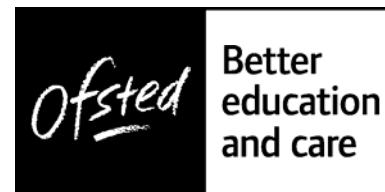


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Mr J Alexander
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr Alexander

Implementation of Bollington St John CE Primary School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Mrs S Øyen HMI, to your school on 27 and 28 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 second 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 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, the Director of Education for Cheshire and the Diocesan Director of Education for Chester. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF BOLLINGTON ST JOHN CE PRIMARY SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit nine lessons or parts of lessons, one registration session and one assembly were inspected. Meetings were held with the acting headteacher, the subject leaders for English and mathematics and a representative from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and pupils, in particular a group of pupils from Year 6. Samples of work were examined and a range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the acting headteacher, the headteacher designate, the chair of the governing body and representatives from the LEA and diocese.

Since the last monitoring visit the governing body has appointed a substantive headteacher who will take up the post in September. Two teachers leave the school at the end of this term. The governors, with the support of the LEA, have appointed an experienced early years' teacher. The newly qualified teacher has accepted a permanent position.

The acting headteacher has continued to provide strong, inspirational leadership and kept up the momentum of change. He has been highly influential in changing the culture to one where the staff and pupils want to play their part in 'aiming high'. He has lifted morale by leading by example, and by supporting and encouraging the teaching and support staff to play a part, especially in improving the school environment. The work to paint dismal areas, complete repairs and get rid of clutter has transformed the school's appearance. The pupils appreciate the changes; they say the school is a better place and that they are taking more care to present their work neatly. There were many creative, clever touches in the vibrant displays of the pupils' writing, artwork, photographs of school events and motivational material. Visitors now get a clear picture of what St Johns stands for. This is echoed in the revamped brochure and leaflet about the school.

Standards are rising but not consistently in all year groups or subjects. The unvalidated results from the national tests show the school has met, and in several cases, exceeded its targets. All of the pupils in Year 2 have attained Level 2 in reading, writing, mathematics and science. In addition, nearly all have attained at least Level 2B and half have attained Level 3 in reading. This is a significant improvement when compared with the results in 2004. The school fell short of its target for Level 3 attainment in writing. The subject leader for English has identified a weakness in the pupils' ability to write at length and is already working with the pupils to remedy it.

The initial results in mathematics, from the tests at the end of Key Stage 2, confirm the teachers' assessment and show the school has met its target of 75 per cent attainment at Level 4, and exceeded its target for attainment at Level 5. This has significantly lifted the standard compared with 2004. Similarly, in English, teacher assessment indicates that standards have risen, with improvement in reading and writing. However, there has been less improvement in science, where too many pupils underachieve.

The school recognises there is some way to go to improve the provision in science and to develop the teachers' skills in teaching it. Pupils in Year 6 were ambivalent about the subject but were clear in their preference for carrying out their own investigations. Pupils in the reception year and Year 1 were very keen to see how well their boats would float and quick to comment on what they observed. A few were able to explain links between cause and effect.

In mathematics, the teachers have acted on advice and increased the focus on problem-solving. The pupils rose to the challenge enthusiastically and showed good skills in co-operating with others in a small group. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 began to see the benefits of a systematic approach. A group of six pupils reviewed their actions by manipulating coloured cubes and checking the clues. Their initial random approach typified the work of younger pupils, who found it hard to apply their knowledge of number. This was not helped when the teachers were too quick to dismiss acceptable ways of adding and subtracting numbers.

The standard of presentation has improved. The pupils' autobiographies, accounts of visits and letters to Tony Blair were well set out. Again, the teachers have acted on guidance and introduced frequent sessions for the pupils to practice their handwriting. This has increased legibility, neatness and uniformity. Accuracy in spelling remains variable. The pupils are not consistently taught spelling rules and strategies to learn them.

The higher attaining pupils are beginning to show what they can do. Small class sizes and a mix of two year groups have been beneficial where the teaching has been focused on helping the pupils to achieve their targets. Many pupils in Years 1 and 5 have made good progress and are working at the level expected of pupils a year older.

In all lessons and in other activities, the pupils behaved well. A significant proportion, mainly boys, was lively and quick to lose focus when the activities did not sustain their interest. The oldest pupils were good role models; they showed responsible, mature attitudes to work and held astute views on teaching, learning and how they could play a bigger part in the life of the school.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory in all bar one of the nine lessons. While this did not reflect the stronger profile judged by the school in its own monitoring, effective features in several lessons showed the potential for the overall quality to be good. In the nine lessons, the learning was generally satisfactory but there was some underachievement and scope for the pupils to move on further in the time. Although there have been several areas of improvement in the teaching, gaps in teaching expertise limit the pupils' learning, especially in developing subject-related skills. Too often, the teachers stepped in to tell the pupils rather than question them and use their responses to highlight key knowledge and strategies. In the one unsatisfactory lesson, the pupils were unsure of the steps to follow and made little progress in seeing how they could rectify their mistakes.

