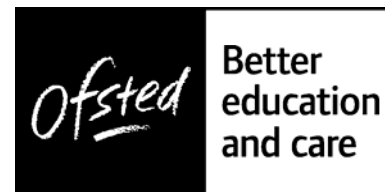


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Mr M Frost
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Frost

Implementation of Warrington Horizons' Action Plan

Following the visit of Mr E Craven HMI to your unit on 24 and 25 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 third monitoring inspection since the unit 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 unit; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

The unit has made limited progress since the last monitoring inspection and limited 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 the management committee and the Director of Education for Warrington. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF WARRINGTON HORIZON'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit six lessons were observed, along with a breakfast session. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the teacher responsible for Key Stage 3, the pupil support officer, a representative from the management committee and two representatives 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 teacher responsible for Key Stage 3, a representative from the management committee and two representatives from the LEA.

A deputy headteacher has been appointed and will take up her post in September 2005. However, the teacher responsible for Key Stage 3 is to leave the unit at the end of this term. The teacher temporarily responsible for Key Stage 4 has stepped down and the day-to-day management of Key Stage 4 has been undertaken by the headteacher. The unit will undergo a planned reduction of 1.5 teachers in September 2005. The refurbishment of a former special school is on track to allow the Key Stage 4 pupils to relocate to the new site at the beginning of next term. A bid from the LEA has been lodged with the DfES to fund further refurbishment to enable the Key Stage 3 pupils to move to the new site as well.

All three Year 9 pupils sat the end-of-Key Stage 3 national tests this term. None of them is predicted to achieve the nationally expected Level 5 in English, mathematics or science. Eleven pupils are to undertake the GCSE examinations in mathematics, with predicted grades between D and G. Two pupils are taking GCSE art and are expected to achieve grades D and E respectively. Year 11 pupils have undertaken a range of other externally accredited courses including one on 'preparation for working life'.

The pupils' learning was good in one lesson, satisfactory in three and unsatisfactory in a further two lessons. Where the learning was good, for example in a Key Stage 4 science lesson, the one pupil in attendance made good progress in learning about chemical hazards. He listened carefully to the teacher and responded readily to requests made of him; he answered questions fully. His written work was good and he read aloud fairly fluently, trying hard to pronounce words he could not easily read. There were two reasons why learning was unsatisfactory. In a Key Stage 4 history lesson the work was not appropriately matched to the pupil's needs and abilities. The pupil made limited progress in learning about Hitler's beliefs and his use of pageantry as he did not understand some of the words used by the teacher. His thinking was not expanded and he was not adequately encouraged to talk about his understanding of the information. In a Key Stage 3 science lesson, despite the best efforts of the teacher, the pupils made limited progress due to their disruptive behaviour.

The quality of teaching was good in one lesson, satisfactory in four and unsatisfactory in one. In the best lesson, and in some lessons that were satisfactory overall, the plans were appropriately detailed and the learning outcomes were clear and measurable. The work of the teaching assistant in Key Stage 4 was good; she worked in harmony with the teacher, appropriately supporting and challenging the pupils' thinking. In a Key Stage 4 science lesson, there was a good starter activity, suitably related to the main task. The teacher had prepared the resources well and the use of artefacts enhanced the pupil's understanding of hazardous symbols. The teacher's steadfast questioning challenged the pupil to think carefully before committing himself to an answer. In one or two lessons, which were nonetheless satisfactory overall, the learning outcomes were not shared with the pupils in a sufficiently meaningful way at the outset and the teachers did not make effective use of the concluding plenary session, mainly due to poor use of time. Behaviour management in two Key Stage 3 lessons was weak. Displays around the unit have improved; they were generally bright, attractive and informative.

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were good in four lessons and unsatisfactory in two. The unsatisfactory behaviour was in Key Stage 3. The behaviour in Key Stage 4 has improved since the last visit, although in three of the four lessons there was only one pupil in attendance. In the lessons where behaviour was good the pupils were generally polite and quickly responded when requests were made of them. In a Key Stage 4 English lesson the pupils were notably courteous to HMI when packing away their work. In Key Stage 3 swearing was heard too frequently and there was a limited response from staff; no reference was made to loss of points and in a few cases the responses did little to check the pupils. Rewards were administered at the end of lessons and were generally valued by the pupils; most have responded positively to the system. Many of the Year 11 pupils have appreciated that their examinations are looming and have begun to put more effort into their work. In the lessons where behaviour and attitudes were unsatisfactory, some pupils were disrespectful and rude to the teacher; shouting out was prominent in parts of the lesson and swearing was commonplace. The pupils displayed poor listening skills and sometimes interrupted their classmates when they were talking to staff.

