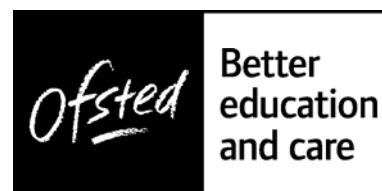


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3 November 2005

Dr Colm Hickey
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St. Thomas More RC School
Wood Green
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Dear Dr Hickey

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST THOMAS MORE SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Sheila Nolan, Judith Charlesworth, Jennifer Hall, Additional Inspectors and Jackie Krafft HMI to your school on 12 and 13 October 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 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, the senior leadership team, groups of students, staff, governors, a small group of parents, representatives from the local authority, representatives from external consultants and the school council. The lead inspector also had a telephone conversation with the headteacher's mentor.

Context

The headteacher was appointed shortly before the previous inspection. Since then the senior team has been reorganised. A coherent and appropriate management structure is now in place with responsibilities defined clearly. Accountability at senior level has improved.

Achievement and standards

Standards overall are low, particularly in mathematics and science. In 2005, the percentage of pupils gaining a level 5 in science at the end of Key Stage 3 fell to 39% from 53% in 2004. In mathematics, the percentage of pupils gaining a Level 5 rose slightly to 57% from 55% the previous year. Standards in English at Key Stage 3 have continued to improve. The proportion of students gaining a Level 5 or better rose from 60% in 2004 to 72% in 2005, which is close to the national average. The percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to C rose very slightly in 2005 but remains significantly below the national average.

Pupils enter the school with standards below the expected levels. Their progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 is too variable. Girls make good progress between the key stages but boys and pupils with special educational needs do not make enough progress. The school has also identified underachievement by average ability girls. Actions taken by the school are not yet impacting sufficiently on standards and achievement.

Pupils' progress in lessons was generally satisfactory and in just under half of the lessons it was good. This was due to the quality of teaching they received and also because of pupils' enthusiasm and eagerness to learn. Progress was slowed in a minority of lessons by weaknesses in teaching and a lack of clear learning objectives.

Standards were satisfactory or better in approximately half of the lessons observed. There was a very wide range of ability in lessons and teaching often did not take this into account. Pupils were often not challenged sufficiently in lessons to produce work of a high standard.

Personal development and well-being

There has been significant improvement in the systems and procedures to monitor pupils' behaviour since the last inspection. The implementation of these policies has been managed well. As a result, behaviour has improved in lessons and around the school and is now satisfactory and sometimes good. The deputy headteacher with specific responsibility for behaviour is monitoring progress with drive, commitment and determination.

The management of any poor behaviour in lessons in the main school has improved significantly since the last inspection in February 2005. In most lessons the atmosphere is calm and conducive to learning. Pupils understand the clear system of rewards and sanctions and are aware of the standards of behaviour expected. In the best lessons behaviour management is effective, consistent and seen as fair by pupils. Teachers manage any potential conflict firmly and calmly before it can escalate. There is mutual respect between teachers and pupils and relationships are good. Pupils are polite, well mannered and enthusiastic. This enthusiasm is not always managed well and occasionally leads to too much shouting out of answers to

teachers' questions. The school council members reported that better behaviour was the most significant improvement in the school this term.

In a minority of lessons behaviour management is inconsistent. Where pupils are not fully engaged in interesting and challenging work they become bored and their attitude to learning and their behaviour deteriorates. Noise levels rise and pupils do not concentrate on their work sufficiently.

The school has benefited from effective work by the local authority behaviour support service and by external consultants. The local authority has supported the school well in monitoring improvements and published helpful reports on progress towards targets. Staff training on behaviour management is valued by teachers and has had a positive impact on raising standards of behaviour. The sanctuary room for pupils who are withdrawn from lessons is effective and managed well. Reasons for referral are monitored carefully and reported to parents. Liaison between the unit and departments is good and management procedures are organised well. This provision has contributed to the reduction in the number of fixed term and permanent exclusions.

Attendance remains below the national figures for secondary schools. Nevertheless, since the last inspection, the school has introduced a number of robust procedures to record and improve attendance and punctuality. Pioneering work with Year 11 has confirmed the effectiveness of these measures on attendance. The school is now in a strong position to extend the systems to other year groups. Attendance figures for the academic year are lower than for the same period last year. However, the school has evidence that this is a result of more rigorous and systematic recording and investigation of non-attendance. Working closely with the education welfare officer, legal action is likely to be a next step to motivate families where there is persistent and long-term non-attendance. There is still some internal truancy but the school is aware of where it is likely to occur and has taken appropriate steps to prevent it. The school rightly recognises that there is work to be done to ensure the consistency with which teachers enter attendance data in lessons.

The school has had some success in encouraging pupils to arrive punctually to school in the morning. Very few pupils were late on the first day of the inspection. The start to some lessons continues to be disrupted by pupils' late arrivals. Some poor punctuality results from increased journey time around the site caused by building works. However, some pupils still take a casual and leisurely approach to moving between lessons and there is not an adult presence in all corridors. Teacher presence in the canteen and in the playground at break times is strong. The canteen is very crowded at lunch times. Although noisy, behaviour in the canteen is good and there is a pleasant and friendly atmosphere.

Pupils generally enjoy their education, especially when their learning is engaging and active. There are many opportunities for pupils to participate in a wide range of sporting activities and clubs organised by the physical education department. These activities are fully inclusive of pupils with physical disabilities and special educational needs. Competitive sports make a good contribution to encouraging pupils to adopt

healthy lifestyles. A range of healthy foods such as salads and fruit are available in the school canteen.

