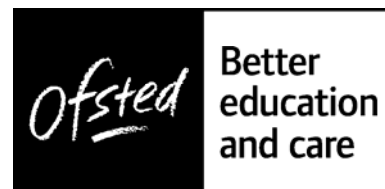


Cambridge Education
Demeter House
Station Road
Cambridge
CB1 2RS

T 01223 578500
F 01223 578501
Inspections_2@camb-ed.com

Ofsted helpline
0845 640 4045



10 January 2006

Mrs J Wood
Headteacher
Lexden Springs School
Halstead Road
Colchester
Essex
C03 9AB

Dear Mrs Wood

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF LEXDEN SPRINGS SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Declan McCarthy, Additional Inspector to your school on 7 and 8 December 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in June 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 headteacher, the chair of governors and two representatives from the LEA.

Context

The school has undergone significant changes in staffing since the last monitoring inspection in June 2005. After a period of interim headship, the school appointed a permanent headteacher who took up the position at the start of September 2005. The deputy headteacher returned from sick leave in September but is again on extended long term absence as well as another member of staff. The school has taken appropriate action to stabilise the staffing.

Achievement and standards

The recent provisional results in the ASDAN accredited course show that the four sixth form students who followed it attained the standards required for the bronze award. The school has started to gather and analyse the data on the pupils' achievements. However, because the process is not yet fully embedded, some of the data on the pupils' progress is incomplete. Nevertheless, evidence from this inspection and from the school's data on tracking the pupils' achievements show that they are making progress at expected levels for pupils with specific learning difficulties. In Key Stages 3 and 4, most of the pupils achieved at least half or one level during the last academic year with the most able attaining Level 1 or Level 2 in the national assessment targets in English and mathematics. The pupils and sixth form students achieved best in these subjects as well as in information and communication technology (ICT), their personal and social skills and personal, social and health education (PSHE).

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' personal development is good. As they move through the school they show good improvements in self-help and independence skills. The younger pupils learn to share, take turns and listen carefully. The older pupils learn to take care of themselves, to stay safe and healthy. Students at post-16 in the sixth form, make a positive contribution to the school community as they develop the confidence to help younger pupils with their learning. The pupils are safe and secure as the school places a strong emphasis on maintaining a safe and healthy environment, through for example effective staff training on safe handling of pupils and developing the car park to include a footpath to safeguard the pupils entering the building. Health professionals also provide good support to ensure the pupils are healthy and safe. They are prepared well for their future economic well being, through for example, planned shopping trips, preparing a budget, learning how to use a computer and a digital camera. Students in the sixth form are given carefully planned career and academic guidance. Pupils throughout the school are well behaved and have good relationships with others. Behaviour has improved significantly since the last monitoring visit and the school is both orderly and calm.

Attendance for the new academic year is broadly in line with similar schools nationally.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching was never less than satisfactory and has improved significantly since the last monitoring inspection. Thirteen lessons were observed and the quality of teaching and learning was good in ten. The findings of this inspection broadly confirm the school's recent monitoring and evaluation of teaching. The teachers have high expectations of what the pupils can achieve and these are constantly reinforced through careful and consistent planning, management and organisation. The teachers use well established routines to settle the pupils and prepare them for the start of lessons. They select and use a range of resources

effectively and imaginatively for whole class, individual and group work to develop the pupils' listening and communication skills. These stimulate the pupils to respond and participate in all activities. As a result, those with profound and severe learning difficulties begin to take part because they are well supported. Additionally, practical approaches using repetition, signing, communication aides, feedback from the older students, summaries, praise and competitive work such as in swimming and physical education encouraged the pupils to take part and make good progress.

There is now greater consistency and improvement in teaching and learning because the teachers are using a common planning format to structure their work. However, while learning outcomes are identified for all pupils, they are not always matched to particular needs. There was better use of targeted questions to monitor the pupils' learning and assessment information was used to provide support and record small gains in achievement using the P-level scales. There is more use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance learning. The increased confidence in using the interactive white board and a range of other technical equipment such as digital camera, lap top and word programme ensure that students are fully engaged and make good progress. In the small number of satisfactory lessons, the pace was slightly slower and some of the pupils were not always fully engaged.

The effectiveness of the teaching assistants in lessons is good overall, though sometimes they are slightly passive during whole class teaching. They repeat the teachers' instructions, promote positive behaviour and successfully challenge the pupils to take part.

The school has made good progress in improving the curriculum since the last monitoring visit. New ASDAN accreditation, 'Transition Challenge', is in place for the older pupils at Key Stage 4, and at post-16, 'Work Right'. There are good links with Colchester College to support the new Certificate of Achievement in media studies at post-16. The number of lunchtime clubs has increased by fourfold.

The school has made good progress in using assessment information to improve achievements since the last monitoring visit. Individual education plans have improved but the quality is inconsistent. There is a sharper focus on the analysis of data and comparisons with other schools and learning objectives are clearly differentiated and reviewed more consistently at the end of lessons.

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

- Eliminate unsatisfactory and poor teaching establishing a strong culture of self evaluation of the work of the school - good progress.
- Give effective leadership to planning and achieving a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum - good progress.
- Give effective leadership to creating and using assessment procedures to raise standards – good progress.

Leadership and management

The new headteacher has been in post for only twelve weeks but she has been effective in articulating a clear plan of action to the staff and in seeking their commitment to improving the school's provision. As a result, the staff are all working together to achieve the set goals and good working relationships and ethos exist within the school. The headteacher has continued to build on the work of the previous interim manager; however, currently, there is a greater sense of urgency to the school improvement process. Consequently, the headteacher has taken swift action to deal with unsatisfactory practices by providing coaching, target setting and individual support for senior managers and other staff but without compromising the shared vision for further improvement.

The school's action plan has been reviewed in consultation with senior managers and the governing body. The mission statement and action plan indicate that there is a sharper focus on accelerating changes. It is clear that strengths and areas for improvement are well understood and priorities for improvement are focused on this understanding. There are now good systems emerging to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning; data is being used more to measure performance but the new system of collating and analysing information is not fully embedded; professional training is linked to developmental needs but as yet, the impact has not been evaluated; teaching and learning responsibilities have been defined and performance management is ongoing. A new corporate image has been launched through developing a new logo and school uniform with staff, pupils and parents; furthermore, the school recognises that parents are reluctant participants and is beginning to take more steps to involve them in the school's work. There is now full time nursing provision and links with the educational psychologist service have been re-established. The senior team and staff are more focused on raising the pupils' achievement and evaluating their practices. This is enabling them to improve their work and as a result, the capacity for improvement has been strengthened.

Governors are increasingly involved in the school improvement process. There are named governors for subjects and aspects and a structured approach is used for them to be well briefed and involved in monitoring the quality of provision. Training is ongoing and because of their work in the school; they are better informed about its progress and areas for development.

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

- Strengthen the leadership and management provided by the headteacher and the whole leadership group in the school - good progress.

External support

The school is continuing to receive some good quality support from the local authority (LA). The support is focused on some of the key priorities in the revised action plan. These include joint observations of teaching and learning, developing

different strands of leadership and management including staffing, using data to monitor the pupils' progress and providing training staff and governors. Although the LA continues to work with the school, the amount of time given to it has been less this term. The external mentor from the LA provides good support for the headteacher but alternative arrangements have not been discussed when the support ends this term. The joint observations and advice provide an effective moderation of the senior managers' judgments of the quality of provision.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures– satisfactory progress.

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – good progress.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue with the action plan and ensure that the changes are fully embedded and evaluated to measure the impact on improving provision.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of Governors and the Director of Education for Essex.

Carmen Rodney
H M Inspector