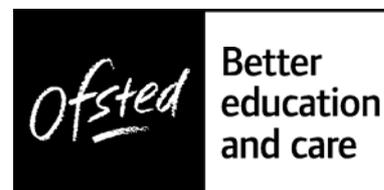


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21 December 2005

Miss J Bennett
The Headteacher
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Dear Miss Bennett

UNDERACHIEVING SCHOOLS: MONITORING INSPECTION OF FLAX BOURTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on Wednesday 7 and Thursday 8 December 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 identified as underachieving 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 the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, subject leaders for English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT), a group of pupils, the chair of governors and the chair of the governors' curriculum committee and two representatives from the local authority.

Context

The school, which is smaller than average, has 81 pupils on roll. It serves a mainly rural community and includes pupils from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. The levels of pupil mobility are above average although these are slowly decreasing. There is an above average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties, including an above average proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, with no pupils speaking

English as an additional language. For the past two years there has been a very high proportion of boys in Year 6. The school has experienced a high level of turbulence and disruption over the past few years. There is now a much more stable staffing situation, new buildings have improved the main school environment, and the number of pupils on roll is increasing.

Achievement and standards

The pupils' achievement is satisfactory although, as a result of the unsettled period that many older pupils have experienced, there is still some underachievement in Year 6. The school is well placed to raise standards further.

Children enter Reception with a range of abilities. In the current year group there is a significant number of children with skills above those normally expected. They make good progress and by the time they join Year 1 many children are likely to exceed the goals expected.

Standards at the end of Year 2 in the 2005 national tests were above average in reading, writing, mathematics and speaking and listening. In science, although all pupils achieved the expected level, no pupils achieved the higher Level 3. The school has identified the reasons for this and put actions into place which are remedying the situation. In Year 6, standards in the 2005 national tests improved in English, mathematics and science from the previous year. All pupils achieved the expected levels for Year 6 although in English and mathematics no pupils achieved the higher level. The school's analysis of data indicates that the past turbulence resulted in gaps in the pupils' knowledge which are now being successfully remedied. The size and ability of the year group also have a significant impact on the results over time due to the different ability range in each year group.

Current standards in writing, mathematics and science remain too low by Year 6 although they are improving. In English too many pupils make unnecessary mistakes with their spelling and punctuation. Their imaginative writing and use of vocabulary are improving and pupils are developing a more interesting and lively style of writing. In mathematics in Years 3 to 6 there are insufficient examples of how pupils work out their answers. Analysis of the work in science shows that, although standards are close to those expected for the pupils' ages, there is not always sufficient challenge for the more able pupils especially with regard to investigative work.

The school has begun to identify and use opportunities across the curriculum to develop literacy and numeracy skills but acknowledges that much more remains to be done in this area. Very little ICT was observed during the inspection. The school has improved the resources which has had a positive impact on the staff and pupils' confidence. No religious education was observed during the inspection.

Pupils in Reception and Years 1 and 2 make good progress. In Years 3 to 6 progress is satisfactory overall. The pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities make good progress because of the effective support which they receive. The teachers are

aware of the more able pupils. In most lessons these pupils receive more challenging work and make satisfactory progress.

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

- raise standards in English, mathematics, science, and information and communication technology for the older pupils, and religious education, and the pupils' literacy, numeracy and information and communication skills across the curriculum, throughout the school—progress is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Most pupils enjoy their lessons and are keen to learn. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is generally good. The school has clear strategies to support any pupils who have behavioural difficulties and the pupils understand these. They respect the school environment and are proud of the new buildings and playground apparatus. Their ideas are taken into account and they feel valued. Pupils state that the school council was effective in making school dinners healthier. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. Relationships in the school are very good. This helps the pupils with their learning as they feel confident and willing to have a go at answering questions. Pupils mix together well although opportunities for group work are too limited in Years 3 to 6.

