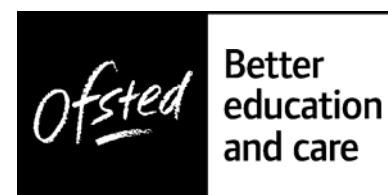


Tribal Education
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol BS2 8RR
T 0845 123 6001
F 0845 123 6002

Ofsted helpline
0845 404045
edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk



9 January 2006

Ms J Mason
Amington Heath Community School
Qunince
Amington
Tamworth
B77 4EN

Dear Ms Mason

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF AMINGTON HEATH COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 6 and 7 December 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 October 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

HMI observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, the senior teacher, coordinators and representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit in May 2005 the school has experienced considerable disruption. There have been a number of long absences due to ill health and a significant staff turnover. The senior teacher takes up his promotion in another school from January 2006. The good practice seen in the last visit has been disrupted and progress against some of the areas of improvement has faltered. A new substantive headteacher was appointed at the end of October and has quickly

identified a range of priorities to address the school's weaknesses. The school has a projected deficit budget of around £90,000 and further staff reduction is necessary. However, even with the present staffing, there are significant gaps in curriculum leadership and management. The school roll continues to fall in line with neighbouring schools. There are 180 full time pupils on roll.

Achievement and standards

Children make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage overall but standards in reading and writing are lower than other learning outcomes.

Standards of attainment improved in the 2005 national tests at the end of Key Stage 1 but remained low in all subjects. No pupils attained the higher Level 3 in English, mathematics or science. Too many pupils make insufficient progress in reading although there has been significant improvement in the proportion of pupils gaining the expected Level 2 in writing.

Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 remained low although improvements were gained in reading, mathematics and science. Too few of the pupils achieved the higher Level 5 in all subjects. Whilst more boys than girls achieved Level 4 in mathematics, fewer achieved Level 4 in English and science.

The pupils make unsatisfactory progress in mathematics. They have limited experience of practical investigation and as a consequence their estimation and problem solving skills are weak. They lack confidence in applying mathematical knowledge to real situations and have not developed a range of strategies to calculate, justify and check their own work independently. Other significant weaknesses have evolved over time because of gaps in the pupils' breadth of mathematical knowledge and development of skills. Too much is left for Year 6 and, as a consequence, the pupils are unable to consolidate what should have been taught at earlier stages.

Writing throughout the school remains a weakness. Only 11% of the pupils achieved the expected Level 4 or above in writing at the end of Key Stage 2. The pupils do not develop a sufficient range of writing styles over time and they are unable to adapt their writing for different purposes or audiences. In addition the pupils are unaware of how to improve. The classroom environment does little to inspire writing or the acquisition of a rich and varied vocabulary. Displays are sometimes too small to inform the pupils or support their development of independent learning skills.

The pupils read and spell with some accuracy although their punctuation and grammar is less well developed and often not corrected. The pupils' speaking remains a significant weakness. They do not have adequate opportunities to talk with partners, discuss in groups, acquire subject related vocabulary to explain or expand their understanding, and their articulation is unclear. As a consequence when the pupils respond to questions they fail to engage the interest of their peers. Teachers accept single word utterances and short phrases rather than full sentences and rarely ask the pupils to expand their thinking.

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

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science—inadequate progress.

Personal development and well-being

The attitudes and behaviour of the pupils are good and the relationships between the pupils and staff are mutually respectful. The pupils are supervised well during lunchtimes and they know what to do if they feel unhappy or unwell. The pupils are polite. They open doors for visitors, move around the school in an orderly fashion, and chat enthusiastically about their interests. There have been no exclusions. In the main the pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong and do not condone inappropriate behaviour during lessons. In lessons the pupils apply themselves well to their tasks and occasionally work collaboratively in pairs and groups.

Attendance is satisfactory. The school takes appropriate action when necessary and an increasing proportion of pupils achieve 100% attendance.

Assemblies promote satisfactory spiritual, moral and social development through weekly themes reinforced by stories, hymns and prayers. The school's provision for the pupils' cultural development is limited although there are plans to address aspects such as religious celebration of other faiths. There is an active school council whose members are officially elected into post. The council advises staff on the needs of other pupils and organises fundraising events. There are a number of well attended after school activities.

