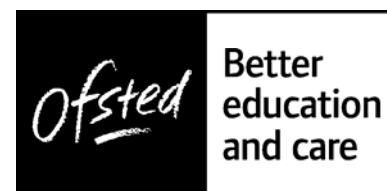


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15 September 2005

Mr J Keeble
Wentworth High School
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Dear Mr Keeble

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WENTWORTH HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Judith Tolley and Ronald Bulman, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 13 and 14 September, 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 was found to have serious weaknesses in February 2005.

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, senior and middle managers, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, and a representative from the LEA.

Context

A new headteacher took up his post from 1 September, a few days before the start of the monitoring inspection. The action plan was jointly written by the previous and present headteachers.

Achievement and standards

Standards attained in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were below those found nationally but rose significantly from the previous year because of

improvements in mathematics and science. Standards were still below those found in similar schools in English, broadly in line in science and above the standard of similar schools in mathematics where progress was good. Unvalidated results for the 2005 tests show an improved performance in English, with the proportion of the pupils who attained Level 5 or better rising from 58 to 67 per cent. However, standards in science remained unchanged and the proportion who attained Level 5 or better in mathematics fell from 74 to 62 per cent.

Standards in GCSE examinations in 2004 were well below the national average. Pupils' progress between the ages of 11 and 16 was significantly below that found in similar schools and was in the lowest fifth of schools nationally. Progress in English, particularly, and mathematics was well below that found in similar schools between the ages of 11 and 16. In 2005, the proportion of pupils attaining five or more higher grade passes was broadly similar to the figure for 2004 while the proportion who attained five passes overall fell slightly. Standards overall have not risen over the last five years although there were improved results in both English and mathematics in 2005. Standards attained by boys rose in 2005 and were close to the school's target, but the figure for girls fell sharply and was well below the target.

Support for the improved achievement of boys is being concentrated into literacy work and systems for monitoring and supporting their progress. This extra support had some impact on their performance in 2005. However, this work is at an early stage and has not started to have a strategic impact on teaching and learning processes. The extent to which boys engage in learning activities varies significantly between classes.

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

- *Improve performance in the higher grades of GCSE examinations – inadequate progress*
- *Address the underachievement of boys – satisfactory progress*

Personal development and well-being

Attendance is satisfactory. It improved towards the end of the last school year through the school's efforts and co-operation with several agencies. Many pupils are regular attendees and enjoy coming to school. Punctuality has improved although too many pupils arrive late. Too many lessons start five or more minutes after the bell, with no clear procedures for teachers challenging late arrivals. The inadequate attendance of a small minority of pupils adversely affects their progress.

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory, largely due to teacher's good personal knowledge of individuals and a well-developed tutorial and pastoral system. There are very good examples of pupils making a contribution to school life through the school council, sport and a peer mentoring scheme. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is generally good, but pupils' contribution to learning is rarely better than satisfactory. The emphasis given by teachers to independent and collaborative learning in lessons is variable and often does not encourage the growth of self-

confidence. In the best lessons, open-ended tasks and group discussions challenge pupils' initiative and promote their self-confidence. Elsewhere, pupils remain passive for too long and the responses required of them are limited to short and predictable answers. Pupils feel safe and enjoy their time in school, since it is an orderly place with good supervision both in the classroom and around the building.

The school's care guidance and support of pupils is good. There is a strong and experienced pastoral team with clear internal communication and consistently executed policies. Pupils feel confident that they are well looked after and that they have someone to turn to if they have a problem. Procedures for child protection are well developed and staff supplement these with close personal knowledge of individual pupils. Pupils are well inducted to Year 7 and are soon enjoying life in school. The school has very good and productive links with local medical and social services, so that emergent problems are promptly followed up. Health and safety issues mentioned at the last inspection have largely been resolved, although only a minority of subjects have completed their own risk assessments. Parents' and pupils' views are taken into account, and any emergent issues are promptly dealt with.

The assemblies and the registration sessions seen did not include an act of collective worship, although moral messages were evident. Spiritual and social development is under-represented in the life of the school, both in formal settings and in classroom practice.

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

- *Raise levels of attendance and improve punctuality – satisfactory progress*
- *Carry out regular risk-assessment audits – satisfactory progress*
- *Provide for a daily act of collective worship – inadequate progress*

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching was broadly similar to that noted in the last inspection. It was satisfactory or better in 29 of the 34 lessons seen; including 14 where the teaching was good or better. One outstanding lesson was seen in physical education. This is consistent with the school's understanding of the quality of teaching across the curriculum. There are strengths in the relationships all staff have with the pupils and in the consistent and calm way pupils are managed. Teachers use starter activities well to recap and reinforce previous learning, objectives are consistently shared with pupils and plenaries are used effectively at the end of lessons. Teachers have good knowledge of the subjects they teach and information is presented confidently to pupils. Lessons were planned effectively so that steps in learning were well sequenced and resources and activities appropriate so that pupils build successfully on what has gone before. Teaching assistants made a valuable contribution in lessons and provided effective, targeted support to particular individuals or groups. Pupils made satisfactory progress in most lessons.

