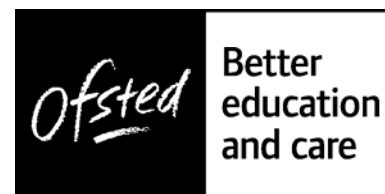


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Mr D Henderson
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Dear Mr Henderson

Implementation of Abbotsfield School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Caroline Bolton HMI, Gillian Barnes, Additional Inspector and Patrick Playfair, Additional Inspector to your school on 20 and 21 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 seventh 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, the chair of governors and the Corporate Director of Education for Hillingdon. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF ABBOTSFIELD SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit 33 lessons or parts of lessons and five registration sessions were inspected. HMI also attended an event for all Year 8 pupils in personal, social, health and citizenship education. It was not possible to see any classes in Key Stage 4 nor in the sixth form during this monitoring visit. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the chair of governors, members of the senior leadership team, a group of subject leaders, a consultant from Education London, the recently appointed assistant headteacher, the chair of the governing body 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 and a representative from the LEA.

The school is currently predicting that it will come close to achieving its targets for GCSE in 2005. The staff expect that approximately 35 per cent of the Year 11 pupils will achieve five or more higher grade GCSE passes, while about 96 per cent will gain at least one A* to G grade. At Key Stage 3, the school anticipates that the results of the national tests will show an overall improvement on 2004 figures in the proportions of pupils reaching the age-expected Level 5 in the core subjects. In the post-16 examinations, the school anticipates that the students' average points scores will show a marginal fall on last year's and will be below the school's target.

In just under nine in ten lessons, the teaching was at least satisfactory and in just under a third it was good or very good. The best lessons were well planned, with clear and focused learning objectives, and activities which were calculated to enable the pupils to achieve them. Time was well used in these lessons; they began crisply with a challenging starter activity and ended with a useful plenary session in which the key learning points were reviewed and the pupils' understanding of them assessed. Relationships were good-humoured and pleasant and the climate for learning was positive. The management of the pupils' behaviour was secure. In these effective lessons, the teachers engaged the pupils' interest and curiosity through lively presentation, skilful questioning and opportunities for independent study or research. They used well-considered and systematic strategies to improve the pupils' attainment in oracy.

Where the teaching was less successful, the planning was often weak and there was too little emphasis on what the pupils were to learn as a result of completing the tasks which were planned; too often, learning objectives were confused with activities. Some lessons began five or more minutes after their scheduled starting times and the pupils who arrived late, while few in number, were not always challenged robustly. In some lessons, activities were continued for too long and the less confident pupils were allowed to sit quietly disengaged from class

discussion. The teachers' exposition was not always clear; in two lessons it was unduly rushed and moved too rapidly from one topic to another so that some pupils became confused. Adequate time was not always allowed for the plenary sessions at the ends of lessons, in one instance with the result that pupils were preparing to leave while homework was being set. There were examples of informative marking, in English for example, but its overall quality was uneven; it was too often cursory or irregular, ignoring mistakes in the spelling of important subject vocabulary.

The pupils' progress was at least satisfactory in just under nine in ten lessons and good in a fifth. Work was not consistently planned to meet the needs of pupils of differing attainment and in some mixed ability classes in particular, not enough was expected of the higher attainers. As at the time of the last monitoring inspection, low attainment in literacy often limited progress and the staff are not yet adopting systematic approaches to the teaching of literacy. The recording of homework by the pupils continues to be inconsistent, indicating either that it is not always set when scheduled or that staff are not ensuring that pupils routinely write it down in their link books.

The improvement in the pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons, noted at the last inspection, has been sustained; their personal development was at least satisfactory in all the lessons and in six in ten it was good. Most pupils were punctual, respectful to the staff and keen to contribute to discussion. Despite the uncomfortably hot weather on the first day of the inspection, the pupils generally sustained their concentration well. Around the site, there was some occasional boisterousness, but movement was generally orderly and considerate and pupils were polite and helpful to the visitors.

The staff report that the LEA continues to provide a high level of support and professional development across a broad range of its work, including financial and personnel matters where they have arisen. They also speak positively of the contribution of Education London in the drive to raise standards in external examinations.

