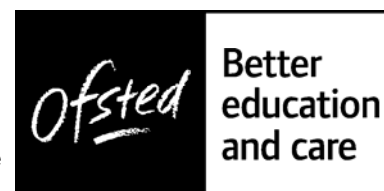


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13 January 2006

Miss Jane Whittington
The Headteacher
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Potters Gate
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Dear Miss Whittington

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF POTTERS GATE CofE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Adrian Lyons HMI 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 May 2004.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior staff, pupils and the chair of governors. Inspectors also joined two assemblies and a meeting organised by the Local Authority (LA) to review the school's progress in relation to its additional support and intervention programme

Context

In September 2005 an extended period of temporary leadership ended when the substantive headteacher and deputy headteacher took up their posts. The deputy headteacher is also a class teacher for four days per week, and she is responsible for the coordination of assessment and science. One teacher left the school at the end

of term and there have been several changes in support staff, including the caretaker. At 198, pupil numbers are well below capacity but, positively, since September, no pupils have left the school. The school local profile is enhanced by a range of community and fund raising events which are well supported by the 'friends' of Potters Gate.

Achievement and standards

Standards are in line with national expectation but the overall rate of achievement is inadequate.

In the 2005 national tests for Key Stage 2 standards were much improved on the previous year. As a result of consistently good teaching, pupils in the Year 6 class made accelerated progress within the year. The pupils' achievement was greater than might be expected from their prior attainment. In mathematics and English standards were above the national average at both the expected and higher levels. However, standards in Years 4, 5 and 6 are not as high as they ought to be. This is because the rate of pupils' achievement has been too slow in previous years.

At Key Stage 1, the results were slightly improved in reading and writing but lower than the previous year in mathematics. Too many pupils' scores were at the lower end of the expected range. Nevertheless, given their low starting points pupils in Year 2 made progress overall as a result of good teaching. A greater proportion of pupils than average achieved the higher Level 3 scores. At the end of the Foundation Stage standards were judged to be good overall in 2005. However, comparison with the local authority profile has caused the school to query the reliability of the assessments which appear overly generous.

In lessons across the school, with support from staff, most pupils reached standards which were in line with expectations for pupils of a similar age. In lessons where the teaching was good pupils made the accelerated progress. Elsewhere, progress was only satisfactory and therefore not sufficient to redress the history of underachievement and help pupils to reach their potential.

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

- Raise the achievement of all pupils and in particular higher attaining pupils - satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. The school continues to be a positive, happy community and relationships between the adults and the pupils are strong. In lessons, around the school and during breaks the pupils' attitudes and behaviour were good. They show consideration for others and are polite to adults. At the end of break pupils lined up quietly; ready to enter classrooms with positive attitudes to learning. The oldest pupils display particularly constructive attitudes to their work and this results from the class teacher's high expectations.

The rate of attendance, at 95.4 per cent, is above the national average and a marked improvement on last years' figure of 93.5 per cent. The school has exceeded its target figure of 93.7 per cent.

Staff showed good concern for pupils' safety and welfare and pupils spoke confidently about their school. They identified how healthy eating and staying safe were covered in lessons, and they gave examples which showed good understanding about matters of health and safety. They recognised that relationship problems sometimes occur and knew who to go to for support. The school council offers a range of worthwhile opportunities for pupil participation. For instance, Councillors were involved in the interview process for the new headteacher. Assemblies offer good opportunities for developing pupils' spiritual and cultural awareness. During the inspection, for example, pupils learned about how Christmas is celebrated in different countries and Christmas lunch provided a lovely opportunity for the school community to enjoy a meal together and for pupils to develop social skills.

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

- There were no areas for improvement identified in this area.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. It has improved since the last visit and this has led to improved progress in lessons. Progress was at least satisfactory in all lessons and was good in half. Good lessons had a range of strengths but common elements were: the variety of activities; opportunities for groups of pupils to work on tasks which were matched to their abilities and a good mix of teacher talk, individual tasks and group work. Lessons were particularly effective when teacher explanations were interspersed with brief opportunities to clarify understanding via discussion with a neighbour and then write on wipe-boards so that the teacher could quickly check on whether pupils were having difficulties and address misconceptions. Classrooms now provide an attractive and stimulating learning environment. Key words are displayed and referred to in lessons: helping to develop pupils' literacy. In the foundation stage planning is improved. Children benefit from a mix of self directed and focussed activity. However, during focussed activities they need to be more involved in their learning so that they learn to do things for themselves.