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

- the management of behaviour in lessons in the main school – good progress
- the punctuality to lessons and the level of attendance at school – satisfactory progress.

Quality of provision

Inspectors observed 32 lessons during the inspection covering a range of subjects and both Key Stages. A total of 22 lessons were observed in years 7, 8 and 9 and of those, 19 were judged to be satisfactory or better. No teaching was judged to be outstanding. The best lessons had clear objectives which were explained to the pupils. Teachers also gave an outline of the activities pupils would be doing and this gave a clear direction to the lesson. Tasks and activities had been planned well to enable pupils to achieve their learning objectives. These lessons got off to a crisp start and pupils were actively engaged in their learning from the beginning. Teachers gave clear timescales for the completion of activities and lessons had pace and purpose. Pupils were challenged by targeted questioning. They responded enthusiastically and were keen to do well. Expectations of both behaviour and standards of work were high and teachers checked learning frequently. The management of behaviour and attitudes to learning was consistent and effective. In a well planned history lesson students worked hard on a range of interesting tasks to achieve their objectives, which had been linked skilfully to the starter activity. The teacher gave clear instructions and timescales and targeted support well. Learning and progress was checked frequently and pupils remained focused and enthusiastic throughout the lesson.

In the less successful lessons, although objectives were written on the whiteboard, they were rarely explained or referred to. In some instances pupils copied objectives from the whiteboard but no check was made to ensure they understood them and no explanation was given as to how they would be achieved. Starts to these lessons were often slow and planning was ineffective. They involved a narrow range of activities and relied too much on pupils copying from the whiteboard. There was very little attention given to the different abilities of pupils or to pupils with special educational needs. Higher achieving pupils were not challenged sufficiently. These lessons often lacked pace and pupils became bored and failed to concentrate on their work. Standards and progress were too low and behaviour was not managed effectively.

Planning for teaching does not take learning needs and styles of specific groups sufficiently into account. Some lesson plans name pupils with SEN but give no detail as to how their needs will be met during the lesson. Too often teaching does not meet the needs of these pupils. The assessment and monitoring of the progress of pupils with special educational needs is very new and has not yet provided any useful information on which to base planning. Individual Education Plans are unsatisfactory and a significant weakness in the current provision. They do not assist

teachers in meeting individual pupils' needs or provide strategies for support. Teaching assistants are linked to a core subject and some are attached to specific pupils. Many are very new to the role and are not yet familiar with the schemes of work. They now attend departmental meetings but liaison with class teachers has been ineffective. There is insufficient in-class support across the school and many lessons would be improved by the inclusion of a teaching assistant.

Staff turnover in the special needs department has been high and the school has been unable to recruit appropriate staff. This situation is now resolved with appointments for senior posts having taken place. The management of special educational needs has been carried out by a deputy headteacher on a temporary basis and much has been achieved with regard to assessment, systems and procedures but it has yet to impact on teaching and learning.

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

- the extent of unsatisfactory and poor teaching in Years 7 to 9 – satisfactory progress
- provision for pupils with special educational needs – inadequate progress.

Leadership and management

The school's action plan is satisfactory overall with some weaknesses. The action plan addresses all of the weaknesses and areas for improvement identified in the inspection in February 2005. The plan is set helpfully within the context of a five year school improvement plan. A lead member of the senior leadership team is identified for each key issue and success criteria are clear and measurable. However, the timings of reviews and other monitoring activities are not always clear. Resources needed are identified but some are not costed. A governors' group has been established to monitor progress.

The headteacher and senior management now provide sound leadership and demonstrate the capacity to improve. The senior leadership team's roles have been revised and they are now unambiguous and understood by all staff. The team work well together and the school has focused appropriately on the key weaknesses identified in the inspection of February 2005. Procedures for monitoring and evaluation are improving and are now satisfactory. Many initiatives are new and have yet to impact in terms of improved outcomes. There was no formal self evaluation report available at the time of inspection but effective work has been carried out in evaluating key aspects of the school's work in line with its action plan. The senior leadership team have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and learning in the school and have taken appropriate action to address weaknesses. There has been a well organised programme of in-service training for teachers focusing on behaviour management and the impact of this training is apparent in almost all classes.

Progress in improving the design and technology curriculum for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 is good. The statutory requirements for design and technology are now met.

The curriculum is now broader and includes textiles in Years 7, 8 and 9. The school is planning to re-introduce food technology, and has appointed a specialist in this subject.

The strengths of the specialism are beginning to have an impact on the school. Physical education, for example, is improving its provision through dance and other aspects of sport and there is a productive link between the information technology department and fitness activities. A substantial number of pupils benefit from links with a local professional football club with activities leading to recognised accreditation. The wide range of curricular and out-of-hours opportunities provided by the physical education department supports well its claim that it has the capacity to meet the challenge of raising expectations and attainment throughout the school.

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

- ensure that the national curriculum requirements are met in design and technology – good progress.

External support

The school has benefited from a wide range of external support since the inspection in February 2005. This support, provided by the local authority and external consultants has focused appropriately on the weaknesses identified in the inspection. The impact of this support, especially in improved behaviour, is apparent in most lessons. The statement of action produced by the local authority is good. It gives a clear indication of the level of support the school can access. The statement also provides a detailed schedule of monitoring and evaluation activities and the local authority provide helpful and detailed reports on the school's progress in implementing its action plan.

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

- Further develop and implement the new systems to support pupils with special educational needs and monitor and evaluate their impact on pupils' progress.
- Improve the proportion of good or better teaching.
- Improve timekeeping between lessons to enable more effective starts to be made.

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

Yours sincerely

Martyn Rhowbotham HMI