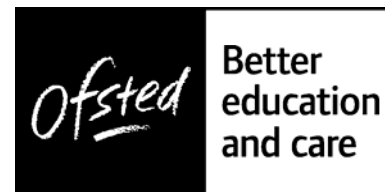


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Mr P Finegan
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Dear Mr Finegan

Implementation of Amington Heath Community School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Mrs D Holdaway HMI to your school on 16 and 17 May 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 fourth 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 Director of Education for Staffordshire. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF AMINGTON HEATH COMMUNITY SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit 11 lessons or parts of lessons and one registration session were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the senior teacher and co-ordinators, the chair of governors 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 senior teacher, the chair of the governing body and a representative from the LEA.

Standards of attainment in lessons were in line with national expectations overall. Pupils enter the Foundation Stage with below average attainment; their communication skills are particularly weak. They make satisfactory progress in the reception class and they are likely to achieve the early learning goals. There is a significant proportion of higher attaining pupils in the Foundation Stage and it would be appropriate for them to be assessed against the early levels of the National Curriculum.

By the end of Key Stage 1 the pupils develop ideas in sentences and accurately spell frequently used words. Punctuation remains a weakness, with irregular use of full stops and capital letters. The pupils do not show pride in the presentation of their work and make insufficient progress in developing a consistent and legible script. The pupils experience a broad range of writing skills which are practised on prepared worksheets. However, the skills are not applied to a purposeful range of writing to consolidate their learning. The pupils do not develop their initial ideas over time or use planning frames to draft and organise their thoughts.

In mathematics the pupils frequently apply skills to problem-solving and choose appropriate operations to calculate their work. The pupils use number lines effectively, add two and three digit numbers and find the amount of change needed in money problems. The pupils do not have a secure sense of measure and, while they know the names of two dimensional shapes, they are not able to discuss their properties. There are too few opportunities for the pupils to investigate mathematics through practical activities and as a consequence they find it difficult to understand mathematical concepts.

At the end of Key Stage 2 the pupils use a range of punctuation accurately; write well-organised, imaginative and sustained ideas; write legible script which is suitable for different purposes; construct sentences grammatically; organise thoughts into paragraphs; and spell common words correctly. The pupils are given many opportunities to write in a range of styles and for different, relevant purposes. In lessons, the pupils make good progress because the skills are

frequently applied to real-life situations and their creativity is inspired by imaginative teaching.

In mathematics the pupils know how to check their work using inverse operations; they recognise place value; measure perimeters, angles and capacity using standard units; and apply a range of methods to solving mental calculations and solving problems. The pupils explore a range of practical investigations in science; they understand that scientific ideas are based on evidence; and they decide on suitable methods such as a fair test to answer a question in their own investigations.

Throughout the school the pupils make satisfactory progress over time; many have made significant advances from underachievement in the past. During lessons the pupils made very good progress when they were able to draw on their own experiences to inform imaginative situations. In two particularly successful lessons the pupils reflected on their sensory responses to describe imaginary scenes. The pupils' imagination was supported visually in one lesson by using scenes from Narnia while in another lesson a tape of jungle sounds inspired the pupils' thoughts. Purposeful observation, listening and partner talk helped the pupils to prepare focused responses. In these lessons the pupils valued each other's comments and learned from them; they were intellectually challenged but their success was secured by appropriate support; the pupils were highly productive and engrossed in their work to the exclusion of all distractions; and they were eager to contribute their ideas.

In less successful lessons the pupils were not sufficiently challenged and they became bored with the planned activities; there were too few opportunities to investigate, explore or discover for themselves and as a consequence, concepts were not sufficiently understood or reinforced. The cost of a broad sweep of knowledge was that the pupils lacked a depth of understanding. In other lessons the pupils were unclear about what they were doing or why and when they finished a task they were unable to extend their ideas independently. When pupils were unsure what to do they relied heavily on the adults in the room because displays and resources failed to supply them with the information they needed. They were not learning independently.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory in ten out of the 11 lessons. Just over half of the teaching was good or better, which is an improvement since the last monitoring visit. All of the good or better teaching was seen in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 2.

The features of the most effective teaching included confident use of the interactive whiteboard; purposeful and challenging partner talk which helped the pupils to deepen their understanding or extend their imagination; excellent pace, punctuated by frequent reviews of understanding or developing concepts; and a variety of methods which engaged the pupils and maintained their interest. The features of

good and better teaching have not been adopted consistently throughout the school. Group work is not yet a feature of the school's approach to learning. In addition there were insufficient opportunities for the pupils to check their own work against given success criteria or assess their own progress and that of others through an awareness of national curriculum level criteria.

