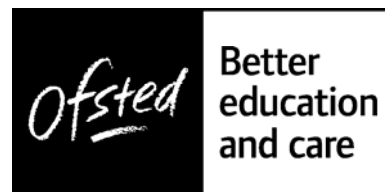


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8 December 2005

Mr A Andres
The Interim Principal
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Dear Mr Andres

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF NEW COLLEGE, LEICESTER

Introduction

Following my visit with Nina Bee, Susan Walsh and Rajinder Harrison, additional inspectors, to your school on 16 and 17 November 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in December 2003.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed a representative sample of lessons, scrutinised many documents, and met with the interim principal, the executive principal, a representative from the local authority who is also vice chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), most of the members of the strategic leadership team and the senior leadership team, and several groups of pupils.

Context

The interim principal left on the 18th November 2005. The local authority is working with the Department for Education and Skills to look at new ways of tackling the school's difficulties, including the appointment of a part time Executive Principal. A new interim principal who will start next term. Work on

the new building meant that until relatively recently, the school had to cope with the inconvenience and disruption that building work inevitably brings. The school started this academic year with nearly a full complement of staff which included 28 new teachers. A significant number of new staff has been recruited from Australia, mostly on a temporary basis, with some staying only for this term. Whereas it is helpful to the school to be nearly fully staffed, there is still not the settled staffing that the school needs for continuous and incremental long term improvement. The layout of the buildings, including an extraordinary number of corridors, remains an impediment to the efforts of the school to supervise the pupils' movement. It has been over six months since the previous monitoring inspection, which is longer than usual.

Achievement and standards

The GCSE results for 2005 were poor and failed to show the significant improvement to standards that ought to emerge after nearly two years of being in special measures. This is a serious indictment of the school's efforts to make improvements to the pupils' achievement. The proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more GCSE A* to C grades fell from 13% in 2004 to 10% in 2005. Many of the Year 11 pupils who gained Level 5 or higher in English, mathematics or science in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2003, failed to convert them into a good GCSE grade. There were no passes at all in information and communication technology (ICT). The results from vocational courses, introduced to meet the pupils' needs better and to raise standards, were particularly low, showing that the school's strategy has failed. The average points score in Year 11 rose slightly, but the improvement was not statistically significant, and it is not possible to demonstrate that this small improvement was the result of the school's strategy for raising standards. The 2005 results of the national tests for 14 year olds were also poor, particularly in English where they fell significantly compared with the previous year. Underachievement is endemic. The school's own analysis shows that many pupils are not making the progress they should, based on their prior attainment, and there is no indication that the situation is improving in any year group. The results at post 16 showed positive improvement, with many more passes achieved in 2005 than in 2004, although the improvement was from a very low base.

Standards in lessons were generally lower than they ought to be, often because the pupils were given work that was too difficult for them. However, some good achievement was seen in individual lessons in art, textiles, drama and religious education.

More work has been done in developing the school's system for assessing the pupils' progress. The monthly assessment of all pupils is in the very early stages of development but should provide a potent tool for identifying which pupils are performing less well than they should. The teachers' understanding and use of assessment information is very varied and too many are still giving

the pupils work pitched at the wrong level which invariably leads to disaffection.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2003:

- raise standards of attainment throughout the college – inadequate progress.

Personal development and well-being

Some pupils are hard working and want to achieve but many have casual attitudes and a significant minority are obstructive and confrontational. There have been small improvements but there are still too many lessons where the inappropriate behaviour of a vocal minority prevents the rest of the class from learning effectively. Pupils respond more positively in practical lessons where they are actively involved in their learning. However, concentration levels are often low; pupils quickly become bored and distracted, there is an undercurrent of chatter and this often turns into poor behaviour. Pupils also become frustrated when work is not well matched to their needs, for example, when they cannot read textbooks or they do not understand what to do. Few pupils take pride in their work and presentation is often careless, books are not cared for, and work is often incomplete.

Behaviour in corridors is unacceptably boisterous. Some pupils have little regard for each other's wellbeing. Some pupils are rowdy, there is noticeable swearing and pushing and shoving. Other physical contact is common, such as 'play fighting'. Pupils often feel that staff do not respect them and react by being rude. Many pupils are immature and have weak social skills. Only the minority has good manners. These pupils have low self esteem and limited confidence in their own abilities. Pupils report that bullying is common.

Supervision is still inconsistent and therefore inadequate overall. Behaviour in areas that are unsupervised, such as stairs, is hazardous. The behaviour for learning policy has been evaluated and refined but as yet has not brought about enough improvement in behaviour. Teachers' implementation of the policy is inconsistent and unacceptable behaviour often goes unchallenged. It is not clear enough who on the senior team has the responsibility for improving behaviour and there is little sense of the whole school pulling together to improve things.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is inadequate. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship despite having adequate space. This is a missed opportunity to develop a positive school ethos. Not all form tutors use time effectively to enhance the pupils' personal development and to develop a culture for learning.

The number of fixed term exclusions is very high and involves a large number of pupils. The number of permanent exclusions is also high. The newly

created behaviour support unit is not working effectively. Staff are enthusiastic and hard working but have not had appropriate training. The accommodation is spacious but is bleak and unattractive. The work is often not appropriately matched to the pupils' needs. Some of the pupils who attend the unit continue to be excluded.

