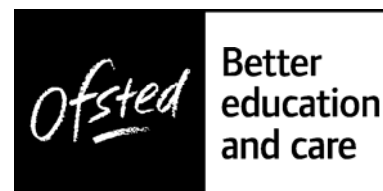


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28th November 2005

Mrs Jo Powell
The Headteacher
Long Mead Community Primary School
Waveney Road
Tonbridge Town
Kent
TN10 3JU

Dear Mrs Powell

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF LONG MEAD COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Christopher Schenk HMI and Robert Lovett HMI to your school on the 19th and 20th October 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was found to have serious weaknesses in November 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 you and the deputy headteacher, members of the senior management team and the three core curriculum teams, the chair of governors and a representative from the local education authority (LEA). Eighteen lessons or part lessons were observed. All the teaching staff, including senior managers, were observed and two assemblies were attended. A range of pupils' work was examined and inspectors spoke informally with other staff and pupils during breaks and lunchtimes.

Context

There have been significant changes in the teaching staff and to the senior management team during the past year. Most new staff took up their posts in

September 2005. The school is now fully staffed with appropriately trained and experienced teachers. Subject leaders for literacy and numeracy have been appointed and are leading subject development teams.

Achievement and standards

Standards are improving, particularly in mathematics and science.

The children enter the Nursery with poorly developed skills, especially in speaking and listening. However, they were seen to be working within the expected range of achievement in several of the Early Learning Goals.

The results of the end of Key Stage 2 national tests in 2005 showed a marked improvement, particularly in mathematics where standards reached the national average. Results in science were almost as good but results in English, whilst they showed a considerable improvement on 2004, were relatively weaker and remain below average.

In 2005 results at the end of Key Stage 1 declined. Although there was a slight decline in reading and mathematics the decline was more significant in writing. Standards in literacy remain low. The school recognises the importance of developing the pupils' ability to articulate and increase the range and breadth of their vocabulary. There are well organised opportunities to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills through interviewing, retelling familiar stories, and explaining how they approached tasks and problems. The younger pupils are making good progress in developing their skills when reading. They use picture and contextual clues, initial sounds and blends, and have many well planned and focused opportunities to read aloud and share books with adults. However, the older pupils have gaps in these word attack skills, and are less confident when reading unfamiliar words. Standards of writing remain very low. Too many pupils are unable to punctuate their work accurately, they mix upper and lower case letters, and much of their presentation is poor. The school has rightly focused on assessing pupils' writing skills, identifying the gaps, and tracking the progress they make in order to raise standards.

Despite the encouraging results in mathematics at Key Stage 2, many pupils do not reach the standard expected for their age and these pupils often have significant gaps in their mathematical understanding. The school is well aware of this. Thorough and frequent assessments are being effectively used to set targets for individual pupils and to identify gaps in coverage. In view of the present attainment levels, and the need to improve basic number skills, the strong emphasis on place value seen in the teaching is helpful and appropriate.

The pupils' progress was good in over half of the lessons observed. The pupils made good progress in those lessons where the work was well matched to their individual needs and built securely on prior learning. Progress was also accelerated when the pupils' learning involved varied tasks, for example, in a Key Stage 2 English lesson where the pupils engaged in reading, speaking and writing through a sequence of whole class, paired and individual work. Younger pupils in the Reception and Year 1

groups made very good progress when using a range of skills to identify and name different shapes, group them, and explain the reasons for their choices.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2004:

- to improve achievement in English, mathematics and ICT – satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They settle quickly, work with enthusiasm, and have good relationships with each other and with adults. The best behaviour continues to be seen where pupils are well taught, work is well matched to pupils' abilities, and where their interest is engaged from the outset.

The improvement in the behaviour of pupils in and around the school noted at the last monitoring visit has continued. The great majority of pupils are friendly, open and welcoming, treating each other, staff and visitors with courtesy and respect. They are very good ambassadors for the school and take a real interest in the well-being of younger pupils. Whilst incidents of over robust play still sometimes occur, pupils say they enjoy playtimes and, in the main, this is an opportunity for meeting with friends, playing and socialising. Pupils are excited about the zoning of the playground and proposed future developments. Members of the school council are taking a leading role in this and are eager to discuss their plans with friends and visitors.

Where challenging behaviour occurs it is appropriately and consistently dealt with and is not allowed to unduly affect the education of other pupils.

For those pupils who do not enjoy being on the playground at lunchtime the school makes available supervised use of the ICT suite. This indoor option is valued by pupils who are able to work individually or with a partner on research, or simply play games and enjoy themselves.

The very recently established Nurture Group offers the opportunity for small groups of disaffected pupils to re-engage with learning and to enhance their social and behavioural skills. The stated intention is rapid, but phased, reintegration with their peer group. Whilst the classroom is calm, purposeful and welcoming, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this provision or whether the high teacher/pupil ratio represents good value for money.