The attendance rates in Key Stages 3 and 4 are 69 per cent and 55 per cent respectively. These are improvements on the rates for the previous school year. However, they remain unsatisfactory. Although displays of the pupils' attendance are evident, targets for individual pupils have not been set as part of a whole-unit strategy to raise punctuality and attendance.

Two Key Stage 3 pupils were given fixed-term exclusions on the first day of the monitoring visit for aggressive behaviour and damage to property. Nevertheless, the need to use exclusion as a sanction has lessened. The number of days lost to fixed-term exclusion this school year to date is 100, compared to 417 for the whole of the last school year.

The headteacher has made some positive responses to the criticisms around the lack of urgency at the unit contained in a recent monitoring report from the LEA. There has been some useful standardisation of practice between the key stages. The use of a common format for planning lessons has been introduced and the rewards and merits systems are now compatible. Full-time education for all pupils has been arranged.

The headteacher reports that the management committee is becoming more searching in its questioning of the unit. However, the headteacher's written reports to the management committee do not contain sufficient information about the pupils' academic progress or their personal and social development to enable the committee to have a detailed view of the unit's development and to appropriately challenge it. Nevertheless, the committee does have a good overview of the unit's strengths and weaknesses. There are sensible plans to extend its membership to include more headteachers of local high schools.

The LEA has responded rapidly to the criticisms contained in the last note of inspection findings. The link adviser has co-ordinated the support of the LEA well. Helpful guidance has been provided by some of the Key Stage 3 consultants, the advanced skills teacher for English and the external management consultant. The link adviser has been seconded to another post and the LEA has arranged for the external consultant to take on the link adviser's role, with another LEA officer co-ordinating the LEA's continued support. The LEA has an accurate view of the unit's strengths and weaknesses and has appropriate plans to continue to support and challenge the management of the unit.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: raise the standard of teaching to help pupils learn and achieve more

Teaching and learning, with an initial emphasis on planning, have appropriately been made a priority. The LEA's consultant for teaching and learning and the teacher responsible for Key Stage 3 have been coaching staff in one-to-one sessions. This work has been valued by staff. Planning folders have been created and lesson plans have improved. A training day was usefully used to create a series of written expectations for planning, assessment and behaviour management although not all staff have applied these rigorously enough.

Progress has been reasonable.

2: improve procedures for helping pupils to improve their behaviour, attitudes, attendance and personal development

The behaviour policy has recently been revised. Behaviour has improved in Key Stage 4 in response to increased consistency in the application of the system; nevertheless variation is evident between some teachers. Incident sheets are used

helpfully by tutors to discuss behaviour with their pupils and to determine targets for inclusion into individual education plans. However, the data on rewards and sanctions is not used by management as a means of identifying patterns and trends. The implementation of the new attendance policy is at an early stage.

Progress has been reasonable.

3: ensure that the curriculum meets the specification of the local education authority's policy

The introduction of an English GCSE course from September 2005 is a positive development. The headteacher is wisely planning to link with a local sixth-form college to extend the provision for Key Stage 4 pupils. Schemes of work are being developed in most subjects. However, there is no scheme of work for history at Key Stage 4.

Progress has been reasonable.

4: address weaknesses in leadership and management to speed the unit's development

The senior management team has been incomplete for more than two terms. The monitoring of the provision is not robust. Lesson plans are monitored weekly. Some lesson observations have been undertaken but the records of these do not always indicate the name of the observer. The feedback to teachers has been variable; some have been provided with written feedback and some only oral feedback. The programme of lesson observations has been halted at Key Stage 4 to make way for one-to-one coaching. Recently, the headteacher and the teacher responsible for Key Stage 3 have received training in observing lessons, although observations have not been undertaken since the training. The role of subject co-ordinators is underdeveloped; there has been too little emphasis on ensuring the co-ordinators take a clear lead in their subject and are held to account for developments. Staff have been responsive to the training they have received. However, no formal evaluation of the impact of training on teaching has been undertaken to judge its effectiveness. The use of data on attainment and behaviour is limited.

Progress has been limited.

5: improve the assessment of pupils' learning and the monitoring of their personal development

Following training in assessment for learning, staff are using the agreed assessment arrangements in recording the pupils' responses to the lessons. Although a start has been made in Key Stage 3 there are no routine assessments made using the National Curriculum levels and sub-levels. At Key Stage 4 regular assessments and formative GCSE grades are not commonplace. This has hindered

the teachers' appreciation of the capabilities of the pupils and the matching of work to meet their needs.

Progress has been limited.

6: provide full time education for all pupils

All pupils are to receive full-time education when they return from the half-term holiday in June.

Progress has been good.

7: fulfil its obligations to eliminate racial discrimination and promote good race relationships

This area for improvement has been fully addressed.