In the best lessons the needs of higher attaining pupils were well catered for. They were challenged through good questioning and appropriate activities. However, inspectors agree with the pupils' view that this is not consistent across all lessons. In most lessons, less able pupils are supported well through differentiated activities and the attachment of teaching assistants but there were occasions during whole class teaching when these pupils were not appropriately challenged. Individualised plans for pupils with special educational needs are up to date. However, targets are seldom focussed on mathematics and targets for social interaction are sometimes too general. Parents and pupils involvement in setting and reviewing targets is inconsistent.

Enhanced monitoring systems are succeeding in raising the quality of teaching. Subject and senior leaders are involved in the process of classroom observation and the scrutiny of planning and pupils' books. Record keeping is satisfactory. The marking of pupils' work is better at guiding pupils in how to improve. The school has introduced challenging and appropriate targets for achievement and a good system to track pupil progress. Staff are clearer about how to use assessment information for target setting and planning lessons. However, it is too early to judge the impact of these initiatives.

Pupils receive their full entitlement to the national curriculum and systems have been established to boost progress in literacy and numeracy. Music provision is a strength and includes twice weekly visits from specialist staff. Pupils were observed preparing for the carol service and singing was developing particularly well. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) has improved. Teachers use data projectors well to capture the interest of pupils. However, overall, ICT is used more effectively by teachers to enliven lessons than by pupils for learning. Teachers are not yet fully confident in managing the work of classes when children are sharing computers.

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

- Teachers need to make more use of their assessment of pupils' attainment in planning for their future learning, including more consistent use of target setting and marking of work – satisfactory progress
- The curriculum needs to contain greater challenge for higher-attaining pupils – satisfactory progress
- Planning for the Foundation Stage needs to give more detail of how support staff will be involved in children's learning and to be more firmly based on the assessment of what children already know – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory overall. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have made a good start in their new roles. They have quickly gained the confidence of staff, pupils, parents, governors and the local authority and much has already been done to improve provision. However the school's leaders have inherited a legacy of piecemeal initiatives and they have wisely sought to ensure that all changes are fully understood and agreed and that priorities are focussed in the right areas. For example, the time and energy given to establishing a consensus about rates of achievement and accompanying tracking system was worthwhile as this development underpins other initiatives. The headteacher has already monitored many aspects of provision and has a good grasp on areas needing development. Targeted support for teaching has already resulted in some improvement. The headteacher plans to lead a school self-evaluation and development planning exercise in the spring term. This is entirely appropriate and necessary to drive the school forward.

Subject coordination is improving but there is much more to be done to enable coordinators to take responsibility for standards and achievement. Coordinators of

the key subjects have devised development plans and begun to monitor the quality of training in their subjects. However the plans vary in quality and rigour.

Governance continues to improve and is satisfactory overall. The governors have provided the school community with stability throughout a period of immense change. They have been successful in the recruitment of senior staff and new governors and in developing positive working relationships with different leadership teams. The Governors have worked hard to develop systems, structures and terms of reference for governance. Procedures for monitoring school finance have improved. The governors have worked productively with the LA and diocese and benefited from their training and advice. The governing body's draft action plan is ambitious. It has good potential to ensure that the governors are well positioned to hold a strategic view, act as a critical friend and ensure accountability. At present, however, the success of the plan is not judged against successful outcomes for the pupils, and, in general, the governors are not judging the quality of leadership against standards and achievement.

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

- The school needs, as soon as possible, to settle the uncertainty about its headteacher, so as to improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, with senior staff more involved in its direction and evaluation, and to ensure that all staff and parents can be confident in it – good progress

External support

The quality of the LA's support is good. However because of the frequent changes in leadership the impact has only been satisfactory. Nevertheless, the LA has given constant support to the school's headteachers and the governor body and provided useful training for both groups. Additionally, monitoring by the LEA is thorough, challenging and developmental. Monitoring meetings are regular and all of the school's partners are involved. The diocese has increased its involvement with the school. It has given effective support and guidance to the governing body. .

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory progress

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory progress

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise achievement
- Further improve the quality of teaching
- School self-evaluation and development planning

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

Yours sincerely

Tina Herring
H M Inspector