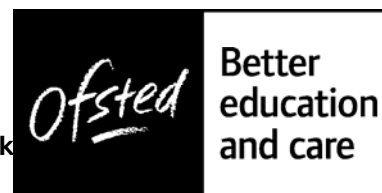


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16 December 2005

Mrs C Connearn
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Connearn

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HARTSHILL SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school with Joan Greenfield, Carol Parkinson and Peter Dacombe, Additional Inspectors, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2004.

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 the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the acting headteacher, several senior and middle managers, the chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and representatives from the local authority.

Context

The present acting headteacher is the third in the last four terms. She will remain until the end of the summer term. Advertisements for the post will be placed in spring 2006. A third deputy headteacher joined the school in September along with several new heads of subject. The head of science and several other teachers leave at the end of the term. Until very recently the school has operated on two sites

approximately 200 metres apart, separated by a congested road. This has been remedied by the provision of several temporary classrooms on the main site. The fencing around the one site adds to the security and staff ensure that most pupils remain in school during the lunch break.

Achievement and standards

Standards have been significantly below the national figures for several years. Pupils enter Year 7 with skills, knowledge and understanding that are typical of pupils of this age. During the course of their five years at the school, pupils do not make enough progress and their achievement by the end of Year 11 is well below the level expected when account is taken of their attainment in the national tests at the end of Year 6. By the end of Year 9 and Year 11 they do far less well than pupils in similar schools.

In 2004 the GCSE results were significantly below the national averages at five or more grades A*–C and overall. The unconfirmed GCSE results in 2005 show that there was a decline in the school's performance over that of the previous year. The school's targets, which it did not meet, were modest and fell well below the levels that would have been expected in similar schools. There were considerable variations between the results in different subjects. Pupils performed better in art and design, business and religious education than in their other subjects. Their performance was below average in most other subjects and was particularly weak in aspects of design and technology, mathematics, French, Spanish, music, physical education, health and social care, and leisure and tourism. Based on the school's unconfirmed GCSE results the achievement of pupils in 2005 may well prove to be exceptionally low.

In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9, the school's performance in 2005 was similar to that seen in 2004 and, overall, was broadly in line with the national average. However, this position masks wide variations between the three subjects. Pupils' results, which have yet to be validated, were considerably better than the national average in English but were well below average in mathematics and science. The better results in English bring the school's overall results closer to the average. In general, pupils make better progress in Years 7 to 9 than they do in Years 10 and 11.

In lessons pupils' progress is broadly satisfactory and is closely related to the quality of the teaching. There is little difference in the progress made by different groups of pupils. In the most effective lessons pupils make good progress and achieve well as the work is well matched to their needs and is sufficiently challenging. However, this picture is not consistent across the school. In too many lessons teachers do not place enough demands on pupils to ensure that they make the necessary progress to raise standards to the level that pupils are capable of reaching when account is taken of their starting points. Most teachers are not using the information that is available about pupils effectively enough to plan work at the appropriate level or to set them challenging targets. There are examples of good practice in English, art

and design, and information and communication technology (ICT) but in most other subjects its use is inconsistent.

The school's systems for monitoring progress and setting challenging targets for pupils are relatively underdeveloped. Pupils are set targets in many subjects but they are insufficiently challenging. The procedures for checking that pupils make the expected progress to meet or exceed their targets are not systematic or rigorous enough. Senior staff recognise that there is a need to sharpen the school's current procedures and a new assessment system has been developed for implementation in the spring term. This is a key requirement if standards are to rise significantly in the short term.

Personal development and well-being

The behaviour of pupils is satisfactory and improving. Pupils around the school are approachable and polite to visitors although, at times, they are boisterous in corridors or noisy whilst lining up for lessons.

In the majority of lessons standards of behaviour were satisfactory or good with pupils paying attention to the teachers and getting on well with their work. However, in a significant minority the attitudes of the pupils to their learning were inadequate. Here, pupils did not follow the school's procedures and expectations. They talked out of turn; interrupted the lesson; and slowed the pace of learning. In these lessons, teachers did not set high enough expectations or take sufficiently firm action to re-establish a learning environment.

The number of fixed term and permanent exclusions in this school year has reduced considerably in comparison with the same period last year. The school attributes this in part to improvements in relationships between staff and pupils and, in part, to the recently introduced behaviour code.

During the lunch hour the pupils spend a lot of time outside the building with relatively little to do. The areas surrounding the school are muddy and much is brought in to the school. Litter after break and lunchtime makes the site appear untidy.

Attendance is now satisfactory and good progress has been made in bringing about improvement. The overall figure for 2004/05 was 91.4% and the current figure stands at 91.9% which is above the school's target. Punctuality at the start of the day and to lessons has improved and is now satisfactory.

