessons where this was good, three very good and two excellent. Where progress is good or better, detailed planning ensures that every pupil has a challenging target for the lesson. The accurate assessment of the pupils' needs informs the planning of their activities, and the teachers check the pupils' understanding and progress against their individual targets. The pupils understand the link between what they are doing and their targets. In lessons where the pupils' progress is unsatisfactory, planning is insufficiently targeted to meet their individual needs, activities are not tailored to enable all the pupils to make sufficient progress and learning objectives describe what the pupils will do rather than what they will learn.

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection; it was satisfactory or better in 13 out of 16 lessons, of which five were good, three very good and two excellent. The quality of teaching was unsatisfactory in three lessons.

At the start of the best lessons, teachers share what the pupils will do and learn during the lesson in a motivating way that captures their imagination. Throughout the lesson there is effective ongoing evaluation and the pupils are given precise feedback about their progress. At the end of the lesson teachers and the pupils are able to review the learning. There is good team work and all adults have clearly defined roles and understand the expectations for learning. In this way all the staff and the pupils work well together with enthusiasm and enjoyment, which improves the pupils' learning. In less effective lessons, the pupils and some staff were unclear about the objectives for an activity; in these situations it was not possible to evaluate what the pupils had learnt. Occasionally, activities were at an inappropriate level for the pupils and impeded their progress.

The senior leadership team continues to have a very clear focus on school improvement; strategic planning is beginning to have a positive impact on improving the quality of education.

The pupils' behaviour was very good overall. It was satisfactory or better in all lessons, good or better in 11 of which two were very good and five excellent. There was a clear link between good teaching and good behaviour. When lessons are well planned to meet individual needs, the pupils participate with enthusiasm. In less effective lessons, whilst behaviour was satisfactory, the pupils were passive and were given insufficient opportunities for active involvement. Any inappropriate behaviour was dealt with in line with agreed policies and behaviour support plans. In some instances where the management of the pupils' behaviour could have interrupted the flow of the lesson, teachers managed to refocus the rest of the class effectively.

There has been good support from the LEA in monitoring progress against the action plan. The LEA continues to provide additional funding to enable mentoring of teachers to take place throughout the school. The authority has submitted a bid to the Department for Education and Skills to seek funding to build a new school to replace the existing Old Park school premises. The authority has not developed a fallback plan to deal with the implications if the bid is not successful. The Old Park school buildings and facilities remain inappropriate if the school is to develop and provide a good curriculum for all pupils.

Action taken to address key issues

Key Issue 1: to improve the leadership and management of the senior management team, and those of subject co-ordinators

The senior leadership team is working effectively; it is a strong team and has a clear view of the strengths and areas for development within the school. Having made difficult decisions, senior leaders are in a position to be more strategic. They have identified the need for new teaching teams to be developed throughout the school and consequently a new management structure has been devised. This is expected to be fully in place in September 2005. Appropriate training has taken place to ensure staff have the skills to undertake their new roles. This new structure is planned to enable more effective monitoring and evaluation whilst continuing to provide support to improve teaching and learning.

Monitoring throughout the school is good but evaluation of the impact of intervention is less well developed. The senior management team is not interrogating the evidence gained from monitoring activities sufficiently to identify positive impact and the need for additional intervention. The governors have maintained the good progress in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities highlighted at the last monitoring visit. However there is insufficient evaluation taking place.

There is an expectation that the subject co-ordinators will monitor and moderate standards in their subject from September 2005.

Attendance continues to be below the national average for this type of school. New systems to analyse attendance issues and for first day calling to parents have been established recently but have not yet made sufficient impact.

Progress on this key issue is reasonable.

Key Issue 2: improve the quality of teaching and learning (including staff expertise), the assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress and the resources for learning available

In effective lessons teaching is lively and engages the pupils' attention. The use of resources is well planned and teachers match the type of resources to individual levels of achievement. Questioning by all staff is specifically targeted at individuals and is used to assess learning throughout the lesson. Where teaching and learning were less effective teachers missed the opportunity to check on the pupils' progress. Involvement of the pupils in their learning was unsatisfactory and there was too much reliance on teacher led approaches. Pace was therefore slow and insufficient learning took place.

Targets have become more focused on the pupils' priority needs and their progress is recorded consistently. The school recognises that it needs to start to interrogate the available information in order to track individual progress across all areas of the curriculum. Systems have been put in place that will allow senior staff to challenge the pace of progress at an individual and cohort level.

Progress on this key issue is reasonable.

Key Issue 3: support pupils' communication and their achievement through the use of signs, symbols, objects of reference and information and communication technology

The use of augmentative communication is good overall. Symbols are consistently used to reinforce key words and concepts throughout the school day. Objects of reference are used consistently with identified pupils when activities are changing. The vocabulary of signs and symbols in use across the school is increasing effectively. In the most successful lessons communication systems are used to introduce learning objectives as well as review and evaluate learning throughout the lesson. In less successful lessons signing was not consistently used.

Where the pupils have particular communication needs, individual communication aids have been developed and are well used. In the best examples, communication aids are used effectively to promote independence. The use of targets presented in a way that is accessible to the pupils' differing levels of understanding is having a good impact on learning. Progress on this key issue is good.

Key Issue 4: improve pupils' social development and the monitoring and management of behaviour of older pupils

Behaviour was very good overall. In all lessons and less structured times the pupils behaved responsibly and there were some very good social interactions between them. The co-ordinator for behaviour has successfully reviewed all agreed behaviour support plans, involving parents, school staff and other relevant professionals. There is detailed analysis of incidents but there is insufficient data yet available to make a judgement about the effectiveness of the strategies being used.

Training has been provided for all staff including those who are part time and those who work at lunch time. This has had a positive impact. The co-ordinator has monitored the use of the reward system and identified classes where this needs to be more consistent. These classes have been given additional support. Many individuals have pupil friendly behaviour targets; they have a very good understanding of these and as a result their behaviour has improved. For many pupils the very good progress made has been further supported by the improved communication systems throughout the school and the very good relationships between staff and pupils. Social interaction between pupils has also improved.

Progress on this key issue is good.

Key Issue 5: ensure that the curriculum is fully taught and there is enough time for learning

The good progress made at the last monitoring visit has been maintained.

Progress on this key issue is good.

Key Issue 6: improve the quality of accommodation and rigorously monitor and eliminate health and safety hazards

The school has an appropriate health and safety policy. There is good, regular monitoring of health and safety issues by staff and governors. The identified hazards have reduced considerably and appropriately timed remedial action is taken. The school has refurbished many of the learning areas and although still small they are more fit for purpose. The displays are of good quality reflecting achievements made by the pupils and the agreed communication systems. The local authority has funded improvements of the physical environment and further work is planned for the summer holidays.

The school has identified funding to improve the playground areas and this work is to take place in the near future.

There is a rolling programme of recognised training for staff in moving and handling together with behaviour management and physical intervention. Progress on this key issue is good.