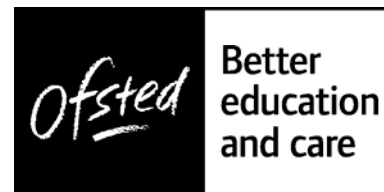


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Mrs J Milford
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Milford

Implementation of Knowle Primary School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Andrew Watters HMI and David Jones HMI to your school on 29 and 30 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 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 good progress since the last monitoring inspection and reasonable progress overall since being subject to special measures.

The school is permitted to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF KNOWLE PRIMARY SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit 20 lessons or parts of lessons, four registration sessions and four assemblies were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, senior teachers and members of the school's leadership team, the chair of governors, an adviser from the LEA's challenge, support and performance team and a consultant headteacher who is working with the school. 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 deputy headteacher, the chair of the governing body and a representative from the LEA.

The preliminary results of the 2005 Key Stage 1 national tests in reading, writing and mathematics show that there has been a slight increase since the previous year in the proportion of pupils reaching the level expected for their age and that the school's targets have been exceeded. There has been a significant increase in the proportion of pupils achieving the higher level in writing, from none to 24 per cent; a good increase in reading from six to 18 per cent but a seven per cent fall in mathematics.

From a very low base, standards are beginning to rise and more pupils are making reasonable and occasionally good progress to improve basic skills, particularly in reading and mathematics. Standards were in line with the levels expected for the pupils' age in 12 lessons; some of the pupils in reception and Year 1 achieve well in writing and some Year 5 pupils reach good standards in reading. An increasing proportion of the pupils in each key stage is on track to reach the targets set in literacy and numeracy. Nevertheless, standards overall remain low and below the levels expected for the pupils' ages, particularly in Key Stage 2. Standards in writing and speaking and listening are particularly low and the quality of the pupils' handwriting and presentation is unsatisfactory. Similarly many pupils in Key Stage 2 struggle to write well structured sentences that are punctuated accurately using the correct grammar and tense.

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were very good in three lessons, good in eight and satisfactory in seven lessons; they were unsatisfactory in two lessons at Key Stage 2 and this was directly related to weaknesses in teaching. The majority of the pupils spoke politely to their teachers and each other, and they responded sensibly to the opportunities provided for group discussion. Most pupils were keen to contribute to lessons and they worked with reasonable enthusiasm; they responded well to established classroom routines, were increasingly aware of the teachers' high expectations of their behaviour and relished the challenging opportunities provided in some lessons. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour in assemblies were generally positive. Around the school, the pupils usually moved with purpose, care and consideration. Behaviour at break and lunchtime was

satisfactory; relationships in the playground were generally positive although boisterous behaviour still exists.

Four assemblies made a satisfactory contribution to the pupils' social and moral development, although one assembly in Key Stage 1 did not meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship.

The attendance rate for the spring term 2005 was 92.6 per cent and for the first part of the summer term 2005 it was 92.9 per cent. These figures represent only a slight increase from the autumn term, when the pupils' attendance was 92.4 per cent. Actions to improve the pupils' attendance are not making a sufficiently strong impact; attendance rates remain very static and below the national figure for primary schools of 94.5 per cent. As reported previously there is no clear upward trend in improvement in the pupils' attendance.

Punctuality to school in the morning remains variable and in some instances unsatisfactory; many of the Year 6 pupils frequently arrive late. The community support officer has established a positive relationship with the school and the community. The start of lessons and assemblies immediately after breaks are delayed by the relaxed scheduling of the school day. Timetables do not show clearly when teaching sessions are expected to begin following breaks for play and lunch and some teachers are unclear about the timing allowed for movement around the school. The school has introduced internal exclusion from lessons where uncooperative pupils spend time with the headteacher; this is having a generally satisfactory impact on improving the pupils' behaviour. There have been no exclusions since the last monitoring visit.

The quality of teaching and learning was very good in three lessons, good in five and satisfactory in eight lessons; it was unsatisfactory in four lessons. This represents a significant improvement since the previous inspection; the proportion of satisfactory and better teaching has risen from 62 per cent to 80 per cent. There has been a slight increase in the proportion of good and very good teaching, from 38 to 40 per cent. The overall profile of teaching in each key stage is becoming more secure as important initiatives take effect and improvements become embedded in practice.

In the best lessons the teachers' expectations were high and questions were used effectively to probe the pupils' understanding and challenge their thinking, particularly in whole-class teaching sessions. The pupils' behaviour was managed effectively, lessons were well organised and the pupils' tasks were matched well to their different learning needs. Teachers' subject knowledge was good and there was a brisk pace of learning. Carefully targeted teaching was instrumental in raising standards and increasing the pupils' knowledge and understanding.

In the weaker and unsatisfactory lessons teachers' expectations were far too low and pupils were praised excessively when producing work that was of mediocre quality and sometimes inaccurate. Low-level disruption was tolerated and there

was a failure to recognise when the pupils were becoming restless and disaffected. The teachers' explanations and instructions caused confusion and the pupils were unsure what they were expected to learn by the end of the lesson.

