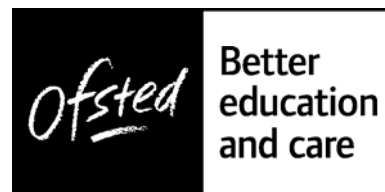


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Mrs J Herriman
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23 December 2005

Dear Mrs Herriman

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE DUSTON SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Ian Hodgkinson, Nick Pett and Valerie Greatrex, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 8 and 9 December 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the sixth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 2003.

This letter will be posted 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

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with yourself, groups of pupils, nominated staff, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection there have been significant staff changes including a new headteacher and four new members of the senior management team. The school has invested in a commercial scheme for consistency management and cooperative discipline, a three year programme from Texas, USA. The school gained the Artsmark silver award in September 2005.

Achievement and standards

The 2005 national tests taken by Year 9 pupils showed a marked decline compared with the previous year. The local authority's analysis of the results reported that the school's performance declined relative to schools nationally and was significantly lower than expected. Less than half the pupils achieved the expected Level 5 or better in English and most made unsatisfactory progress overall when their achievement at the end of Year 6 was taken into account. The best results were in mathematics where almost two thirds of pupils reached the expected Level 5, over a third achieved Level 6 or higher, and pupils who have learning difficulties performed well. Pupils also underperformed in science where just over half achieved the nationally expected level or higher.

The 2005 GCSE results were unsatisfactory. The school expected almost half the pupils to achieve five or more A* to C grades, but only just over a third did so. The school has identified marked underachievement in information and communication technology (ICT), media studies, business studies and single science as contributory factors to the underperformance.

Attainment by the end of the sixth form was below average. A level results have declined since 2003. There have been consistently good performances in the sciences and physical education, but weak performances in English and history. Girls have done much better than boys. Students' performance has been better than average on vocational courses at Levels 2 and 3.

Standards in lessons varied widely but were close to those seen typically in other schools. The progress made by the pupils has accelerated markedly since the previous monitoring visit in response to the significantly improved learning ethos and gradually improving teaching.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' attitudes to learning have improved significantly since the last visit. The new behaviour strategies introduced in the autumn term have radically improved behaviour in lessons and around the school. There is very little graffiti or litter around the site. Pupils now listen to their teachers and their peers, have greater respect for themselves and others, and are starting to enjoy learning. The new system for rewards and sanctions is being consistently followed. The pupils like the opportunities for recognition that this provides and are aware of the consequences of their actions should they misbehave. Exclusions are still too high, but are slowly decreasing with the pupils being brought back into school life as quickly as possible.

The school cannot be confident of its attendance figures before 7 November but since then attendance is 87.4% and remains unsatisfactory. It is better in Years 7 and 8 than in Years 9, 10 and 11. The quicker and more accurate response to absence is starting to improve attendance.

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is broadly satisfactory. There are good opportunities for pupils to learn about different ways of life through assemblies, personal, health, and social education. Pupils work in the community with senior citizens and involve themselves in a wide range of well attended extracurricular activities. They value their increasing responsibilities around the school, such as becoming classroom managers. Tutor periods contribute well to the pupils' moral and social development but they do not consistently include a daily act of worship. Assemblies fully comply with statutory requirements.

Changes in the arrangements for social and study facilities have helped sixth formers to adopt a more serious attitude to work. They are now more involved in the life of the main school by taking on voluntary duties at breaktimes, contributing to assemblies, and acting as classroom assistants. There is a good degree of participation in the recreation programme for sixth formers, aimed at keeping them healthy and interested in activities.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2003:

- improve students' attitudes—outstanding progress
- provide a daily act of collective worship—inadequate progress.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning have improved markedly and are approaching satisfactory levels. Pupils commented about the better quality of teaching they are experiencing and how this has helped improve their achievement.

The consistent application of the recently introduced system of pupil management and cooperative discipline has underpinned improvements in teaching. During the inspection relationships between teachers and pupils had improved markedly and were often good. There was little sign of the previously reported casual approach by pupils to their work, poor listening to the teachers and each other, and being too dependent upon the close supervision of adults. Pupils were beginning to take more responsibility for their learning and enjoying their work.

The proportion of good or outstanding teaching has doubled since the previous monitoring inspection but there remains too much that is unsatisfactory. The best lessons were well structured with stimulating and interesting work which motivated the pupils to do well. There was a brisk pace and high expectations of the pupils' behaviour and work. The quality of teachers' questioning was good, helping pupils to understand their work and contribute positively to the lesson. There were many more well planned opportunities for the pupils to work in pairs and small groups to solve problems, work cooperatively, and develop their literacy skills.

Where teaching was less successful, the work did not adequately match the pupils' different learning needs or abilities so that their progress was unsatisfactory. Teachers often talked for too long and the learning activities were uninspiring. Pace and challenge were insufficient to engage and sustain the attention of the pupils. In some lessons, the inadequacy of resources, especially in English and mathematics, undermined learning opportunities. The unsatisfactory computing resources on the Prestbury Road Campus adversely affected the pupils' learning opportunities.

