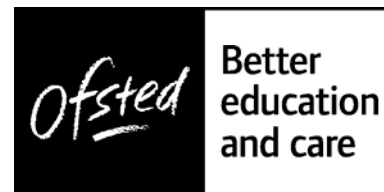


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7 July 2005

Mr J B Hirst
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hirst

Implementation of Sandhill Primary School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Mr J S Hardwick HMI to your school on 4 and 5 July 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, the chair of governors and the Executive Director for Education for Barnsley. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF SANDHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit 13 lessons and an assembly were inspected, and the pupils' conduct was observed around the school and at break time. Discussions were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the co-ordinator for literacy, and a representative from the LEA. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, the chair of governors and a representative from the LEA.

Overall the school's initial results in the 2005 national tests are similar to those for 2004, thus generally maintaining the considerable improvement that was made in Key Stage 2 last year. The school has met its targets in all the tests, except for English at Key Stage 2, where the proportion of pupils gaining the age-expected Level 4 was 64 per cent, compared with 79 per cent in the previous year. The school has begun analysing the information and is already preparing to address writing, the weakest aspect of its performance.

The picture in lessons was one of a steady rise in standards, though not consistently across the school. Nonetheless, the issues arising from the monitoring inspection in February are being tackled systematically; for example, in the targets set for presentation and basic punctuation. Standards were relatively higher among the younger pupils, some of whom reached levels above those normally expected for their age. In reception, for instance, some of the pupils read well, spelled accurately using their knowledge of letter sounds, and recognised odd and even numbers to 100.

At Key Stage 2, standards were at the expected level in some aspects of work and just below this level in others. The pupils in Years 5 and 6, for example, empathised with the characters in a poem and recognised the features of an advertising leaflet, but the quality of their written and spoken answers did not fully reflect their understanding.

The pupils' progress was good in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, and satisfactory in Key Stage 2. This resulted from the differences in the overall quality of the teaching within the school. The teaching was very good in two lessons, good in five, satisfactory in five and unsatisfactory in one. This maintains the improvement noted in February.

The basic features of at least sound teaching underpinned all the lessons. Planning, preparation and organisation were good. Appropriate learning objectives were shared with the pupils at the outset of each lesson and the teachers recapped on previous learning to establish a secure foundation before new work commenced. The teachers have rapidly come to the terms with new interactive whiteboards, which were used to aid the pace, the clarity of demonstrations and the level of

interest among the pupils. Tasks were usually carefully differentiated to match the pupils' various levels of attainment. The classroom assistants provided skilful support, particularly in leading small groups of pupils.

The better teaching was marked out by high expectations, well-timed and chosen tasks, and firm routines. The individual weaknesses in otherwise satisfactory lessons related to: insecure subject knowledge, including misspellings; question-and-answer sessions that involved too few pupils; unclear and low expectations of how pupils should record their written answers; and tolerating too much wasteful chatter when pupils were meant to be working on their own. The unsatisfactory teaching stemmed from weak explanations and use of time.

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were good or better in 11 lessons and satisfactory in two; they were mostly very good in the younger classes. This is an improvement when compared with February. In most classes the pupils followed well-established routines, organising their materials, settling quickly and moving from one part of a lesson to another without fuss. They showed interest in the work, co-operated well in pairs and were confident to address the class as a whole. There were a few occasions when pupils lost concentration and chattered, but the most significant weakness was the tendency in some lessons for a considerable number of pupils to sit passively while a few of their schoolmates answered the teacher's questions. The pupils have responded well to the reminders on their desk about how to present their general work but there were times when they needed instruction specific to the task, such as the need to insert commas in lists of numbers.

Attendance for the school year to the end of May was 94.3 per cent, which is similar to the national figure, and there have been no exclusions for misconduct.

Much has been undertaken by the headteacher to take the school forward, and she has been well supported by senior staff. Extensive monitoring has gone ahead as scheduled, staff development has been well directed at the school's needs, and a range of policies has been produced to promote consistency across the school. Separate plans have been written for aspects of the school's work, but there is the sensible intention to recast the overall action plan to reflect what has been achieved and what priorities remain. Preparations for the new school year in September have been under way for some time. They are well conceived and involve an anticipated strengthening in staffing.

The governing body has fulfilled its responsibilities to the school. There have been a considerable number of visits by governors to discuss and monitor subjects and aspects of performance. However, a difference of opinion over how to redeploy responsibilities for special educational needs, which has now been resolved, caused an unnecessary distraction from the key priorities facing the school.

The LEA has again provided satisfactory and clearly documented help to the school, particularly in addressing some of the issues arising from the monitoring inspection

in February. The school has also benefited from the support of external consultants, visits to view practice elsewhere, and shared initiatives within the local group of schools.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: raise standards in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology

Much further appropriate work has been undertaken in relation to this area for improvement. Actions have included monitoring of planning, joint observations of lessons, support from the LEA's consultants, training, and installing new resources such as interactive whiteboards. Standards are discussed above: progress is reasonable.

2: improve the quality of teaching and learning

There has been a good deal of training that has been suitable to the needs of individuals and staff as a whole. Teachers have been observed by staff from the school and the LEA, and they have received feedback on their practice. Whole-school issues, such as marking, presentation and handwriting, are being tackled appropriately. The pupils, for their part, are being encouraged to pay close attention to their own targets and thus become involved in self-assessment. The quality of teaching and learning is discussed above: progress is reasonable overall, but better in the younger classes than at Key Stage 2.

3 improve leadership and management

A comprehensive programme has been established for checking the key aspects of the school's performance, such as standards and teaching. Progress has been reviewed to determine ways forward, sometimes through specific action plans. Senior staff have been drawn into this process, and the role of the deputy headteacher has been broadened. The governors are implementing their own annual plan for monitoring. Progress is reasonable.

4: improve the quality of the curriculum

Progress in this area has continued to be good. The long-term plan for the curriculum has been reviewed, and there has been specialist help on subjects such as art, physical education and music. The pupils have benefited from a range of visitors and visits, for instance to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, and new after-school clubs have been introduced.