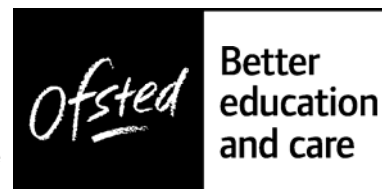


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28 November 2005

Mrs K Marshall
The Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Marshall

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE ASH TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE

Introduction

Following my visit with Carmen Rodney, HMI and Michael Pye, Additional Inspector to your school on 8 and 9 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 college became subject to special measures in March 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 college's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy and assistant head teachers, heads of department in technology, science and religious education, a group of pupils, the chair of governors, and two representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the inspection in the spring term of 2005, about a fifth of teachers have left and a similar number, including newly qualified teachers, have joined the college. In addition, heads of department for science and religious education and a number of teaching assistants have been appointed.

The number of pupils on roll at the college has dropped to just below 800. The LA's policy is to maintain Ash college, pending a review of educational provision in the Spelthorne area.

Achievement and standards

Standards in the college are generally below national averages . In 2005, unvalidated data indicates that in Key Stage 3 tests in English, mathematics and science, 72%, 61%, and 56% of pupils attained Level 5 or above respectively; 34% of pupils attained at least five higher grades at GCSE. Value-added data indicates that progress was low at both Key Stages in 2005 and also lower than in 2004.

In 28 lessons seen, progress was good in 5 lessons, satisfactory in 14 and inadequate in 9 lessons. Good formative assessment helped pupils make progress in design processes in textiles; high expectations in English, with the use of modelling techniques led to pupils critically analysing characters in Pygmalion. Inadequate progress was usually related to behavioural issues.

The college has improved the quality of its assessment data and ensured its availability to all teaching staff. The data has been used to set minimum expected grades for each pupil. Unfortunately, the data is incomplete, with a significant minority of the Key Stage 2 test results missing, particularly for the stream.. In addition, the minimum expected grades set for pupils, based on cognitive test scores, are too low: for example in a Year 9 class, the minimum expected grade for most pupils was identical to the level attained at Key Stage 2. Expectations need to be raised across the college to improve pupils' progress.

With regards to the key issues relating to science, religious education and music a start has been made by appointing new curriculum leaders in the first two subjects but this has not had an impact on standards yet.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2005

- Urgently raise standards in science, music and religious education – inadequate progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development is inadequate. Their attitudes to learning were unsatisfactory in 8 out of the 28 lessons observed. In inadequate lessons teachers frequently had to remind pupils to listen and not call out. These warnings interrupted the flow of lessons, and learning was disturbed because ideas and themes could not be developed.

Pupils' behaviour remains overall unsatisfactory. Pupils noted that whilst there have been improvements in behaviour there is still room for further improvement. The school, after consulting widely, has introduced a new code of behaviour. This allows

senior staff to check the consistency with which the code is applied, but the new procedures have yet to have a positive impact on learning. Teachers continue to be inconsistent in their expectations of pupils and in the way that they apply the code. In some lessons no warnings were issued for inappropriate behaviour, or were delivered too late to prevent further disruption.

There is a determined small minority of pupils who do not enjoy their education or value the school community. They are willing and able to interrupt lessons despite knowing that they are having a negative effect on their own and others' learning. This group is increasingly being challenged. However insufficient progress has been made in developing the overall social, cultural, moral and spiritual education of pupils. Whilst most pupils do respond positively when asked to improve, a significant minority continue to show little respect for fellow pupils, their teachers and visitors.

Pupils' attendance, reported as just above 90%, is below that for 2004 because of the high level of authorised absence. The level of permanent exclusions has fallen from four at the last inspection to one so far this year. In the first half of the autumn term, there were 97 fixed term exclusions whereas at the last inspection in the spring term, there was a total of 192.

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

- Review the behaviour policy, with students, and make sure all teachers apply it consistently – inadequate progress

Quality of provision

The teaching in lessons was satisfactory in 20 out of 28 lessons observed; this figure is similar to the percentage of satisfactory lessons observed in the inspection of spring 2005, and also in a more recent joint review undertaken by the college with the LA. There were six lessons where teaching was judged to be good but none was outstanding. Good teaching was seen in English, mathematics, French, and textiles. Inadequate teaching was seen in each of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, as well as in history, geography, religious education, and music.

Features of the good lessons were careful planning, assured delivery, and good attention to detail; good relationships were underpinned by the use of good formative assessment by the teacher. For example, a mathematics teacher spent time discussing common errors on vectors and ensuring that a range of pupils were challenged to provide answers, rather than just those who put up their hand. In other good lessons, practical activities engaged pupils and ensured good progress.

In lessons which were generally adequate, teachers presented ideas clearly, but did not ensure that all pupils worked at a steady pace, and did not check inappropriate behaviour in a consistent way.

