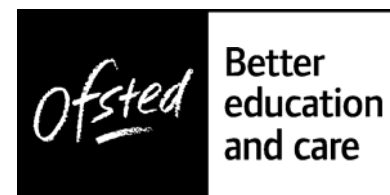


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7 December 2005

Mrs C Cooper
St Mary's Church of England Primary
School
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Dear Mrs Cooper

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST MARY'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Peter Kemble, Additional Inspector, to your school on 2 and 3 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 March 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

During the visit we inspected ten parts of lessons, two assemblies, scrutinised documents including pupils' work, and met with the chair of governors, the subject leaders for English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). We also met with the school council and the special educational needs coordinators.

Context

There have been no significant changes to the circumstances the school is working in. However, there have been significant staff changes since the inspection including the headteacher who has been in post since April 2005.

Achievement and standards

The school's own data and analysis shows that pupils achieve satisfactorily throughout their time in school and this is supported by the available test results. The results in the 2005 national tests for pupils at the end of Years 2 and 6 were above average overall. In lessons, standards were generally above average and all pupils achieved satisfactorily. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities made satisfactory progress because they are now supported effectively in class and work is matched appropriately to their needs. Pupils who are more able often have work that is challenging and they make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. Moral development is promoted well throughout the school in assemblies and in class discussions. Pupils appreciate the value of the school council in providing them with an opportunity to voice their views and make a difference to school life, for instance, in improving the playground environment. Pupils' involvement in the running of the school through the allocation of a wide range of responsibilities, such as preparing the school hall for assemblies, contributes significantly to raising pupils' confidence and self esteem and particularly those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

The behaviour of most pupils was good. Pupils were respectful to adults and generally cooperated well in lessons. Some pupils found coping with new learning styles, such as working independently and making decisions for themselves, difficult. This led to lack of concentration and restlessness in lessons. There was some boisterous behaviour around the school and some pupils did not move around the building in a sensible way. However, the school has made satisfactory progress in helping the pupils become independent learners.

Pupils enjoy school. They generally tackled tasks with enthusiasm and were keen to answer questions and contribute to class discussions. These good features were the result of clear guidance to pupils on behaviour through an effective system of rewards and activities related to the promotion of pupils' personal development. Incidents of bullying or unkind behaviour were reported by pupils to be rare. Pupils have a good understanding of right from wrong. They enjoy having visitors in school and speak confidently and happily to them. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and have a satisfactory awareness of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching was satisfactory overall and this agrees with the school's own assessment of teaching and learning. All of the lessons were satisfactory or better, five were good. In the most effective lessons teachers encouraged pupils to talk about their learning and discuss their ideas. Work was well planned and took account of the different ages and abilities in each class. Planning is undertaken in year groups and this has resulted in all pupils having equal access to the curriculum. In less effective lessons pupils were not always engaged in the activities in the class and their progress slowed. This was due, in part, to the change from very direct teaching to encouraging pupils to become increasingly independent and attempt tasks on their own.

The curriculum is based on national requirements and guidelines. There is satisfactory breadth to pupils' learning, further extended by French lessons for pupils in Years 3 to 6, and a satisfactory range of extracurricular activities. The school has improved the balance of the curriculum by giving a greater emphasis to subjects other than English, mathematics and science in teachers' planning. A satisfactory start has been made in making more effective use of these subjects in promoting pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Improvement to the provision for information and communication technology was good. However, there is still work to be done in making further modifications to the curriculum to consistently meet the needs of all pupils. The school has reviewed the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and better use is made of individual pupil data to give targeted support for these pupils.

The school has suitable policies in place for promoting pupils' health, safety and well-being. There are good relationships between teachers and pupils. The school has collected a wealth of useful data on how well pupils are doing in their work. However, this information has not yet been used effectively to set individual targets so that pupils can improve their work. The quality of marking in books varies. Where it is most effective teachers not only encourage pupils by identifying what they have done well but also suggest points for improvement. Where marking is weak there are only encouraging remarks and pupils have little idea what they need to do to improve.

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

- raise pupils' expectations, accelerate the pace of lessons and provide more opportunities for pupils to work independently—satisfactory progress
- improve the quality, accuracy and use of assessment—satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

Since the inspection in March 2005 there has been a new headteacher in post. She has drawn up an improvement plan that sets out key activities to tackle the serious weaknesses identified. These have been successful in improving the leadership and management of pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities and this area of the school's work is now good. However, it will take some time for all staff to be

confident in setting achievable targets for pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities. Coordinators are now more knowledgeable about their roles in managing their subjects and are keen to receive further training. Ensuring that all pupils are included in the life of the school has received high priority and, through changes in planning and managing the provision for pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities, this has been successful.

The school's self-evaluation is accurate and has identified weaknesses in teaching but there has been too little time to follow up these issues to ensure that the quality of teaching improves.

The governors are now more involved in the school and are taking an active part in monitoring its work. They have been successful in ensuring that statutory requirements have been met regarding collective worship.

The school has satisfactory capacity to improve.

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

- ensuring that the school is inclusive and has a sharply focused strategic plan, better subject leadership and more rigorous curriculum development—satisfactory progress
- improve the leadership of and provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities—good progress
- ensure that statutory requirements for collective worship are met—good progress.

External support

The local authority has provided valuable support for the school and this has resulted in good improvement to the issue regarding pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Further support has helped subject coordinators to understand what they have to do to manage their subject and many teachers have benefited from one to one support in their teaching.

Main Judgements

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

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that the weaknesses in teaching are systematically followed up to ensure that teaching continues to improve
- use assessment data to set specific targets for all pupils so that they know how to improve their work
- make sure that behaviour is good around the school and that pupils are aware of how they should move between lessons.

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

Yours sincerely

Marianne Harris
Additional Inspector