A healthy eating coordinator has been appointed from January in preparation for the Healthy Eating Award. Fruit is available during breaks and there are plans to improve the pupils' access to water throughout the day. Economic well-being is promoted effectively through mini-enterprise projects in Years 5 and 6.

Informal family events, extended school facilities, and family learning initiatives have improved the school's relationship with the local community effectively. An increasing proportion of parents attend formal consultations every term to discuss their children's progress.

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

- improve attendance—satisfactory progress
- develop closer partnerships within the community—satisfactory progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in eight out of the ten lessons seen. It was good in only one lesson. This is a weaker profile than the last monitoring visit.

The most effective teaching included a shared learning purpose which was reinforced with appropriate activities and suitable resources. The pupils' interest was sustained effectively in lessons where there was a good balance of whole class,

individual and group learning. Pupils made good progress when they were aware of the teacher's expectations and had clear success criteria against which they could measure their progress and evaluate their success.

Lesson plans describe activities rather than focus on the expectations of learning and how the pupils will consolidate newly acquired knowledge, skills and understanding. While summative assessment is recorded and analysed effectively to provide a broad view of attainment and progress, ongoing assessment is insufficiently accurate to inform day to day learning. As a consequence activities and tasks are not matched suitably to the pupils' abilities.

Teachers are too dependent on worksheets and units of study which bear little relevance to the pupils' interests and fail to inspire a joy of learning. Lessons lack sufficient challenge to engage pupils, make them think, and experience the satisfaction of problem solving, discovery and investigation. The curriculum is broad but lacks balance, relevance, enrichment and excitement. Timetables are inflexible and there are few attempts to link areas of learning across the curriculum.

Teachers mark the pupils' work regularly. Their comments are supportive and, in the best examples, the teachers explain explicitly how the pupils can improve their work. Many classes have implemented a traffic light system of self assessment. The pupils show an increasing confidence and accuracy in the evaluation of their understanding.

The provision for children who have learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) is well managed. The number of statements of educational need has reduced, pupils' needs are identified earlier, and intervention strategies are implemented swiftly. Satisfactory support is provided by teaching assistants although their effectiveness is dependent upon the quality of the teachers' plans and the assistants' understanding of what is required of them. In some lessons the teaching assistants were too passive and did not contribute effectively to learning. The LDD coordinator reported that sessions in the nurture group help the pupils to manage their own behaviour and understand how to deal with their emotions.

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

- improve the quality of the curriculum and bring the resources to at least a satisfactory level—satisfactory progress
- improve special educational needs—good progress.

Leadership and management

The newly appointed headteacher has a firm grasp of the school's relative strengths and weaknesses. The school's self-evaluation is realistic. Together with the senior teacher she has identified appropriate priorities including the remodelling of the workforce, devising new job descriptions, and managing the performance of staff. The headteacher and senior teacher have organised paired lesson observations, conducted a thorough analysis of national test results, and scrutinised progress from the school's individual pupil tracking. The headteacher is enthusiastic, but realistic,

about the difficulties ahead. She is aware of the rigour, determination and urgency needed to address the significant weaknesses in the school.

The coordinators for LDD and curriculum change are well motivated and share the headteacher's vision for the school's future direction. However, subject leadership has not brought about the necessary improvements in raising standards.

Governors hold regular meetings and fulfil their statutory duties. Individual governors understand their role but there is still some reluctance to hold the school to account. The governing body has not monitored the school's effectiveness with sufficient rigour.

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

- leadership and management of the school—satisfactory progress.

External support

The local authority provides satisfactory support for the school. However, there are some recently introduced initiatives which have not been sufficiently implemented or monitored, for example the intensive schools programme. As a consequence teaching strategies have neither been disseminated nor embedded effectively.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures—inadequate.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection—inadequate.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve standards in English, mathematics and science by assessing the needs of the pupils and planning lessons which accurately target their learning requirements.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by selecting and implementing effective teaching strategies which focus sharply on the pupils' learning.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Deana Holdaway
H M Inspector