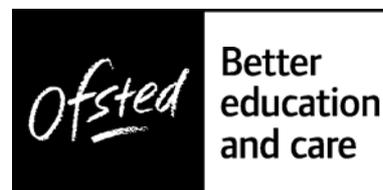


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3<sup>rd</sup> November 2005

Mrs Janet Sealy  
South Molton United C of E Junior School  
North Street  
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Devon  
EX36 3GN

Dear Mrs Sealy

## **SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SOUTH MOLTON UNITED C OF E JUNIOR SCHOOL**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with John Collings, additional inspector, to your school on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> 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, deputy headteacher, leaders of core subjects, teachers who had experienced the school's coaching programme, and a representative of the governing body's Action Plan Monitoring Committee. In addition, informal discussions were held with pupils throughout the inspection. Eleven lessons were observed.

### **Context**

There have been no significant changes in staffing since the school was inspected in February 2005. As a result of a falling roll, the number of classes was reduced from six to five in September. A review of school organisation in the South Molton area is

currently being undertaken by Devon County Council, but its findings have yet to be announced.

### **Achievement and standards**

Results in national tests for Year 6 pupils have improved consistently from the low scores attained in 2003. The 2003 results had led to the school's designation as one 'causing concern' by the Local Education Authority (LEA). Overall results in English had already returned to meet the national average in 2004. The results for 2005 look likely to remain at the national average, albeit with some weaknesses in writing at the higher levels. In 2005 there were substantial improvements in mathematics and science results. Mathematics results, which were below average in 2004, are likely to be in line with the average in 2005. Science results moved from well below average in 2004 to well above in 2005.

The statutory targets set for the school's results are appropriately challenging given the school's recent weaknesses and the broadly average attainment of pupils when they join the school. In 2005 the school met its targets for pupils reaching the nationally expected Level 4 and above, but not for pupils expected to attain the higher Level 5. In mathematics pupils did not meet their target for Level 4, but exceeded them for the number of pupils reaching Level 5. Predictions for the current Year 6 pupils, based on their end of infant school national test results and assessments of their progress in Year 5, indicate that results are likely to rise in 2006.

Pupils' achievement was identified as unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. Although better than in 2003, test results in 2004 were not as high as they should have been for most pupils. Achievement has improved and is now satisfactory, although progress through Years 3 and 4 is not as good as progress in Years 5 and 6.

In the lessons seen pupils' literacy skills were at least average for this early stage in the academic year and, as a result of focusing on the development of writing skills, achievement in English is now satisfactory. Pupils are making good progress in learning to use grammatical techniques to give greater meaning to their writing and to write in a variety of forms. Pupils' attainment in mathematics is in line with that seen nationally. It was not possible to see many lessons in science but, from talking to pupils and reviewing books, there is every indication that standards remain above average.

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

- Raise standards and achievement in mathematics, science and boys' writing – good progress.

## **Personal development and well-being**

The personal development of pupils was judged to be good overall at the last inspection and was not a focus for this visit. However, throughout the visit it was evident that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. In many lessons pupils from Year 3 onwards are given the opportunity to reflect on, and to discuss, spiritual and moral issues. They frequently work very effectively in groups and respond willingly when asked to take responsibilities for getting tasks completed. The pupils make a very positive contribution to school and develop important skills for working with others which will serve them well in later life.

Pupils enjoy their education and show good attitudes to their learning. Their attendance and punctuality are good. Pupils behave very well, although some Year 3 and 4 pupils can be quite restless, especially when work is not challenging enough and does not move ahead at a quick enough pace. Nonetheless, they comply very well with school procedures and this ensures their safety. They also feel confident that a member of staff will help them if they are in need. Pupils are very active during the long lunch break. The 'Huff and Puff' initiative has brought with it equipment and staffing which serve to promote a healthy use of time.

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

- No areas identified.

## **Quality of provision**

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and has improved since the last inspection. It was good in seven of the eleven lessons observed, satisfactory in three, and unsatisfactory in one. This means that nearly two thirds of the lessons seen were good or better and this exceeds the expectations for improving the proportion of good teaching identified in the school's action plan. This is a result of monitoring and support from the LEA and systematic monitoring and coaching within the school. Evidence shows that much of this support was in place before the last inspection but had not had sufficient time to make an impact. The school is now reaping the benefits of this investment.

There are good relationships between staff and pupils and these have a beneficial effect on the creation of an ethos where pupils' achievements are respected and recognised. Overall, there is good classroom management. This results from good planning which meets the needs of all pupils in a class. Pupils mostly find work interesting and, as a result, are fully involved in their work and achieve well.

Long term planning takes appropriate account of pupils' prior learning in English, mathematics and science. Lesson plans are skilfully modified in the light of assessment during lessons. Where teaching was less successful it was because planning did not take sufficient account of the range of abilities in the class and the work was not sufficiently challenging, particularly for higher attaining pupils.

Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to the pupils' learning through well planned support for groups and individuals. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported to enable them to take a full part in all lessons.

The use of assessment, both to help teachers plan and to help pupils make progress, has improved since the last inspection. There is now a very clear policy that identifies expectations with clear lines of responsibility. Teachers are being held to account for the progress of pupils in their classes. The school has reviewed the way in which data is recorded to monitor pupil progress. This has resulted in identifying more clearly the pupils who are not making the expected progress, and in providing the support to enable them to do so. School, class and pupil targets in mathematics and English are now set systematically and progress against these is carefully monitored. This is evident in the improved planning of the vast majority of lessons where work is well matched to the various abilities and thereby offers pupils appropriate challenge. Pupils are well aware of their short-term targets in English and mathematics. These targets are having a very positive effect on learning because pupils know exactly what they need to do to improve. The last inspection judged the care, guidance and support given to pupils as good overall with the exception of the way in which assessment was used to support pupils' progress across the school. The school has made good progress in addressing this weakness in academic support and guidance.

Improvements in planning by teachers have meant that the quality of the curriculum has been strengthened since the last inspection. Weaknesses in planning in Years 3 and 4 have started to be addressed. The planning is now related to helping pupils demonstrate the capabilities expected for their age. The curriculum has a good degree of breadth. It has a particular strength in promoting pupils' personal development through activities that get pupils working together to discuss spiritual, moral and social issues. Planning to develop pupils' basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) through work in other subjects is not always explicit. However, there is some good practice in the classroom, for example, the development of creative writing through religious education (RE) in Years 3 and 4. Very good provision is made to ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities have full access to the curriculum.

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

- Increase the proportion of lessons where teaching and learning are good or better, and remove inconsistencies in teaching across the school – good progress.
- Improve the use of assessment data in planning for pupils of different abilities – good progress.

## Leadership and management

Improving standards of achievement has been a strong priority since the school was identified as causing concern by the LEA. Since then the governing body has maintained a good degree of focus on raising the school's performance in its key areas of weakness. It has developed a good action plan with two central priorities: developing the role of senior and middle managers in taking action to bring about improvement; and improving the quality of teaching across the school. The plan identifies very explicit criteria for judging its success. The governors' Action Plan Monitoring Committee has maintained close scrutiny of improvements in line with the plan. It has further ensured that all aspects of the management of performance of staff have been linked strongly to the action plan's objectives. Additionally the school has been very careful to ensure that all forms of external support are designed around those key priorities specified in the action plan. As a consequence the school's leadership has ensured a good degree of coherence between the programmes put in place to bring about improvement.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher continue to provide sound leadership. They have been engaged in an impressive programme of monitoring and support for teaching. This has enabled the school to develop greater consistency in the quality of teaching. Where teachers have not responded successfully to this support further action has been taken. The key weakness in leadership and management identified in the last inspection was in the role played by subject leaders in ensuring that standards were high enough, and teaching was good enough, in their subjects. In literacy this role was already developing strongly at the time of the last inspection. Monitoring and development of teaching are strong in this subject. Subject leaders in mathematics and science are now able, through much more detailed scrutiny of pupils' work and assessments of their progress, to identify strengths and weaknesses in performance and help teachers plan to raise standards. The role played by subject leaders is now satisfactory, although there has not been sufficient in-class monitoring of mathematics teaching by the mathematics leader. In the longer term, the roles of subject leaders for ICT and other subjects need to be developed to allow them to check that targets for attainment are securely met through the programmes offered.

The programme to improve academic standards is being carried through with a good deal of determination but without compromising the school's strengths in promoting the personal development of its pupils. The school's evaluation of its own performance is frank and accurate, and matches that of the inspection team. The school has a good capacity to sustain its improvement.

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

- Develop the role of the senior management team and subject leaders in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, planning for the future, and in taking actions to bring about improvements – good progress.

## **External support**

The LEA's statement of action is good. The LEA has made available an intensive programme of support for the school's leaders, managers and teachers. This programme has been well designed to support the school's action plan. Its effectiveness is shown by a continued improvement in standards and achievement in the school and by much more consistent standards of teaching quality across the school. Since September the additional support brought to the school through the Intensifying Support Programme (ISP) is also leading to improvements in teaching quality and standards. This has been achieved through strengthening target setting in the classroom. These improvements were evident during this visit. The school will seek to ensure that the ISP support has coherence with other support programmes in place through the LEA.

## **Main Judgements**

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

## **Priorities for further improvement**

- Maintain the emphasis on improving the capability of staff to use assessment information to track and support pupils' achievement.
- Continue to improve the roles of subject leaders in their monitoring and development of teaching, especially through more classroom observation by the mathematics and science subject leaders.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education for Devon, and the Chief Education Officer for the Diocese of Exeter.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson

**Additional Inspector**