Pupils are encouraged to adopt a healthy lifestyle and to eat healthily. They appreciate the range of extracurricular activities including football, basketball and tag rugby. Teachers ensure that pupils are aware of safety issues, for example, in science lessons when using candles or boiling water. The pupils show respect and understanding for the feelings of others but the school acknowledges that more emphasis is needed on the multicultural aspects of our society. Pupils develop skills to support their future economic well-being. For example, older pupils raised funds towards their residential visit at the recent Christmas Fair. There have been two exclusions during the past term.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with some good teaching in each key stage. Most lessons are clearly planned and pupils understand what they need to do because of the teachers' explanations. In the best lessons teachers make good use of information about the pupils' progress. They plan activities which are matched to the different ages and abilities of the pupils. In these lessons the teaching is lively and has a brisk pace which captures the pupils' interest and helps them learn. Teachers use well directed questions to check that the pupils understand their work. A range of strategies, including demonstration, discussion and questioning, keeps the pupils interested. In some classes there are not enough helpful prompts to support pupils with their literacy and numeracy skills. In a few lessons the pace is too slow, activities do not always match the range of pupils' abilities and, consequently, attention wanders and pupils do not make as much progress in their learning. When time is not always used to full effect the final plenary session loses its impact in reinforcing or assessing what the pupils have learnt. In some lessons

there is insufficient opportunity for group work, independent work, or discussion, which limits the learning.

In all lessons the pupils made at least satisfactory progress. However, the proportion of good and very good teaching is not yet high enough to ensure that the rate of progress accelerates and that all pupils achieve their full potential.

The school has developed effective assessment and tracking procedures and has collected a useful bank of information. The use of this information to plan activities which meet the needs of all the pupils is not yet fully embedded in all the teaching. Not all pupils are fully aware of their targets for improvement. This hampers the progress which the pupils make, particularly the more able. However, the school recognises this and is working hard to remedy the situation.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and enhanced by a range of interesting clubs and activities. The school has begun to identify and make more use of opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum, for example, through ICT.

The quality of care and guidance for pupils is good. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties, are included in school life. Pupils' individual needs are identified quickly and they receive good support. The school works well with outside agencies to provide extra support where needed. Pupils say that they feel well looked after and know who to go to if they have a problem or need support. The school works successfully with parents which supports pupils' learning.

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

- improve the provision for more able pupils in each class, through a more focused use of assessment—progress is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher provides effective leadership and has led improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, through enabling the staff to work together in a productive way. She has a determined focus to remove any underachievement. Through effective monitoring she has identified the school's strengths and areas to be developed. Actions to support the learning have been put into place, for example, through extra support or further training. The headteacher is well supported by the staff team and governors. Subject leaders in English, mathematics and ICT have developed their roles and have a clear understanding of the priorities for further improvement. They are developing more confidence in their leadership roles and are keen to work together to eliminate any underachievement. The school acknowledges that the monitoring and evaluating roles of subject leaders, in order to raise standards, require further improvement. The outline plan for monitoring and evaluating the curriculum provides useful guidance. Although the school is currently running a deficit budget there is careful financial planning to reduce this deficit.

The governors are well led. They suitably hold the school to account for its actions and support new developments energetically. The action plan is reviewed on a regular basis. Governors have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have a determination to ensure the quality of education continues to rise.

The school's accommodation in the main building has much improved and is spacious and attractive. This has a positive impact on the pupils' attitudes and behaviour.

The school's post-Ofsted action plan is clearly focused on raising achievement with helpful success criteria and timescales. The school's own self-evaluation is accurate and the school has a good capacity to improve further.

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

- develop the role of subject leaders—progress is satisfactory.

External support

The local authority (LA) has provided very good support to the school with extensive advice, support and training. The LA action plan identifies clear priorities over a manageable timescale.

Main Judgements

The school has made satisfactory progress in dealing with the causes of underachievement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that all pupils, and especially the more able, achieve the standards of which they are capable.
- Continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the use of assessment information.
- Strengthen middle management by continuing to develop the subject leaders' roles in monitoring and evaluating standards.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Chief Education Officer for North Somerset and the Education Officer for Bath and Wells Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Anne Johns

Additional Inspector