The quality of marking has improved, but remains too variable. Some books were unmarked since September. The best marking recorded the pupils' level of achievement and helped them understand what they needed to do to raise the standard of their work. Homework is set more regularly, but there are still occasions when none is set.

Teaching and learning in the sixth form were mostly good. Lessons were well structured, moving briskly through a range of well pitched activities to keep students working at pace. Lessons were well linked to examination objectives and sometimes students were able to assess their own or each other's work against examination criteria. Marking, however, varied in quality and regularity and did not provide consistently good feedback about the development of key skills, particularly extended writing.

The quality of display has improved and is now satisfactory. Faculty corridors and classrooms are far more stimulating learning environments. The state of the furnishings and fabric of the school has improved noticeably. There is far less graffiti on desks, chairs, exercise books and walls, reflecting the better care shown by the school community.

Pupils receive their curriculum entitlement in all subjects except citizenship and ICT, where statutory requirements are not met. In Key Stage 4 the curriculum does not have sufficient breadth and balance to meet pupils' differing needs and to prepare pupils for future education post-16 or for the world of work. The structure of the timetable retains some weaknesses.

A sharp decline in enrolment has meant that the sixth form is now below average size. Nonetheless, the curriculum offers students a satisfactory range of academic A levels and vocational courses at Levels 1, 2 and 3. There are firm and appropriate plans to expand the number of vocational and applied courses offered at, or below, Level 2. The curriculum is given good breadth by general studies and key skills courses, and an organised recreational programme.

There is a radical improvement in the quality of care provided by the school for the pupils since the last visit. Pupils are starting to feel their teachers care about them and that they are approachable should they have any problems with work or personal issues. They receive helpful advice about the choice of courses for GCSE and career options available to them post-16. The school

works closely with a variety of agencies to promote pupils' well-being. The required procedures for health and safety and for child protection are in place. Risk assessment and health and safety checks are carefully attended to in order to ensure pupils' safety at all times.

Sixth formers are given good guidance and support in choosing courses, careers and higher education options. Support and guidance has been strengthened this term by the introduction of a programme of academic review. This allows students' current standards of work to be reviewed against examination target grades, and allows the student with a tutor to set specific targets to keep performance on track.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2003:

- improve the quality of teaching; raise teachers' expectations and improve the achievement of students—good progress
- ensure students have their full curriculum entitlement—inadequate progress.

Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management provided by senior managers has improved radically. The new headteacher has given the school a clear and appropriate vision to work towards. Her outstanding leadership has raised the expectations of the whole school community. The improvements she has led are celebrated by pupils, staff and governors. She has brought coherence to the work of senior managers and led significant improvements in teaching, learning, behaviour and care. She has been very well supported by the current team of senior leaders, all of whom were new to the school in September. As a team they have worked hard and successfully to address many weaknesses in management structures. For example, over 40 policies have been written and implemented, some of which secure health, safety and child protection issues. Leadership and management elsewhere in the school are mixed and have yet to develop sufficiently to implement improvements quickly. Training and careful recruitment have considerably strengthened the expertise available to the school, but some weaknesses remain, particularly in mathematics, modern foreign languages, ICT and English. Monitoring is thorough, well organised and rigorous and has helped the new management team to identify areas of strength and weakness quickly. Strategic planning and actions to bring about improvement are being effective. The improved ethos for teaching and learning has reduced the stress on staff. This is reflected in the marked decline in staff absence. The pupils gratefully appreciate the reduction in the number of lessons taught by unfamiliar supply teachers.

Satisfactory progress has been made in improving leadership and management in the sixth form, in particular in developing a positive ethos among sixth formers and increasing their involvement in the life of the school.

Nonetheless, shortcomings remain in the use of data to monitor teaching and learning.

Governance continues to be good. Some governors visit the school while it is in session and are collecting evidence about the school's progress from a wider range of sources. The draft plans to coordinate governors' visits into a focused programme are appropriate.

After a long period where the hard work of the staff has not led to improvements in the quality of provision, the school has made rapid progress in less than a term and clearly has the capacity to continue to improve quickly.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2003:

- provide the necessary leadership to drive whole school improvement—outstanding progress
- ensure managers apply monitoring and support systems more consistently and rigorously—good progress.

External support

The local authority's support has improved. The use of targeted intervention groups to coach teachers has been better focused and more effective than previous advice. The monitoring of the school's progress is good. The school improvement partner is providing good support to the school's new management.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures—inadequate.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection—outstanding.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

Priorities for further improvement

- Eradicate unsatisfactory teaching where it still exists
- continue to improve the pupils' attitudes to learning
- improve the management skills of middle managers.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children and Young People's Service for Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Redman **H M Inspector**