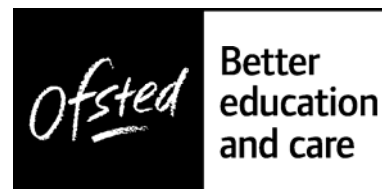


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1 November 2005

Mr C Laybourn
The Headteacher
William Fletcher Primary School
Rutten Lane
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Dear Mr Laybourn

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WILLIAM FLETCHER PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Mike Thompson, Additional Inspector to your school on 20 and 21 October, 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, subject co-ordinators, groups of pupils, a governor and a representative from the local authority.

Context

There have been four new teaching appointments since the last inspection. Two full time and two part time teachers have recently joined the staff. There have also been significant changes to the governing body. There are five new governors and a new chairman and vice chairman have recently been elected.

Achievement and standards

In 2005, the results of national tests at the end of Year 2 showed an improvement in writing and mathematics. In reading the results improved dramatically with a large proportion of the pupils reaching the highest level. The results of national tests at the end of Year 6 improved in English and were considerably higher in mathematics than in recent years. Comparisons with the results achieved by the same group of pupils at the end of Year 2 shows that overall, they made satisfactory progress.

Evidence from lessons and the pupils' work confirms that they are now making satisfactory progress overall. In mathematics progress is accelerating because of the increasing emphasis being placed on challenging the more able pupils. In English, although standards have risen and progress is generally satisfactory, there are still weaknesses in writing throughout the school.

The results of annual optional tests show that past underachievement is still having an impact on standards. However, improvements in tracking in mathematics are enabling the teachers to set challenging targets to make up for earlier lost ground. In English and science tracking systems are not sufficiently developed to support target setting that can stimulate rapid progress.

Whilst the presentation of the pupils' work is generally acceptable it is not as good as it should be.

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

- Build upon the recent improvements in teaching and learning to ensure that standards are raised significantly and that pupils make more consistent progress over time – satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' personal development is good, as it was at the time of the last inspection. Attendance is good. Pupils say they enjoy school, feel safe and are keen to learn. Their relationships with each other and with the staff are good. Pupils are considerate to one another and know that they can count on friends and teachers for help, should they need it. They show respect for the feelings of others, and have a clear sense of right and wrong. Pupils play happily together and say that although instances of bullying or aggressive behaviour occur from time to time, they are rare and are dealt with quickly. They are confident and polite, and are good at carrying out responsible jobs which contribute to the smooth running of the school. These include helping in the school office, which the Year 6 pupils particularly value. This experience gives them an opportunity to develop skills that may aid their future economic well being. Pupils have a good awareness of what it means to have a healthy lifestyle and to keep safe. The school's participation in the Junior Citizen initiative helps pupils develop an understanding of potential hazards at home and raises their awareness of 'stranger danger'. They understand that they can make a useful contribution to the community, for example, through the school Eco Committee. Year 6 pupils are very clear about how their learning in school has

changed their attitudes to healthy eating. The pupils grow in confidence because of the school's strong and effective commitment to personal development.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. This is consistent with the school's own evaluation. All of the lessons seen were satisfactory or better. Teaching in Years 2 and 6 is good.

Lessons are thoroughly planned and take account of the needs of different groups, although not all provide sufficient challenge for the more able pupils. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities continue to be well supported. In all lessons pupils know what they are expected to learn and teachers use questioning effectively to help the pupils to deepen their understanding. The teachers mark the pupils' work, but in some cases they do not provide the pupils with clear guidance or illustration on how they can improve. Whilst a more systematic approach to assessment has emerged in mathematics, in English systems lack coherence and targets are broad rather than being precisely focused upon what pupils need to learn next. The teachers assess the pupils' progress but the information they collect is not used effectively to move learning on at a rapid pace.

The teachers are making more effective use of information and communication technology. For example, in a geography lesson Year 4 pupils were set the task of searching the internet for information about the weather in different parts of the world. The school has just taken delivery of an interactive whiteboard for every classroom as part of its strategy to improve teaching and learning further.

Relationships throughout the school are good. The pupils show an eagerness to learn and contribute well to lessons. The classrooms and work areas are functional but dull and do not provide an inspiring environment in which to work. With the exception of the bright and welcoming entrance hall many areas of the school are untidy and do not create an expectation of high quality or promote high standards.