The early morning Breakfast Club, run in partnership with a local church, provides a good adult to pupil ratio and gives some pupils a good start to the day.

Two whole school assemblies were seen. Both afforded a valuable time in the day for all classes to come together and reaffirm the core values and sense of community central to the school's continuing improvement. In these assemblies pupils had the opportunity to consider current issues, such as global warming and pollution, and to celebrate the achievements of others in the school. There was

particular interest in the work of the youngest pupils and a real sense of pride and pleasure in their achievements.

Attendance currently stands at 95.6% which is higher than the school's target, and much higher than at the time of the last inspection. However, within this overall improvement there is considerable variation across the school, with absence by class ranging from 3.7% to 7.7%. There have been no unauthorised absences this term. Most pupils arrive at school in good time but a small minority arrive after 9.00 a.m. and many others come on to the playground just after 8.55 a.m.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2004:

- to improve levels of attendance and punctuality – good progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of education is good overall. In 11 of the 18 lessons observed the teaching was good with several very good features. The teachers plan in appropriate detail, use resources effectively, and organise their classrooms well. The learning environment in the classrooms and around the school is a strength. Many stimulating displays of pupils' work can be enjoyed in corridors and on classroom walls. In the best lessons the teachers use pupils' work to model objectives and to set high expectations. These lessons are lively and the pupils are provided with challenging and interesting tasks. In a well taught mathematics lesson in the Foundation and Year 1 class, the pupils had many well thought out opportunities to investigate and explore shapes and discover where these shapes could be identified in the school.

In the satisfactory lessons several of the above strengths were seen, but some of the tasks were not well matched to the individual pupils' needs. The lack of match of task to need was also evident in an inadequate lesson where the pace was too slow, resulting in a lack of urgency by pupils to complete work to an acceptable standard.

In the Foundation Stage careful records are kept of children's progress towards the Early Learning Goals, with good use made of incidental opportunities to assess children's skills as they play. The transition to Key Stage 1 is well managed, with assessments made against Early Learning Goals or National Curriculum levels as appropriate. In the rest of the school there are thorough assessment systems in mathematics and science. Information from these assessments is well used to provide targets for individual pupils and identify gaps in coverage. As a result the programme of work is revised to make sure that these gaps are covered. However, assessment in English requires further development. Teachers keep reading records, but not in a consistent way. Samples of writing are regularly assessed against detailed, National Curriculum criteria and pupils have clear targets to improve their writing. However, neither the reading nor writing assessments are used sufficiently to revise the programme of work.

Useful work has gone into planning and writing the curriculum, determining school policies, providing in-service training for teachers, and establishing a number of effective monitoring procedures. The headteacher's evaluation of teaching and learning is well established and accurately identifies key development points to enable the teachers to improve the quality of their lessons.

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

- to continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning – good progress
- to improve assessment to ensure that work builds on children's prior attainment – good progress overall.

Leadership and management

The school is led and managed effectively. The headteacher is a very good leader and manager. She continues to provide very clear educational direction for the school and leads and manages change well. For example, she has very effectively led the staff in implementing the post Ofsted action plan at a brisk rate. The headteacher is successfully developing a team of teaching and support staff who are committed to the school's further improvement, including a sharp focus on pupils' learning and achievement. Her self-evaluation accurately identifies the strengths and areas for development and sets the correct priorities for further improvement. The deputy headteacher is an able teacher and good role model for training all the staff in how to enable pupils to learn. The subject teams work together to plan future actions for the development of their subjects. The mathematics and science teams are particularly effective. The headteacher is considering reviewing how subjects are led and managed in light of the low levels of achievement in literacy. This is appropriate, and literacy requires very focused attention to ensure the pupils make enough progress to raise their levels of attainment. Whilst new in post, the coordinator for special educational needs has quickly identified appropriate priorities for future development. One of these is the development of her role as coordinator for the school's work with its gifted and talented pupils.

The governors have a secure understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The chair is well informed and works closely with the headteacher to assess the progress being made. Governors are increasingly involved in the school and are looking for further ways to involve the parents in the life of the school.

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

- to increase leadership and management effectiveness – good progress.

External support

The LEA has continued to provide very good support for the school. Well thought out plans to provide appropriate training are in place for governors and senior managers. The headteacher and LEA are planning to review the support programme in light of the progress made and the changing needs of the staff and school. The

school continues to benefit from support from the local church group, for example, for the Breakfast Club and reading helpers.

Main Judgement

The school has made good progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses.

Priorities for further improvement

- Review how English is led and managed, and how all aspects of English are monitored and assessed.

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

Yours sincerely

Juliet Ward
H M Inspector