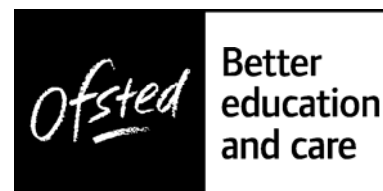


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24 November 2005

The Headteacher
St Nicholas and St Mary C of E First and Middle School
Eastern Avenue
Shoreham-by-Sea
West Sussex
BN43 6PE

Dear Mrs Pearce and Mrs Slocombe,

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST NICHOLAS AND ST MARY CHURCH OF ENGLAND FIRST AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Sheila Browning, additional inspector, to your school on Thursday 3 and Friday 4 November 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 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

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the co-headteachers, the chair of governors, the chair of the governing body's curriculum and standards committee, and members of the teaching staff including the subject leaders for English and mathematics. Discussions were held with the school improvement partner (consultant headteacher) and the Senior Education Officer of the local education authority (LEA). In addition, informal discussions were held with pupils throughout the inspection. Twelve lessons were observed.

Context

The school has undergone a significant change in leadership. The headteacher did not return to work after the inspection, and the deputy headteacher returned only briefly. The LEA immediately put in place a locum headteacher who is working in partnership with an acting headteacher to run the school. Governors have not yet been able to appoint a substantive headteacher although the position has been advertised twice. There is a new chair of governors, and the governing body has two additional governors, from the LEA and diocese, to develop its work. Two classroom teachers are new to the school since the last inspection.

Achievement and standards

Results in 2005 national tests for Year 6 pupils were an improvement on those of 2004. They countered the decline in standards reported at the last inspection. However, the school acknowledges that the results are still not as good as they should be. While the proportion of pupils who attained the nationally expected Level 4 was above average, the proportion attaining the higher Level 5 was average. Few pupils reached the higher level in writing. Given the pupils' social backgrounds and their attainment on joining the school, many more should attain higher levels in all tested subjects.

Conversely, national test results for Year 2 pupils fell back considerably in 2005 from significantly above average to average overall, again with weaknesses at higher levels of performance. The decline was most marked in reading and writing. In mathematics, performance improved overall but also fell back at the higher levels.

As a key part of its action plan for improvement, the school has begun to focus on raising the teachers' expectations of their pupils given their capabilities. In lessons, teachers are beginning to offer work of increasing challenge to more able pupils and to give individual work better suited to lower attainers. This is leading to sound progress in the development of number and writing skills, although lower attainers struggle to understand in some whole-class exercises in literacy. Pupils' speaking skills are less well developed and, in some classes, the teachers' questioning does not allow pupils to expand and express their views with clarity. Standards in the Reception class are above average and children make satisfactory progress in communication, language and mathematical skills.

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

- raise achievement for pupils in Years 3 to 6 – satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils enjoy school. They show interest in lessons and are keen to participate when given the opportunity. Their attitudes to learning and their behaviour are good. This is an improvement since the last inspection when attitudes and behaviour were judged satisfactory. The school has agreed systems for managing pupils' behaviour which are applied consistently by teachers. The increased use of praise and

acknowledgement of good effort and work by teachers is also having a positive impact on behaviour. The school is calm and orderly. Pupils are polite, friendly and support one another well.

In discussion, pupils said this was a safe school and the bus stop system at break ensured that everyone had someone to play with. There have been no recorded incidents of bullying or racist behaviour since the last inspection. Pupils have a good awareness of safe practices and how to adopt healthy lifestyles. They take regular exercise, participate in a range of extracurricular sporting activities and they responsibly choose times to drink water.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Personal development continues to be well supported through the school's Christian values and the programme for citizenship, personal, social and health education. Members of the school council take an active role in making decisions. Individual pupils enjoy taking on roles of responsibility such as acting as monitors and looking after younger ones. Pupils show an understanding of the feelings of others and readily help one another. At playtime they mix well and play together happily. Older pupils support younger ones at lunchtime and help them to play board games in the classrooms. Pupils know the difference between right and wrong. Although they have a good understanding of their own cultural heritage, pupils are still offered too few opportunities to develop their understanding of the breadth of cultures in modern British society. The school has recognised this weakness and has scheduled action to occur as part of review of long-term curriculum planning.

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

- prepare pupils better for life in a culturally diverse British society – inadequate progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. It was satisfactory or better in 11 out of the 12 lessons observed, of which a third was good. The overall quality of teaching and learning is broadly similar to that noted in the last inspection and reflects the school's most recent evaluation.

An effective start has been made in addressing the causes of weaknesses in teaching and learning. Classes have been reorganised and teaching assistants deployed effectively. Teachers are receptive to change and appreciate the new openness and opportunity to share skills and good practice.

