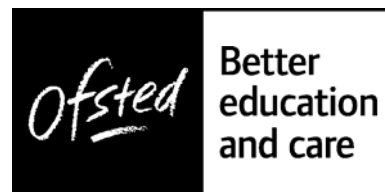


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Mrs Frances Cooper
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1 December 2005

Dear Mrs Cooper

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST DOMINIC CofE VA SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Pauline Robins HMI to your school on 29 and 30 November 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 2005.

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, talked to pupils, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The local authority had identified this school as one causing concern in 2002. Action plans had been put in place but had not improved sufficiently the quality of educational provision and especially the quality of leadership and management. Following the inspection which made the school subject to special measures the headteacher has resigned. The local authority brought into the school an acting headteacher for two terms. The vacant post was advertised but did not attract candidates of sufficient calibre. A further period

of acting headship under a different person has been secured for a further two terms and the post will be re-advertised for September 2006. The current acting headteacher has had a significant positive impact on the school, its ethos, and the morale of both staff and pupils. The local authority has temporarily funded this as a non teaching post to ensure that the acting headteacher can devote time to supporting staff and school improvement. Support for the school is being managed by a local authority inspector and governors are fully involved in monitoring the implementation of the action plan.

Achievement and standards

There are very few pupils in each year group and consequently comparisons with national averages have little meaning as each pupil represents a significant percentage. In the most recent national tests standards at the end of Year 2 were below expectations for the age group and significantly below for the pupils in Year 6. There is a wide range of attainment within each group of pupils. Performance at the higher Levels 3 and 5 at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 respectively is well below expectations.

Work seen during this inspection clearly indicates that standards are rising especially in science and English and more pupils are making progress in lessons. Many pupils are now working within the expected levels although there are some significant gaps in their knowledge. There is some evidence of more challenge for pupils of higher ability in some subjects.

The quality of written work seen in English is much improved and there are more opportunities for pupils to write in a range of styles. There are limited examples of longer pieces of writing in which pupils can develop themes and ideas. Handwriting and presentation are much improved. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved significantly and pupils have good access to computers and other technology. Each class has an interactive whiteboard and staff are becoming more confident in using them. Understandably, there are still significant gaps in the pupils' ICT skills.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- raise standards in English in Years 2 to 6, especially in writing—satisfactory progress
- raise standards in science, mathematics, design and technology and geography in Years 4 to 6—satisfactory progress
- raise standards and improve provision in ICT throughout the school—satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' attitudes towards learning and their behaviour around the school are good. This is a significant improvement since the inspection. Good

behaviour is rewarded and celebrated throughout the school. As a church school the new behaviour and discipline policy recognises Christian values. It promotes good relationships rather than the enforcement of a set of rules. The pupils move around the school in an orderly fashion and there is a calm, quiet, yet purposeful, atmosphere. Pupils are welcoming, treating each other, staff and visitors with courtesy and respect. They listen attentively and show good levels of concentration. They report that they enjoy coming to school. Consequently attendance is now in line with the national average and is continuing to rise. Good attendance is celebrated both at individual pupil and whole class level. There have been no exclusions this term.

Playtimes can be boisterous but this is through no fault of the pupils. There is a lack of space for the pupils to run around and play games and this has a detrimental impact on their well-being. Pupils are well supervised and play together cooperatively in mixed age groups. Fruit is provided and the pupils are encouraged to eat healthily and take part in physical exercise.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- set in place suitable systems for improving pupils' attitudes and behaviour in Years 4 to 6—good progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Staff are working hard to address the issues identified in the inspection report. As part of necessary staff development teachers have worked with the local authority to develop a new teaching and learning policy which is beginning to impact successfully on practice. The review of the curriculum is bringing greater coherence and relevance to what is being taught in different subjects. Classrooms are well organised with innovative and inviting displays although not enough of the pupils' own work is on show.

In the more effective lessons teachers had higher expectations of behaviour and attainment. Questioning skills were used effectively to promote the pupils' understanding and challenge their thinking. More time was given to reflection and to the pupils' active involvement with their work. Class routines were more securely established. In less successful lessons the pace of learning was not maintained and the use of worksheets was not appropriate for all pupils. When several year groups are brought together, especially in English and mathematics, the grouping of pupils should be reviewed. Not all pupils are being asked to work to their full capability and some year groups, need to be challenged further. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed across the school to work with specific groups of pupils and are familiar with the teachers' expectations and planning.

The school has established a system for assessing and tracking individual pupils' progress which will enable teachers to provide a better match of task

to ability. This has yet to become established in classroom practice. The school has made a good start in developing the marking of pupils' work. There needs to be greater consistency throughout the school to ensure that comments enable the pupils to understand what they need to do to improve. Some of the older pupils know what they need to do in English and mathematics and how to achieve their targets, but these are not always written down in a form they can easily understand.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning in Years 4 to 6—satisfactory progress
- further develop systems for pupils' assessment to ensure that the information gathered is used effectively to set targets for improvement and to adjust planning where necessary—satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher has accomplished a great deal in a relatively short space of time. Many aspects of the quality of education provided by the school have improved. The support for staff in developing their teaching skills and the revision to some policies and practice have ensured a more consistent approach to school improvement. The headteacher's evaluation of teaching and learning accurately identifies key points to enable teachers to improve the quality of their lessons. This is having a positive impact on practice. Feedback needs to be explicit about lesson effectiveness using the four point grading scale. The governing body is taking an active part in all aspects of development including frequent visits to the school and support for the staff. It is holding the school to account for implementing the action plan.

Following the failure to appoint a substantive headteacher, a new acting headteacher is due to take over for the next two terms. Although this secures leadership to the end of the summer term it increases the instability of the situation. The post is to be readvertised in the spring term.

The school's action plan for dealing with the issues for improvement has been carefully considered by the staff and governors to ensure that planned developments are manageable. All the issues are properly resourced, have a sensible time plan, and identify how monitoring and evaluation are to be carried out. Although the plan has only just been put into effect there is already tangible evidence of positive impact from completed actions.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- take immediate steps to improve the leadership and management of the school—satisfactory progress.

External support

External support is coordinated by the local authority inspector who is providing very good support for this school. Staff have already drawn on a range of advice and support which includes visits to other schools, whole staff training sessions, governor training, and the use of specialist staff such as advanced skills teachers. The quality of teaching and learning is improving as a result. Local authority monitoring reports are clear and accurate records of the actions carried out and their impact on the educational provision. External support is effective.

The local authority's statement of action shows that a full range of options has been considered and their plan is closely linked to the school's action plan. The local authority, in consultation with the governing body, will need to give consideration to their strategy in the event of further failure to appoint a substantive headteacher.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures—satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed until a permanent headteacher is in post.

Priorities for further improvement

- Review the grouping of pupils especially for teaching English and mathematics to ensure that planned activities offer sufficient challenge to each pupil
- seek opportunities to observe good assessment practice and its impact on:
 - daily planning from YR to Y6
 - setting and using clear learning objectives for each pupil.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Way
H M Inspector