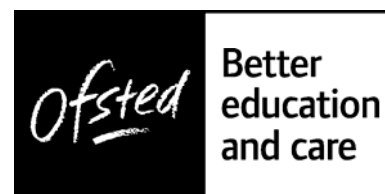


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18 November 2005

The Headteacher
Mr R Robson
Sheredes School
Cock Lane
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Dear Mr Robson

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SHEREDES SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Lynne Blakelock, Alan Lemon and John Francis, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 31 October and 1 November, 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 and other senior managers, teachers, pupils, the chair and vice-chair of governors and a representative from the local education authority (LEA).

Context

There have been two substantial changes in the school's situation since it was inspected in February 2005. The first has been the reduced numbers entering Year 7. This under-subscription is caused partly by demographic changes in the area but also by current local perceptions of the school. Positive changes include a growth in

the sixth form, which has almost doubled in size. There has been a slight reduction in casual admissions and an improvement in staffing in science. The school continues to face the challenge of building a mathematics department with stable and well-qualified teachers.

Achievement and standards

Results in the external examinations in 2005 show a significant improvement on those of the previous year. Half of Year 11 pupils gained five or more higher grades in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in contrast to less than one third in 2004. The school was very close to its targets for the cohort. The gap between the results for boys and girls narrowed considerably although girls remained more successful overall. These results, however, mask the well-below average proportion of pupils gaining both English and mathematics. Standards in mathematics remain too low with less than a quarter of the pupils gaining Grade C or better. The number of pupils gaining Grade C in science was double that in mathematics. English results were significantly better than both science and mathematics with around two thirds of the cohort achieving higher grades.

Despite improved examination outcomes, the school recognises that many pupils, particularly boys, continue to make much less progress than they should given their starting points at Years 7 and 9. National test results at the end of Year 9 have declined slightly this year, particularly in English. The school failed to meet its targets for Key Stage 3 in each of English, mathematics and science. Weak literacy skills have been identified as a major obstacle to improving achievement among boys. Across the school, too few boys or girls made enough effort to apply the literacy skills acquired in English to other areas. In particular, standards of presentation are often poor although there is some good practice, in food technology, for example.

Progress in lessons remains too variable and in some areas such as mathematics is too slow to raise standards. Poor listening and communication skills coupled with fragile motivation create barriers to learning in some classes. In lessons such as English, music, performing arts and physical education, pupils generally make good progress. In some science classes, the regular recall of earlier learning coupled with increasingly rigorous assessment tasks supports pupils' learning well. Other than where there is a substantial imbalance in the number of boys and girls in a class, there was no marked difference in the progress made in lessons seen during the visit by either gender.

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

- address the underachievement across the school, especially in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science with particular emphasis on the underachievement of boys – good progress has been made in English, satisfactory progress in science but inadequate progress in mathematics. Overall progress has been satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour in the lessons seen and around the school was satisfactory. Mostly, pupils respond well to reasonable requests from teachers and other adults. Movement about the school is orderly and at break times the atmosphere is generally good-natured. Pupils report that they enjoyed access to the school building at breaks. They are keen that none abuse this privilege. Nevertheless, in a few lessons, and sometimes with teachers new to the school, immature and rude behaviour is too readily tolerated. Not all staff consistently follow the school's procedures for managing behaviour. The school has successfully reduced the number of permanent and fixed-term exclusions.

Attitudes to learning match closely the quality of teaching. Where imaginative teaching catches their interest, pupils are engrossed in their tasks and participate willingly in group and class activities. However, significant numbers of pupils are too casual about learning and are often passively compliant rather than engaged productively. Poorly presented work, a paucity of written responses in exercise books and homework tasks, and a lack of equipment for lessons reflect their lack of urgency in learning. The school has had a measure of success, however, in encouraging better punctuality to school and to lessons than at the time of the last inspection.

Attendance has improved since the last inspection in all year groups and is close to national figures for secondary schools. A major factor in reducing absenteeism has been the robust and consistent approach adopted by pastoral staff. The recruitment of an attendance officer has brought about improved and effective communications with parents. There is little internal truancy, but not all staff are rigorous enough in registering pupils in lessons.

The school council offers pupils a platform to make their views heard. They report that they are listened to seriously. There are few concerns about bullying and they enjoy the wide range of activities beyond the school day. Pupils are positive about opportunities for leadership, proud to be prefects and keen to explain their fund-raising and charity events.

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

- improve attendance – progress has been good.

Quality of provision

There has been a modest improvement in the proportion of teaching that is good or better. However, the overall quality of teaching has not improved enough since the last inspection. Three quarters of teaching seen was satisfactory or better. Two of the 46 part lessons seen were outstanding, 16 were good and 11 unsatisfactory.

In the most successful lessons, planning is well-founded on reliable data to which all teachers have ready access. Teachers make good use of methods to assess the

pupils' learning as seen in an English lesson for Year 10 and in music lessons. Challenging questioning and good support allow pupils, including those with special educational needs, to make rapid progress. Relationships are very good and the pupils respond with a sense of urgency and pride in their work.