The rate of attendance remains very low. It fell from 83.3% in 2003/04 to 79.8% in 2004/05. Authorised and unauthorised absences are very high. The strategies used to improve attendance have generally failed to do so. The exception is the attendance of Year 7, which is better than in other year groups. Since September, the school has served 35 fixed penalty notices, 8 court briefs have been taken, and 29 court appearances are pending, but it is too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of these measures. The 'breakfast club' now has around 60 pupils, some of whom are encouraged to attend because of their low attendance. This is a positive development.

Punctuality is also a persistent problem not just with the numbers of pupils who arrive late to school but also the high numbers who arrive late to lessons. This poor punctuality disrupts teaching and learning and slows down the pupils' progress.

The school has, in the last two weeks, introduced a system to monitor attendance in every lesson and is beginning to identify patterns of absence and lateness, but not all teachers keep accurate records.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2003:

- improve pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour in lessons and around school – inadequate progress
- improve the students' attendance and punctuality to college and to lessons – inadequate progress.

Quality of provision

Teaching is inadequate in too many lessons and only good in a few. The successful lessons were well planned with interesting activities that held the pupils' interest. The way these lessons were organised promoted learning effectively. All were underpinned by the teachers' high expectations and, most importantly, an ethos of respect for all. At all times, pupils' thoughts and ideas were valued. As a result all pupils were well motivated, spoke with confidence and enjoyment, and achieved well.

The inadequate lessons were dull and underpinned by the teachers' low expectations, especially of the pupils' behaviour. Too often antisocial behaviour was allowed to interfere with learning. Teachers spoke over pupils' chattering and disruptive behaviour was rarely handled effectively.

When planning lessons, too many teachers do not use information collected on individuals. Tasks are often too difficult. Work in pupils' books is too often not marked and does not consistently inform pupils what they need to do to improve.

Senior staff feel that there has been an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning but their evaluations tend to be too generous and focus insufficiently on the pupils' progress.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2003:

- improve the quality of teaching in order to improve the quality of the students' learning and the rate of progress they make – inadequate progress.

Leadership and management

The IEB is already proving to be more effective than the governing body was able to be, although it is early days. Members of the board are taking appropriate actions to speed up the school's progress.

Ultimately, the quality of leadership and management must be judged by how well the pupils achieve, and as there continues to be significant underachievement and low standards that show no conclusive sign of improvement, then the interim principal and other senior managers have failed in their primary task. There have been extenuating circumstances that have impeded the school's progress, and much of the senior staff's time has been taken up in dealing with complex day to day operational matters and staff recruitment difficulties. The senior staff have managed some of these matters satisfactorily. At a strategic level there are effective systems emerging for tracking the pupils' progress and managers now have a more accurate understanding of where the school is failing. However, at this stage in the school's journey through special measures there ought to be much clearer signs of improvement. There ought to be a strong connection between the school improvement strategies being used and the progress being made, but there is not. The gap between management thinking and the reality in the classrooms is far too wide. There were encouraging signs a few terms ago that everything was poised to move forward, but the small gains made at the time have not flourished. Some initiatives were introduced but not followed through with enough rigour. Consequently, there is too much inconsistency in the way in which important areas of the school's work are tackled. There is still not a strong enough sense of the whole school moving forward together. Relationships between the interim principal and the local authority have broken down and this can only be unhelpful to the school. Overall, there has been a collective failure by all the key players to make sure the school improves more quickly. Many of the senior staff are dedicated and committed, but there is not always sufficient clarity about their individual roles and responsibilities. There are some small improvements. For example, behaviour

is marginally better, although much more work is still needed, the sixth form is developing well; and some aspects of the curriculum are better meeting the needs of the pupils. However, these are small gains compared to some of the bigger problems that still face the school. Standards and achievement are too low, attendance and punctuality are poor, teaching is not good enough overall, and behaviour remains unsatisfactory. The school lacks an ethos where there is a strong focus on achievement and personal development. Respect between teachers and pupils, and often between pupils and their peers, has not been achieved. Clear and well established routines to maintain an orderly school are not in evidence.

Managers with faculty responsibility are developing an understanding of their role but there is still a long way to go. The new system of having learning managers to oversee the academic progress of the pupils is not working well and needs to be reviewed.

The school's present capacity for improvement is poor.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2003:

- improve the impact of leadership and management at all levels – inadequate progress.

External support

The local authority's contribution to the IEB has been important and useful in reviewing the school's work and in developing a better understanding of what needs to happen next. Although relationships between the local authority and the interim principal have been very fragile, the local authority has provided valuable support in some curriculum areas.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures is inadequate.

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection is inadequate.

Priorities for further improvement

- Stabilise behaviour in lessons and around the school so that there is a safe and calm environment
- establish stronger routines for the pupils to make the school more orderly
- establish an ethos of mutual respect that focuses on moral and personal development, and develops a culture for learning.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of the IEB, and the Director of Education for the City of Leicester.

Yours sincerely

Colin Humphreys
H M Inspector