When given opportunities to take responsibility pupils react positively and rise to the challenge. Older pupils act as prefects with a variety of responsibilities and also as mentors to younger pupils. The school council is being relaunched.

Some positive steps have been taken to improve pupil attitudes to learning. For example, 'the learning challenge', targeted at specific groups of pupils, is helping to raise self-esteem and reduce the risk of exclusion. Steps have been taken to make

sure that pupils have a school bag and come appropriately equipped to lessons. The school's policy on rewards and merits is underused.

Quality of provision

The inspectors agree with the monitoring of the school and the local authority, that with just over one third of the teaching being good or outstanding, the proportion is too low.

Where the teaching is good or outstanding planning for lessons clearly focuses on the pupils' learning and how they will achieve success. The common short term lesson planning format used over the last two terms has generally increased the pace of learning. The pupils' progress is monitored closely and evaluated carefully during the lessons, often through well constructed concluding plenary sessions. Effective questioning helps this evaluation and encourages the pupils to share their views. Relationships between the pupils and teachers are strong. The needs of the pupils are met by providing challenging work, opportunities for discussion, and skill development through group work, based on a thorough assessment of pupils' capabilities, including those who have learning difficulties and disabilities.

Teaching is less effective when the aims for learning are unclear and confused with the tasks that pupils will undertake. Sometimes pupils are expected to listen to the teacher for too long and, as their concentration wanes, their progress slows down. Some teaching fails to engage the pupils' interest and does not inspire them to try harder. In these lessons assessment information is not used rigorously enough to plan appropriately challenging lessons for the pupils' different capabilities.

The school has maintained its increased taught time for ICT observed at the previous inspection visit and all pupils now receive their full entitlement in the subject. Equipment has been bought and training has taken place in readiness for the new computer suite in the design and technology department but it has yet to be installed.

The new head of religious education (RE) is now in post and the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme is now implemented with citizenship as an integral part. All pupils in Year 10 receive one hour per week in RE and PSHE as separate subjects but pupils in the present Year 11 continue to follow the blocked two-year programme which delivers them alternately. This unsatisfactory arrangement will cease at the end of this academic year. The requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship is still not met consistently, although twice weekly assemblies in the hall and gymnasium are valuable times of coming together.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2004:

- raise the pupils' achievement by improving the quality of teaching—inadequate progress
- to meet statutory requirements: ensure all pupils have their full entitlement in information and communication technology (ICT) and religious education,

provide reports to parents on their child's progress in citizenship, and provide a daily act of collective worship—satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management have not yet had a major impact on raising standards or improving the quality of the teaching. Through the process of self-evaluation the school has a more realistic understanding of how well it is doing and has begun to identify the main areas for improvement. Having analysed the examination and test results and monitored the quality of teaching and learning there is recognition of the major tasks facing all of the staff.

The senior leadership team was reorganised in September. Responsibilities of the senior leaders are now clearer than at the time of the last inspection with lines of accountability to the acting headteacher. Effective training and support has been provided.

The leadership of subjects is variable but the new appointments are beginning to make an impact. Recent changes to the way senior staff manage subject leaders have clarified ways of working and have led to improvements. However, where the leadership of subjects is weakest this is yet to have sufficient impact upon the quality of teaching, the variability in the effectiveness of planning for learning, or the pupils' progress in lessons.

Governance is good. The members of the IEB recognise the areas for development in the school. They hold it to account for its performance appropriately. The large budget deficit and the large staffing costs in relation to income is for them an ongoing major concern.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2004:

- ensure governors carry out roles in checking the work of the school—good progress
- ensure that policies are implemented consistently at all levels and that data is analysed fully to drive whole school improvement—inadequate progress
- ensure managers apply monitoring systems more consistently and rigorously and tackle underperformance fearlessly—satisfactory progress.

External support

The local authority continues to provide good support and effective strategic monitoring to the school. The school's adviser visits regularly. She is working with the acting headteacher and other senior and middle managers to moderate the school's self-evaluation through joint lesson observations and the scrutiny of work and planning. The local authority has responded to the school's needs in providing support for some teachers in specific subject areas and, more generally, to curriculum leaders. Local authority personnel are also working with the acting headteacher to resolve some long term staffing and financial issues.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures—inadequate.

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection—inadequate.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that all teaching emulates that of the best with a greater emphasis on the progress being made by the pupils.
- Consistently make use of the pupil data that is available to ensure all lessons meet the needs of the range of abilities in each class.
- The acting headteacher and members of the IEB should use the evidence of this visit to rigorously challenge the weaknesses identified.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the County Education Officer for Warwickshire.

Yours sincerely

Keith Gilbert
HM Inspector