Action taken to address the key issues

Key Issue 1: raise the levels of pupils' achievements where they are unsatisfactory or poor, particularly in literacy skills, Year 11 science, design and technology, music and English by:

- **setting minimum standards of attainment;**
- **monitoring pupils' progress more rigorously and providing clear data to help teachers with their planning, to enable them to set challenging targets and to make realistic predictions;**
- **modifying programmes of study where necessary;**
- **implementing as a matter of urgency the measures recommended in the previous report to improve pupils' literacy skills**

The advice and guidance from the Education London consultant enabled a successful Easter revision programme to take place. Mentoring of particular target

groups and improved revision booklets have given useful additional support to pupils preparing for their examinations. The response of pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11 to opportunities for on-line revision has been generally positive, although only a third of the registered pupils in Year 10 have been active participants. Guidance is also being given to staff in subject areas on the preparation of accessible summaries of examination syllabi. The intention is that pupils will know from the start the expectations and structure of the examination courses. This usefully complements the range of actions reported on during the last monitoring visit. Agreement has been reached with London Challenge for their support of the residential revision programme planned for selected pupils in Years 10 and 11 in February 2006.

Greater rigour is being promoted in the assessment of examination work. The more detailed use of examination board marking schemes and greater precision in the identification of grade boundaries is bringing a sharper focus to both school and individual targets. A start has been made in using assessment data to target those pupils in Year 10 who are at risk of underachievement. The skills of teachers, subject leaders and heads of year in the use of assessment data are not yet consistently well developed. The two raising-achievement groups for each of Key Stages 3 and 4 have sensibly been merged in an effort to achieve greater coherence in their planned actions. However there is less discernible emphasis currently given to raising achievement at Key Stage 3. Significant weaknesses remain in the pupils' writing skills. Although many pupils speak confidently, their capacity to write accurately for different purposes is still not good enough. Work is too often poorly presented, lacking in structure, or left unfinished. The models of written language provided by some staff are not helpful in developing accuracy in the pupils' spelling and use of grammar and basic punctuation. The drive to improve standards of literacy across the curriculum is not yet having enough impact on the pupils' achievement.

Progress is limited.

Key Issue 2: raise achievement, in particular of pupils with special educational needs, with English as an additional language and the gifted and talented by:

- **ensuring that all staff know who they are and receive documentation which clearly specifies needs where appropriate;**
- **providing INSET to enable staff to implement appropriate strategies which meet the particular needs of these pupils;**
- **use all specific grant funding in these areas for their designated purpose**

During this monitoring inspection, some good practice was seen in planning to meet the needs of different groups in mainstream lessons but it is by no means consistent. Lesson planning did not always identify the role expected of teaching assistants where they were present, nor was it common for reference to be made to the targets of pupils who have special educational needs or to strategies specific

to the needs of pupils for whom English is an additional language. In the best lessons, specific tasks and resources were provided for the higher attainers but in some classes, particularly those which were mixed ability in composition, too little was demanded of these pupils.

The school has prepared guidance for teachers in developing techniques to meet the needs of pupils who have English as an additional language and special educational needs. However, in practical terms the issues of the differentiation of work raised on previous monitoring visits are still not consistently embedded in practice.

Progress has been limited overall.

Key Issue 3: improve the overall quality of teaching and learning by:

- **making better use of the very good practice that exists to share strategies that are successful;**
- **requiring rigorous planning for every lesson which includes all groups' needs;**
- **monitoring the effectiveness of teaching in bringing about clear learning outcomes;**
- **following up the results of monitoring with support for individual teachers**

The quality of the teaching and learning has been evaluated above. The common form for planning lessons is helpful in prompting teachers to identify learning outcomes as well as teaching activities. The teachers' understanding of the purpose of this section of the plan is uneven, however, and there is a tendency for some to record there the intended tasks for the pupils rather than the skills, understanding and knowledge which they are expected to acquire as a result of completing them. The focus on learning which senior leaders have sought to promote in lesson planning and practice is not yet embedded across the school. At the time of the last monitoring visit, the proportion of lessons in which the teaching and learning were satisfactory or better was similar to that recorded on this occasion. At the time of the last inspection, the proportion of the teaching in Key Stage 3 which was good or very good was lower than that seen in Years 10 to 13 and on this occasion it was possible to observe only Key Stage 3 lessons. Nevertheless, the stubborn element of unsatisfactory teaching and learning has yet to be eliminated and progress has been limited overall.

Key Issue 4: improve the attitudes, behaviour and punctuality of a significant minority of the pupils by:

- **implementing school behaviour policies consistently;**
- **using more appropriate strategies to reduce the number of exclusions and promote regular attendance and punctual arrival at school and in lessons**

The school has continued to reinforce clear expectations of behaviour and attitudes to learning. Changes have been made to the behaviour policy so that sanctions

can be better matched to individual incidents. The consistent implementation of the system of rewards and sanctions has resulted in pupils feeling very positive about their experiences in school. They see the improvement and want it to continue.