Good features of improvement include: the better weekly planning of mathematics and English; the identification of learning objectives which are shared with children and which take account of pupils' differing needs; and the provision of a good balance of activities in lessons. The best plans take account of how pupils responded and what they achieved in the previous lesson, and whether or not they had reached their full potential. This reflects the intensive in-service training programme that has

taken place to develop cohesiveness and consistency in teaching and learning. As yet not all teachers have adopted these good practices to the same degree. However, the quality of short-term planning is monitored rigorously by the acting headteachers, and their accurate intervention and informed feedback to teachers is having a positive effect on the quality of education.

Previously, the staff were not aware of, or involved in, the use of assessment and performance data to help them to plan to support pupils' progress. Targets and actions for improvement in assessment are on track but the impact on teachers' planning is limited and variable. The school now has good data which the acting headteachers have shared with staff to help them track progress over time. A few teachers are using this information to identify and address underachievement. Year 6 pupils know the level at which they are working in. This gives them a better understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to reach even higher levels. Pupils making slower progress are targeted and extra support is planned for them. Constructive comments and supportive marking are evident. The attainment, progress and targeting of pupils is now linked to the performance management of teachers.

The curriculum has improved and the school day has been reorganised to provide better breadth and balance. However, medium and long-term curriculum plans have not been developed. The planned curriculum audit has been delayed because more immediate and intensive support was required to help teachers understand short-term planning. Teachers are aware of the need for longer-term plans which identify how subjects are developed across the school. They are beginning to make links between English, mathematics, and information and communication technology and other subjects. However there is still an over-dependence on published schemes and worksheets.

The quality of care is good. Child protection, risk assessments and health and safety procedures have been improved and are more rigorous. Improvements are evident in the identification and provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. The quality of support, advice and guidance based on the monitoring of pupils' progress remains unsatisfactory overall because of the weaknesses in assessment noted above. However, the school is taking appropriate action to remove the causes of these weaknesses.

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

- improve teachers' planning and use assessment information effectively to meet the learning needs of all pupils – satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The school has been given very good direction by its co-headteachers since the last inspection. They have evaluated the school's systems and performance thoroughly and accurately. They have also identified, and acted upon, significant weaknesses beyond those reported in the inspection, for example, in the school's lack of preparedness to implement the workload agreement giving teachers time for

preparation and assessment. The action plan which the school produced to address its weaknesses is broad ranging but its goals are appropriate. The plan's timescales have been carefully measured to ensure that actions can be undertaken effectively without imposing excessive burdens on staff. A relatively short time has elapsed but key initiatives such as those to improve teachers' short-term planning are already having a positive impact in the classroom. The appointment of new subject leaders to support teachers in planning and evaluating their work has strengthened management beyond senior level. The subject leaders are beginning to benefit from intensive support from LEA specialist consultants.

The governing body has undergone significant changes in structure and leadership. It was the subject of much scrutiny and support from the LEA because it lacked the skills, systems and culture to enable it to challenge the school over matters of performance. New committees have been established which should allow governors to monitor more closely aspects of the school's performance. The curriculum and standards committee already plays an active role in monitoring the school's progress against its action plan. While appropriate structures are now in place, the school's success depends critically on how well all governing body committees carry out their functions in monitoring and supporting its performance. Governors have accepted that more training is needed to ensure that this can occur.

Communications with parents are much improved. Parents are now better informed about what their children will be learning, and other school developments.

Given its track record of improvement since the last inspection, the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

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

- establish well-focused strategic planning that provides a clear educational direction for the school and leads to effective, sustained school improvement – satisfactory progress
- improve the roles of key staff and subject leaders and deploy staff more effectively – satisfactory progress
- check that all staff are implementing agreed procedures properly and, where necessary, take follow-up action to ensure that they do – satisfactory progress
- improve the school's communication with parents and carers – good progress.

External support

The LEA's statement of action is good. It is focused appropriately on providing support for leaders and managers, starting with senior managers and governors and extending to middle managers and subject leaders. The school has benefited from the high quality leadership of the headteachers put in place by the LEA. It has also benefited from the work of the local school improvement partner who has a good understanding of the school and has been able to provide additional support at the appropriate levels. The subject leader for mathematics has been given effective support by the LEA's subject advisor. Support for literacy has been delayed, but

development has continued through work undertaken by the locum headteacher and subject leader.

Main Judgements

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

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop the teachers' skills in using assessment to plan the pupils' learning and to monitor their progress.
- Improve planning of the curriculum, and build in opportunities for pupils to learn about the variety of cultures in modern Britain.
- Develop the skills of governors so that they can analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the school and share their ideas and concerns.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education for West Sussex, and the Chief Education Officer for the Diocese of Chichester.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Additional Inspector