In the inadequate lessons, it was often disruptive behaviour which impeded learning and, despite carefully prepared lesson plans, resulted in poor progress by many or

even most pupils. In these lessons, many pupils were inattentive and talked while the teacher explained and discussed ideas with the class. Occasionally, starter activities lasted too long and there were insufficient opportunities for pupils to engage actively in a range of activities. The quantity and quality of pupils' written work was often unsatisfactory.

All teachers had lesson plans which ranged in quality from adequate to good. Teachers had the assessment data provided by the college for each class, but there were few examples of constructive use of the data in planning lessons or for differentiating the tasks set for pupils.

The college is aware of the need to improve teaching and learning and has taken a number of important steps. A number of teachers have left and been replaced with teachers who are thought to have good potential. A coaching programme has been established for some weaker teachers and a few are also being offered extra support through professional development. The effects of these initiatives have yet to be realised.

With regards to the issue relating to special needs, some progress has been made in terms of provision. Some classes have a high proportion of pupils with special needs so that targeted support can be provided. Smaller classes have also been formed and some have two teaching assistants in addition to the main teacher. Some teaching assistants are assigned to a specific department to ensure continuity of support.

The 2005 inspection report raised a number of issues relating to the curriculum, accommodation, and resources. All these aspects have been improved. A new curriculum model has been implemented with a one week timetable of shorter 50 minute lessons to encourage lessons which are more sharply focused. A banding arrangement has been introduced in all years to allow teaching support to be offered in relation to pupils' needs. Pupils in Year 10 have more choices of options and information technology is now taught as a discrete subject, as is citizenship.

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

- Ensure that all students with special educational needs get the support they need: satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The headteacher, college staff, governors, and local authority consultants have worked together on preparing the improvement plan. The plan covers the five areas for improvement identified in the inspection of spring 2005. The report has been carefully analysed and other key areas for action have been highlighted. In addition, each curriculum area has drawn up its own action plan. The college's specialist status in technology has had limited impact on standards of achievement.

The areas for improvement are focused under the core aim of raising standards and achievement. The actions which the college proposes are generally appropriate, with a lead person identified for each action. The timescales for activities are not always specific enough, completion dates are not all realistic and phrases such as ongoing are unhelpful. Resources and costs are often identified. Success criteria are provided in many cases, often with measurable targets. Arrangements for monitoring and evaluation of the plan are included but the means of evaluating progress are not always clear.

The headteacher provides clear direction for the college and is well supported by the senior team. She does not shy away from making difficult decisions when they are required. Staff morale has improved, with greater stability, openness and accessibility to the senior managers. The leadership team has increased its capacity to take the college to the next stage of development. The progress of the college has been hampered by the legacy of non-specialist teachers and the behaviour of a hard core group of pupils who are persistently disruptive.

The recruitment of well qualified and experienced specialist staff has been given a high priority. This has led to the appointment of curriculum leaders for science and religious education and efforts are being made to recruit a head of music. There are models of good and effective practice amongst the middle managers, and some sharing of these across the college.

A rigorous programme of monitoring teaching and learning has been implemented and middle managers have been trained to develop their monitoring skills. The improvement of the pupils' attitudes and behaviour is rightly placed as a key area, with a recognition that there is more to do on personal development.

The chair of governors is aware of the college's strengths and weaknesses and the governing body is better prepared to ask difficult questions. The involvement of governors in monitoring the college improvement plan has helped to ensure that their work is now more effectively focused.

The local authority's statement of action is satisfactory. It begins with a detailed contextual statement on the college against a background of decline over a short but intensive period. The statement focuses on the future of the college within the forecast for places in the local area. The outline of intervention does not dovetail well with the college's action plan; costing, success criteria and a clear time line have not been worked out against each area for development. A team of consultants provide subject-related training, support and advice. There is commitment to keeping the college under review and providing necessary support until the college is removed from special measures.

Assemblies are appropriately timetabled and there is a programme of work that is linked into thought for the week; however statutory requirements are not met.

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

- Persevere with all efforts to appoint heads of departments for science, music and religious education and to appoint enough qualified, specialist teachers to match the curriculum: satisfactory progress
- Ensure that statutory requirements are met in the daily act of collective worship, control technology and more use of ICT in all subjects by students in Year 10 and 11: inadequate progress on collective worship

External support

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate progress

Quality of LEA's statement of action – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed in English, mathematics and modern foreign languages

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise standards by setting higher expectations of pupils' progress.
- Enhance the quality of teaching and learning by improving the quantity and quality of work completed by pupils in each lesson.
- Improve behaviour across the college by using rewards and sanctions in a more consistent way, so that pupils are more focused on their learning and respectful to both staff and external visitors.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the specialist schools section of the DfES and The Executive Director for Children and Young People Director of Education for Surrey.

Yours sincerely

R Kapadia
H M Inspector