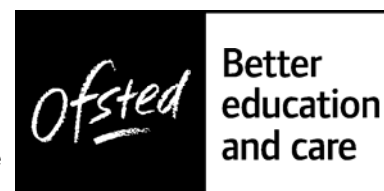


Prospects Learning Services Ltd
132-138 High Street
Bromley
Kent
BR1 1EZ

T 020 8313 7760
F 020 8464 3393

Ofsted helpline
08456 404045



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Ms S Nisbett
St Christopher's CE School
Langford
Lechlade
Gloucestershire
GL7 3LA

Dear Ms Nisbett

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST CHRISTOPHER'S CE SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Christopher Parker AI to your school on 5 and 6 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 found to have serious weaknesses in April 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 teachers and other staff members, the chair of governors, a further governor, a representative from the local authority, and groups of pupils.

Context

The headteacher has left the school, and the former deputy headteacher was appointed headteacher in September 2005.

Achievement and standards

The results of national tests in 2005, at the end of Year 2, in reading were well above average and half of the pupils reached the highest level. However, in writing the results fell to below average and no pupils reached the highest levels. In mathematics the results were marginally above average.

The results of national tests at the end of Year 6 showed good improvements in English and mathematics. Comparisons with the results achieved by the same group of pupils at the end of Year 2 shows that they made good progress over four years. However, the work of current Year 6 pupils shows standards in writing are not high enough and pupils are not making as much progress as they should. There are weaknesses in writing throughout the school. In mathematics, progress is satisfactory.

Currently the assessment of the pupils' work is not rigorous enough and the use of targets to help the pupils to improve is inconsistent and, in some cases, ineffective. Developments in marking and peer assessment are not yet resulting in the pupils making the progress they should in writing. The assessment of writing is too narrowly focussed and does not make consistent demands for high standards of, for example, spelling and punctuation. The standard of presentation in some pupils' work is unsatisfactory. In Year 6 too many pupils have scant regard for the way in which they form letters or present their work. Handwriting is not as good as it should be throughout the school.

The quality of artwork on display is of a high standard, and reflects the school's vision of helping pupils to become creative, thinking and imaginative. The older pupils use colour, tone and texture very effectively.

Personal development and well-being

Standards of pupils' personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are satisfactory, as they were in April 2005. Attendance is good. Pupils enjoy being at school and say they feel safe in school and on the playground. Their relationships with each other are, for the most part, positive. Most pupils are considerate to one another and know that they can count on teachers for help, should they need it.

Behaviour is satisfactory but it is not as good as it should be. In some lessons, pupils do not settle to the task quickly enough or concentrate fully on their work. As a result they do not achieve as much as they should. Playground behaviour is satisfactory although pupils say that their relationships with supervising adults are not as good at lunchtimes as at playtimes.

The pupils are being given greater opportunities to respond to their teacher's marking comments. In Year 6 the pupils are not yet showing the maturity expected or needed to benefit from this way of working. In some lessons some of the pupils do not respond with the enthusiasm and application that might be expected.

The school encourages pupils to eat healthily and they know that exercise is good for them. They particularly enjoy physical education lessons. Pupils make good contributions to the school community. For example, the older pupils prepare the hall for assemblies. They also support the wider community through collections for charity. Their preparation for economic well-being is extended through their running of events such as a bring and buy sale.

The school council has an increasing role and status within the school. Its members welcome the opportunity to represent their peers. Currently they are making decisions about, and organising, Christmas events. They are also discussing how a quiet area of the playground might be established to provide greater choice for pupils. However, meetings are still quite short and guided by adults rather than being chaired by the pupils themselves.

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

- involve pupils more by listening to, valuing and acting on their views – satisfactory progress.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning in the school are satisfactory. In the good lessons seen, pupils were challenged and had opportunities to consolidate their learning; time was used effectively; an interactive whiteboard was used to enhance the teaching and learning; the teacher's questioning was demanding; and pupils took opportunities to decide which of several worksheets best matched their needs, and to assess their own and each other's learning. Elsewhere, lessons were planned adequately, and pupils made satisfactory progress. However, some lessons lacked challenge for some pupils. Unevenness of response – including untidy work and off task behaviour – was tolerated. Worksheets were not proof read adequately. Pupils moved slowly into the classroom and between activities.

The school has revised its approach to timetabling so that subjects are covered more evenly in all years. The links between subjects have been strengthened. The length of the school day has been extended informally, and is due to be extended formally shortly. The range of extra-curricular provision remains wide.

Leadership and management

The school now has a substantive headteacher, and a leadership and management structure with the capacity to help it to improve. The headteacher, staff and governors are committed to providing a high quality education at St Christopher's, and are working together effectively towards this end. A vision statement issued by the school in December 2005 reflects the shared emphasis on enabling every child to reach their full potential within a stimulating, healthy and safe environment.

The strategic planning of the school has improved. The school's action plan is clear and thorough and sets out what needs to be done and who will lead each

development. Its organisation shows a sense of urgency, and reflects the sense of purpose with which this school plans to secure its improvement.

The self-evaluation of the school has improved. The headteacher has attended a course in self-evaluation, and a self-evaluation form has been completed in draft.

The school needs to base its self-evaluation, and monitoring of its action plan, on their impact on teaching and learning and achievement within the school.

The tracking of pupils' progress has improved. There are good records showing how well pupils are doing at all stages in English, mathematics and science. This information is used to set targets at the end of each key stage, but the results of all tests are not yet analysed in sufficient depth to provide an accurate picture of year on year achievement.

Subject leaders have been given time and resources to carry out their roles, and initial progress has been made in some cases.

The governance of the school has continued to improve, and the governors support and challenge the headteacher very effectively. The school has set a deficit budget for this year, but has planned to be in balance by April 2007.

The school has the capacity to improve, given the close and challenging working relationship of the headteacher, governors and local authority, and the culture of improvement that has already been generated.

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

- strengthen the leadership of the school so that a clear strategic plan for improvement is established immediately – satisfactory progress
- put whole-school systems into place for the assessment and evaluation of the school's performance and ensure these are followed consistently – satisfactory progress
- enable subject leaders to do their job effectively - satisfactory progress.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is good. It outlines the support the school has received, and will receive, and reflects its close work alongside the school. It is integrated with the school's action plan, and commits the local authority to extensive and coherent support for the school. The report of a review that the local authority carried out in November has provided the school with a frank review of the progress made in its key issues since the inspection in April 2005.

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

- raising the achievement of pupils, particularly in writing
- raising the overall quality of teaching and learning
- improving the consistency with which the staff manage the behaviour of pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Mills

Additional Inspector