In less effective lessons, the pace of work is very slow so that pupils become restless and easily distracted. Often the pupils' immature behaviour is not well managed and too much time is wasted on trivia. Expected learning outcomes are unclear to both teachers and pupils. Planning pays little attention to methods to help pupils learn. In a few lessons seen, the teachers' focus on individuals resulted in a lack of awareness of the whole class.

The school has formulated clear guidelines aimed at improving teaching. There has been a rigorous programme of monitoring and staff development activities, well supported by the LEA. The school's assessment of the quality of teaching is generally accurate as is its identification of areas for improvement. Some middle managers provide very good guidance and support to teachers, often using the school's own coaching model. However, not all subject leaders take a robust enough approach to evaluating teachers' planning and to ensuring they have access to models of good practice within their areas.

School-wide procedures to assess pupils' progress have developed effectively. There are regular review days and target-setting activities. Most pupils in Years 10 and 11 are aware of their targets and current working grades. Assessment procedures within and across departments are not yet consistent, however. There are examples of good practice which are beginning to influence other curricular areas. Performing arts, music and English, for example, have worked together well to improve practice. The school's now rigorous analysis of pupils' performance in examinations provides a solid platform from which to address underachievement. Marking remains inconsistent. While there are examples of effective marking, not enough provides good guidance to pupils, not only on what they need to do to improve but also on what they do well and why. The school has a well-considered policy aimed at improving marking but it has not yet had sufficient impact across the curriculum.

Good progress on developing provision for literacy across the curriculum is beginning to improve standards. Among other initiatives are the very successful lessons focusing on communication skills for pupils in Year 7. The high level of support, including from older pupil volunteers, raised confidence levels and self-esteem and resulted in improved fluency and self-evaluation skills in the sessions seen. The beginnings of a school-wide approach to literacy were evident in several lessons in which staff paid close attention to new vocabulary and spelling.

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

- improve teaching and learning by ensuring teachers have appropriately high expectations through the effective use of information about pupils' performance – satisfactory progress has been made;

- address the inconsistencies in marking and feedback for pupils – satisfactory progress has been made;
- develop pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum – good progress has been made in setting up systems to support literacy skills.

Leadership and management

The headteacher gives energetic and purposeful leadership and is committed to raising standards in all aspects of the school. He is well supported by the current leadership team who share a determination to do the best for the pupils. The leadership team has an open and honest assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result, the capacity to improve has strengthened since the February inspection and is now good. Standards have risen, especially in the key areas of English and science. Attendance has improved. The monitoring of teaching and learning has become more rigorous as has the use of data at whole school level.

The quality of middle managers remains too variable despite timely support in areas of weakness. There are models of good practice among the heads of some major departments who are active in identifying and remedying underachievement. Nevertheless, senior and middle managers have yet to co-ordinate their efforts effectively to ensure they adopt consistent approaches to their work across the school.

The governing body has been significantly strengthened through the appointment of a new chair and other experienced members. They have adopted a robust approach to holding the school to account and are determined to foster rapid school improvement. The governing body has addressed fully the statutory breaches in the provision for information and communication technology. Plans are in hand to comply with the requirements for a daily act of worship.

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

- embed more systematic approaches to management across the school, including monitoring and evaluation - satisfactory progress has been made;
- meet statutory requirements to develop ICT across the curriculum; ensure reports and prospectus contain statutory information; provide a daily act of collective worship - satisfactory progress has been made.

External support

The LEA has provided very good support. The school effectiveness adviser, along with other local authority personnel, has engaged very positively with the school on each area of weakness. Additional resources have enabled the strengthening of the senior team through a consultant deputy and headteacher. The integrated LEA and

school action plan is sound. It sets out a comprehensive list of actions for each area for improvement. It is complemented well by an impact evaluation plan to measure the effectiveness of both resources and actions. The school has a useful traffic light system to identify actions taken so far. Mechanisms to evaluate the impact are in place but not yet fully available.

Main Judgements

The school has made satisfactory progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses. This visit has raised some concerns, however, about the standard of education provided and the school's performance will be monitored.

Priorities for further improvement

- ensure that the drive to raise standards and improve achievement is reflected at Key Stage 3 as well as Key Stage 4;
- eliminate the high proportion of unsatisfactory teaching and increase that which is good or better;
- take the necessary steps to improve provision for mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Hertfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Sheila M. B. Nolan

Additional Inspector

Please email this letter to the Ofsted email postbox for the region in which the school is based: SouthSIQA or NorthSIQA or MidSIQA for quality assurance.

File Name

- HMI authored letters - D school name, visit number, SW (ie D Whitemore 2 SW)
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Appropriate authority - chair of governors/Interim Executive Board (IEB)/ Proprietor – in independent schools

LEA – except for independent special schools and academies

DfES

Contractor providing support services on behalf of the LEA - where appropriate

Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools

Learning and Skills Council where the sixth form is deemed to be inadequate.

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the regional ADM: SI
the regional HMI with responsibility for legacy schools
the LMI schools for the LEA in which the school is located.

A copy with editing marked up should be forwarded to the:

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