The school continues to provide a wide range of activities to interest and engage the pupils. Curriculum enhancement continues to be a strong feature of the school's provision. For example, annual residential visits for pupils in Years 2, 4 and 6 make an important contribution to their social development as well as extending the curriculum.

At the time of the last inspection provision for the Foundation stage was good. Planning for the youngest children remains good and ensures that they are given a secure platform for future learning.

The school is good at caring for its pupils and places a high priority on their welfare and well being. It is an orderly, calm and friendly community in which pupils learn happily. However, pupils do not have a sufficient understanding of precisely what they need to do next to improve and accelerate their rate of progress.

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

- Build upon the recent improvements in teaching and learning to ensure that standards are raised significantly and that pupils make more consistent progress over time – satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The school's plans for improvement are clear and, after recent revision, are well focussed on the areas of serious weakness. The headteacher has taken steps to make better use of test data. For example, he has carried out a detailed analysis of test papers to identify topics and questions where the pupils' responses were weak. The results have provided areas for improvement in teaching.

The mathematics co-ordinator, who is also a member of the senior management team, is playing a central role in the improvement strategy. Alongside the headteacher he has established systematic approaches to monitoring the quality of teaching, rigorous tracking of pupils' progress and is setting challenging targets. He has also worked with the local authority mathematics consultant to help the teachers to improve further. The impact of these actions is most evident in the good improvements in the standards achieved in national tests in 2005 and the improving progress in mathematics lessons.

The actions taken to improve the provision for mathematics are seen as a blueprint for English and science. In these subjects far less progress has been made because the co-ordinations have only very recently taken over the role. The English co-ordinator has a clear plan of action which she is now beginning to implement. The inexperienced science co-ordinator has had little opportunity, in the few weeks she has held the post, to make an impact.

An unsettled period prior to the last inspection and the headteachers' considerable teaching commitment contributed to the weaknesses found in leadership and management. These were identified as a lack of clarity of vision and inadequate school improvement planning. Changes in teaching staff have allowed the governors to significantly reduce the headteacher's teaching commitment. He now teaches one afternoon each week. Consequently he has far more time to lead and manage the school effectively. The plan for improvement is now good and focussed on raising standards. The headteacher compiles monthly evaluations of progress towards the objectives within the plan, which latterly considers the impact of some improvement activities on standards in English and mathematics. However, a sharper and more evaluative approach to assessing the success of improvement activities is needed to generate the rapid momentum that will bring about the high standards the school aims to achieve.

The governing body has undergone considerable change in personnel, organisation and approach. Governors recognise that in the past they 'supported rather than challenged' the school. All governors are now paired with a subject co-ordinator. They are making visits to the school to meet with co-ordinators and to find out for themselves how subjects are taught and progress evaluated. Although many

changes have yet to be implemented, governors have a much clearer understanding of their role and the need to hold the headteacher and the school to account.

The headteacher's judgement that progress, since the last inspection, has been satisfactory is realistic and accurate. Similarly his assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching within the school was confirmed in the inspection. He has evaluated his own performance, identified the need for further leadership training and in his own words is, 'learning to lead differently'. He recognises the need for greater rigour in monitoring and more precise evaluation of the school's performance. The school's own evaluations have correctly highlighted the need for more precise assessment of the pupils' progress and sharper use of target setting, particularly in English. The school has the capacity to improve further.

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

- Improve the leadership of the school – satisfactory progress.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is satisfactory it gives a clear indication of the resources available to the school to support improvement. It is focused on the weaknesses identified in the last inspection report and outlines specific actions to be taken. The task group meets monthly to monitor progress.

Input from the local authority advisers and consultants has been consistent with the improvement plan and valued by the school. The impact of the support is already evident in the teaching of mathematics and the greater consistency in progress in lessons.

The network of local schools has helped the headteacher to identify good practice, for example, in involving the governors more effectively in monitoring the work of the school. As a result of visits to local schools and discussions with other headteachers he is better informed and has a broader range of strategies to draw on to raise standards further.

Main Judgements

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

Priorities for further improvement

- Further improve systems for assessing the pupils' work, tracking their progress and setting them challenging individual targets.
- Use the good model of subject co-ordination in mathematics to generate rapid improvements in the leadership of English and science.
- Place a greater emphasis on evaluating the impact of improvement activities on the pupils' progress.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director for Learning and Culture, Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Parker
Additional Inspector