All the teachers used the same format to plan their lessons. They clarified the structure of the lesson and the work for different groups of pupils but not always the teacher's role, and that of the teaching assistants, once the pupils were working independently. As a result, chances were missed to extend the work of some pupils and to make optimal use of the assistants' time and expertise. The staff showed growing confidence in using the recently installed interactive whiteboards. They had taken care to prepare materials, to ensure the classrooms were orderly and the displays reflected current and completed work.

The widening of the range of learning experiences in and out of the classroom has added to the positive feeling of change. The pupils won an award when they took part in the Bollington festival. All the junior pupils have had an opportunity to go on a residential visit and to learn Spanish. The visit of John Malam linked very well with the focus on authors and non-fiction for pupils in Years 1 and 2. The youngest pupils were waiting to see which of their sunflowers would grow the tallest. There is some burgeoning practice in linking subjects within a theme and also in developing the pupils' awareness of the plan-design-make-evaluate cycle in design and technology.

The staff, pupils and parents rightly hold the work of the acting headteacher in high esteem. Staff commented that they feel valued and appreciated. He has gradually and effectively established an ethos of expecting the best, while ensuring that everything is in place to allow the school to move on. A good example is the introduction of behaviour contracts for a few pupils. These pupils have responded positively to the regular review of their conduct and are keen to gain the approval of the adults, especially that of the acting headteacher.

HMI and the governing body have been given honest, detailed reports on the school's progress and alerted to the factors that have had both a positive and a negative impact. As a result, the governors have been able to act from a well-

informed position in identifying and dealing with concerns, not least the administration and finances of the school. The acting headteacher's good planning skills have come to the fore in agreeing the arrangements with the diocese and LEA for the repairs to the school roof and the handover to the new headteacher. The planned programme of support for the headteacher is vital to ensure the momentum of school improvement at a time when there will be substantial changes in the teaching staff and in management responsibilities. Although the subject leaders are aware of what is expected of them in raising standards, they are heavily reliant on consultants and advisers from the LEA to guide their work, especially in analysing and interpreting the evidence they have collated from monitoring and testing the pupils.

The increased involvement and support of the LEA has had a positive impact on the school. The adviser for the school has made frequent visits and given valuable support to the acting headteacher, governing body and staff in guiding, monitoring and reviewing practice. His work with the staff has contributed to the change in the culture. Likewise, consultants in literacy, numeracy, science and information and communication technology (ICT) have helped to develop the staff's expertise in teaching and subject leadership. The LEA conducted a thorough review of the school's progress and outlined steps to be taken. However, it was less clear from the minutes how well it had evaluated the effectiveness of its own contribution.

Both the LEA and the diocese have provided substantial financial support for the school. The LEA has funded the acquisition of books for the school library and, following the emergence of a substantial shortfall in the school's calculated staffing costs, is meeting additional costs to enable the school to sustain current staffing levels and to provide advisory support for the new headteacher. The diocese has also agreed a schedule of payment to cover the school's contribution to the repairs to the building.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: improve leadership, management and governance in monitoring, evaluating and challenging the school; strategic and financial planning

Leadership, management and governance have been evaluated above. Progress is good.

2: raise standards in English, mathematics, science and ICT by the end of Year 6

Standards have been evaluated above. Progress is reasonable.

3: develop the leadership and management role of subject leaders to provide a broad, balanced and interesting curriculum that is flexible enough to meet all pupils' needs

The action taken to develop the role of subject leaders has been evaluated above. Progress is limited.

4: to meet statutory requirements:

a) improve provision in ICT;

b) ensure effective performance management is in place for all staff as required

The policy for performance management is being implemented effectively. The acting headteacher has carried out the agreed programme of monitoring. He has shared the outcomes with individual teachers and agreed points for development. The teachers have reviewed the progress made by the pupils in reaching agreed targets. The ICT suite has been reorganised to facilitate class sessions and all classes have allocated times to use it. The school has access to the Internet and suitable software and additional technological equipment to cover the basic requirements of the National Curriculum. The school is meeting statutory requirements in relation to both elements. In future, inspection findings on the provision and standards in ICT will be included as part of Key Issue 2 and comments on performance management as part of Key Issue 1.