While assessment is used effectively to track the progress of pupils it is not used to determine what the pupils do not know and need to be taught. Teachers' day-to-day assessments remain insecure and activities are not differentiated accurately. As a consequence, too many of the pupils are inadequately challenged and the higher attaining pupils underachieve. Furthermore, there is insufficient reference to national curriculum levels to define learning objectives, structure planning or inform assessment.

Marking frequently praises the pupils' efforts and some comments help the pupils to improve. Constructive advice was not followed up in corrections or later work and the feedback lacked sufficient detail.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory overall. The headteacher is clearly committed to the pupils' well-being but the pace of improvement is too slow. The leadership team has not been rigorous enough in scrutinising outcomes, analysing weaknesses and addressing them strategically and thoroughly. Although improvements have continued and progress has been achieved, the urgency of special measures has not been grasped.

The senior teacher has a clear understanding of the improvements needed to raise standards and advance the quality of teaching further. He leads by good example.

The co-ordinators reflect the school's aims in their work but suggested strategies and LEA support need to be implemented speedily and thoughtfully. The leadership team benefits from regular meetings and opportunities to reflect on its work, thus avoiding complacency, but there is still much to achieve.

The governing body is increasingly involved in contributing to the school's aims and vision. There are appropriate committee structures and individual members are responsible for monitoring curriculum areas. Recently appointed governors have received suitable induction training. The chair of governors is committed to the school's success and continues to provide effective leadership for the governing body. However meetings are too frequently taken up with peripheral issues and governors are not holding the school to account.

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are at least satisfactory and often good. The pupils behave well during lessons, persevere with their work and co-operate sensibly. During break times the pupils play collaboratively and they know what to do if they are hurt or upset. The pupils have formed a school council which has

contributed effectively to playground procedures and break time resources. A number of pupils perform duties around the school reliably.

The LEA continues to provide the school with good support. Subject co-ordinators benefit from partnerships with consultants and training. The early years advisor has supported the Foundation Stage effectively. The link advisor has conducted paired lesson observations with co-ordinators and trained them in feedback techniques.

Action taken to address the key issues

Key Issue 1: improve the leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management has been evaluated above.

Progress has been reasonable overall.

Key Issue 2: raise standards in English, mathematics and science

The headteacher and subject co-ordinators monitor the work of the school regularly. A scrutiny of the pupils' books and lesson observations has enabled the English, mathematics and science co-ordinators to evaluate standards of attainment and advise staff on appropriate developments. However, their lesson observations tend to be descriptive rather than evaluative. Although the headteacher takes in the teachers' planning at the beginning of the week, the staff do not receive feedback on how their planning could be improved.

The co-ordinators have formed clear priorities for future developments in their individual action plans but there is not an adequate sense of urgency in leading the required changes and implementing them consistently across the school.

Progress on this key issue is reasonable.

Key Issue 3: improve the quality of the curriculum and bring the resources to at least a satisfactory level

The curriculum is inclusive and meets the statutory requirements. The staff has recently reviewed the curriculum and agrees that it fails to inspire a joy of learning. Furthermore they have identified significant weaknesses in its organisation, progression and continuity. There are suitable plans to address these issues. A number of out of school clubs, educational visits and a trip to France successfully enrich the curriculum and broaden the pupils' experiences meaningfully.

The school's budget has been appropriately delegated to subject areas to ensure that each curriculum area is suitably resourced.

Progress in this key issue is reasonable.

Key Issue 4: develop closer partnerships with the parents and the community

This key issue was not inspected during this visit.

Key Issue 5: improve attendance

This key issue was not inspected during this visit.

Key Issue 6: special educational needs

The co-ordinator for special educational needs has begun an early intervention programme for Foundation Stage pupils to ensure that appropriate support is implemented at the earliest opportunity. A programme for speech therapy has also been introduced.

Biannual targets are identified by the co-ordinator, teachers and teaching assistants. Parents are invited to contribute their ideas to the reviews. All targets are broken down into short-term goals which the pupils understand.

Teachers and their support staff are responsible for supporting the pupils' individual targets during lessons. The teachers identify specific activities in their planning for those pupils with special educational needs.

Progress in this key issue is reasonable