The role of teaching assistants has shown some improvement but is variable, ranging from good to unsatisfactory; overall it is satisfactory. The best use of teaching assistant time was in the good and very good lessons where teachers directed and managed their work well, particularly when they supported groups of pupils in whole-class sessions and during the main teaching activities. The work of the teaching assistants was less effective when they remained as passive observers during lesson introductions.

The provision for pupils who have special educational needs is satisfactory. Effective assessment procedures allow the appropriate targeting of support; the pupils make satisfactory progress, particularly when they are supported by teaching assistants. Individual education plans are appropriate and the teachers make regular refinements as the pupils' achievements increase. A useful review of the special educational needs provision is being undertaken that should allow senior managers to measure the impact of support.

Curriculum provision is sound. All subject-based topics are evaluated after a curriculum unit has been taught. Teachers and subject co-ordinators review the outcomes and generally make appropriate recommendations regarding methodology and resources. Phase co-ordinators review the planning of major units of work, but as yet, there are no formal procedures to cross-reference planning, outcomes, and the assessment of pupils' progress. There is a good range of extracurricular opportunities, such as in sport and music. The plans for the forthcoming arts week are well advanced and a history week is under consideration for the new school year.

There is an increasing amount of assessment information that is beginning to be used well to: track the pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics; hold the teachers to account for the standards achieved by the pupils in their class; identify strengths and weaknesses in attainment in literacy and numeracy and provide additional teaching time to boost the pupils' achievement, where it is very low. These are extremely positive developments and work in this area is led well and enthusiastically by the deputy headteacher, who is a very good role model for other teachers. However, the decision to base the school's analysis of assessment information on a benchmark with similar schools does not provide a sufficiently accurate picture of the pupils' performance in relation to the standards that they are expected to reach for their age; it is also leading to a slightly over generous view of the proportion of pupils whose attainment is described as average and above average.

The quality of the school's collective leadership continues to improve and is satisfactory. The leadership team is becoming far more focused than previously on evaluating the effectiveness of their work in relation to raising standards and

increasing the rate of the pupils' progress. The deputy headteacher and key stage co-ordinators are becoming increasingly influential in supporting the headteacher in the drive to raise standards and improve the quality of education.

The headteacher has continued to lead the school's work with determination and commitment; she has ensured that there is a far more rigorous focus on raising standards and measuring the value added to the pupils' achievements in lessons and over time in each key stage. She has introduced important initiatives to eliminate remaining weaknesses, such as the individual development plans for all teachers and the recruitment of a consultant teacher to further improve the quality of teaching and learning. Similarly, all teachers have been encouraged to evaluate their work in relation to raising standards and have taken part in joint observations of each others' lessons; all subject leaders have produced helpful records of progress that show what actions have been taken during the year 2004/05.

Monitoring and evaluation are becoming embedded in the school's policies and practice, although self evaluations of progress generally give too much emphasis to describing actions rather than providing concise evaluations of their impact. Some of the documentation provided for HMI is historical and has been scrutinised on previous visits. The school's leadership is not yet sufficiently adept at synthesising information to demonstrate the impact of initiatives, particularly in the period between monitoring inspections. Other documents are not signed and dated which contributes to a lack of accountability and an insufficiently rigorous approach to evaluating the effectiveness of some roles and responsibilities. The written feedback to teachers about their work gives greater emphasis to standards and progress although targets for improvement and review dates for subsequent observations are not always identified; this was reported at the second monitoring inspection in October 2004. There is no clear overview to show when and how different monitoring and evaluation activities are expected to occur, and who is responsible for leading them.

Strategic planning is satisfactory; the draft school development plan for 2005/06 identifies a range of relevant actions and gives overriding priority to raising standards and lifting the level of the pupils' achievements. There are measurable success criteria for raising standards in the core subjects and useful subject action plans to support the overall development plan; timescales generally show when certain actions should be completed but there are very few milestones to indicate when progress will be evaluated in the short and medium term.

Staff absence has continued to disrupt the school's programme of training and development to secure improvement in the quality of teaching and learning in all classes; during the summer term three permanent members of the teaching staff have been absent for a combined period of almost 12 weeks. Nevertheless there is greater stability in staffing overall; teachers' morale is generally good and teamwork is improving rapidly.

Governance is satisfactory; the recently elected chair of governors is establishing a working partnership with the headteacher and is receiving information about the pupils' achievements and their attainment. This is helping the governing body hold the school to account for the standards achieved by the pupils and provides a secure basis for governors to act as critical friends.

The LEA continues to provide a satisfactory level of support. A recent review of progress provided helpful feedback to the school, identifying strengths and weaknesses in provision and setting out points for development to secure improvement in key areas, such as teaching, learning, leadership and management and the pupils' achievements.

Action taken to address the key issues

Key Issue 1: improve the quality of leadership, management and governance of the school to enable it to set a clear educational direction and to focus on raising standards and achievement

Reasonable progress has been made to address this key issue.

Key Issue 2: raise the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of pupils' learning, ensuring that the needs of pupils of different ages and abilities are met in each class

Good progress has been made to address this key issue.

Key Issue 3: improve the curriculum to ensure that it addresses the needs of all pupils

The progress made in addressing this key issue has been reasonable.

Key Issue 4: eliminate bullying and improve pupils' behaviour

Good progress has been made to address this key issue.