The incidence of fixed-term exclusion has risen when compared with the same periods in the last academic year. For example, last term there were three times the number of days of fixed-term exclusion in comparison with the figure recorded in during the spring term 2004. A significant proportion of these exclusions involve pupils from Year 9. The school reports that the unequivocal expectations of behaviour and the need to continue to reinforce school policy are behind this rising trend. Sensible arrangements are made for the reintegration of pupils returning to school after exclusion. There has been one permanent exclusion this term.

Good leadership and continued effective links with the education welfare service have led to some success in improving attendance and reducing unauthorised absence. Overall attendance for the current academic year is 92.4 per cent. Unauthorised absence is currently one per cent. Punctuality to lessons is helped by the time allowed during the school day for movement between lessons.

Progress is reasonable.

Key Issue 5: improve the quality and range of learning opportunities by:

- **meeting statutory requirements for cross-curricular ICT, music, aspects of design and technology and religious education in Years 10 and 11;**
- **increasing the amount of teaching time**

All but one of the new courses being planned at the time of the last monitoring visit are to be implemented at Key Stage 4 from September 2005. Improved breadth within the option choices has enabled the school to meet a significant proportion of first choices. The school has endeavoured to ensure that pupils recognise what is expected of them when embarking on specific vocational and applied GCSE courses. In the sixth form, religious education is now included within the core studies programme. Recreational physical education will be available for post-16 students from September 2005.

The school reports an increase in the number of teachers booking rooms for cross-curricular work in information and communication technology. Teachers of English and French are the most frequent users but there is a disappointingly low take-up by the humanities department. The quality of what is being provided and the links with the core programmes of study for information and communication technology are not being monitored with sufficient rigour. The proposed purchase of two banks of wireless laptops reported at the time of the last monitoring visit has not taken place.

Progress is reasonable overall.

Key Issue 6: strengthen management by:

- **ensuring that senior managers monitor and evaluate the priorities contained within this plan and that they are held accountable for their direct responsibilities including health and safety issues;**
- **providing guidance to all governors on their role as 'critical friend' so that they can undertake their full responsibilities, in monitoring the work of the school**

A school improvement plan has been formulated to steer the work of the school over the next three years; the plan identifies appropriate targets and success criteria and takes account of the imminent re-structuring of the senior leadership team.

Arrangements for the monitoring of the school's work, including departmental reviews, continue to be systematic and the judgements of the senior team on the quality of teaching and learning are suitably rigorous and precise. Leadership in some subject areas is improving well and raising the quality of the provision. However, the monitoring skills of some middle managers are still developing, not least in the use of data to track the progress over time of specific groups of pupils.

The governors are becoming more active in their monitoring and support for the school. Protocols for governors' visits to the school are in the process of being formulated but the programme is at an early stage of development. During this visit, the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils was not met.

Progress has been reasonable on this key issue.

Sixth Form**Key Issue 1: improve overall standards of teaching and learning**

It was not possible to observe sixth-form lessons during this visit and progress on this key issue was therefore not evaluated.

Key Issue 2: improve the use of school and national data to set targets for students and to guide teachers' planning

All staff involved in teaching in the sixth form have now considered the significance of, and the relationships between, the various grades recorded for individual students. The requirement for subject leaders to provide an analysis of the progress made by individual students revealed some underachievement, particularly by the more able. A planned programme of activities is to be introduced next term to address this significant issue.

There are examples in some subject areas of the effective use of assessment information in the planning of lessons but these models have not yet been disseminated as planned.

At the time of the last monitoring visit, it was noted that post-16 performance indicators for individual subjects had not been considered in relation to national

data. There is a clear commitment to ensure that this work will take place in the course of the in-depth analysis of the examination results for 2005.

Data generated by the electronic registration system is being used effectively to monitor and improve attendance.

Progress has been reasonable.

Key Issue 3: improve the management of subjects that use staff from both schools

Significantly improved attendance at the joint A-level meetings has enabled teachers to work together more closely and to plan for the changes to be introduced in the new academic year. This co-operation has facilitated the provision of new courses in September. Securing the accommodation for these courses has been the focus of much of the activity in cross-campus financial management.

Contact between the head of post-16 provision and subject leaders has increased and should be further strengthened when the recently appointed assistant head of post-16 provision is in post. Subject staff have accepted greater accountability for their results but the proposal for cross-campus lesson observations has not been realised.

The inclusion of A-level meetings for staff from both schools in the schools' published calendars for the next academic year will provide for a more consistent and formal approach. This decision, and the appointment of an assistant head of post-16 provision, should widen the opportunities for improving the effectiveness with which the subjects delivered by staff from both schools are managed.

Progress has been reasonable.