The most significant weaknesses in the teaching included: planning which did not always take sufficient account of pupils' different needs or enable all pupils to be

effectively challenged, particularly the most able; a lack of clarity about the purpose of a starter activity; learning objectives which were not clearly linked to an assessment of the pupils' abilities; too little variation in learning activities and, because of the teacher led nature of many lessons, the lack of opportunities for pupils to participate fully as individuals or to take the initiative. Few lessons included any opportunity for pupils to discuss their own progress or for the teacher to assess the extent of the learning.

The school has maintained the high standards of support for pupils with special educational needs identified in the last report, despite changing and challenging circumstances. The provision for gifted and talented pupils, however, remains relatively underdeveloped.

The school has a good deal of information about the pupils' performance, which is used to track progress and set targets over the course of the year. This information is used to inform pupils about what they have to do to improve. Those pupils making slower progress are identified and given additional support. There are regular discussions between class teachers and senior managers about the attainment, progress and targets for each pupil. The school systematically checks the quality of marking of pupils' work. However, the use of assessment is not yet an integral part of lessons and the increased availability of data has not led to lesson planning consistently matching the needs of groups of differing ability within teaching groups. Strategies for assessing pupils' progress during lessons are underdeveloped.

Progress on the areas of improvement identified by the inspection in February 2005:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning particularly in English and maths – satisfactory
- Improve assessment procedures in order to monitor progress better - satisfactory
- Improve the quality of marking – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The school's action plan has not addressed the causes of the school's weaknesses with sufficient urgency. Although the school was inspected in early February 2005, few of the planned actions were scheduled to take place until September and many at some time after this date leading to an unhelpful concentration of activity into a few months. The strategic planning is a weakness: some key actions, such as the introduction of a new teaching and learning policy, are planned for very late in the process. The range of planned actions are generally appropriate but insufficient emphasis is placed on the need to raise standards in particular subjects where weaknesses have been identified. There is too little emphasis on how progress will be evaluated. The role of the governors is underdeveloped in the action plan, particularly in terms of the development of their evaluative role and training in this.

The involvement of the new headteacher in the writing of the action plan has aided continuity in the transition of leadership, but this is less evident in the day-to-day work of the school. Sound practices have begun to evolve without the benefit of

strategic co-ordination and direction; for example, ideas about lesson planning and assessment have not been securely interlinked so that the quality of lesson planning remains very varied. Key policies, central to the school's improvement, have not yet been codified due to the lack of urgency in the action plan. The skills and practice of effective self-evaluation remain under-developed at a strategic level, for example in using information from lesson observations to plan improvements, although there are emerging strengths in areas such as pupil achievement data. Senior managers have a generally accurate view of the strength of teaching overall but no broad school self-evaluation exists at present.

The senior leadership team consists of the headteacher, two deputies, five assistant headteachers and the business manager. Many of this large team are enthusiastic and committed to the school's improvement. The new headteacher has plans to review the deployment of the team, which at present is not structured to gain the maximum strategic impact. Middle managers are similarly committed to the school's improvement but their skills are variable, for example in self-evaluation and the ability to set a good example in lesson planning. The existence of dual heads of department lacks a clear rationale.

The contribution of the governing body to the school's improvement has been inadequate. Governors do not visit the school sufficiently regularly and there are no clear links between governors and areas of the school. The governors do not have an accurate evaluation of the school's current strengths and weaknesses, partly because they do not have systematic access to clear information on important aspects of its operations such as the quality of teaching. Overall, evaluation is inadequate.

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

- Improve the effectiveness of management in the monitoring of outcomes – satisfactory progress

External support

The LEA's statement of action helpfully follows the same format as that of the school. It is satisfactory overall. However, it shares a similar lack of clarity in terms of the allocation of evaluation activities; evaluation methodology is not closely cross-referenced between the two documents. Records of LEA visits at senior level indicate a clear focus on strategic areas for improvement and some of the analysis is very effective. It has provided some helpful training on lesson observation. The LEA has been less successful in supporting the school's development of self-evaluation, including at governing body level, over the last seven months.

Main Judgements

The school has made satisfactory progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses. This visit has raised some concerns about the standard of education provided and the school's performance will be monitored.

Priorities for further improvement

- Strengthen the school's procedures for self-evaluation, including developing the role played in this by the governing body
- Develop a whole school strategy for improving teaching and learning to include:
 - Using the increasing assessment data to plan for the needs of all pupils
 - Improving the variety of learning experiences offered to pupils in order to accelerate their learning and enhance their personal development

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

Yours sincerely

Adrian Gray
H M Inspector