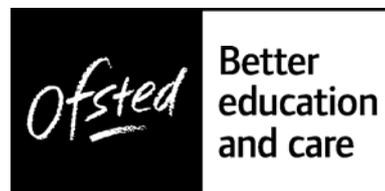


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Mr J Stanley
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21 April 2006

Dear Mr Stanley

SCHOOLS WHERE THE PUPILS' BEHAVIOUR HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS A CONCERN BY INSPECTION: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST JOHN'S CATHOLIC COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Michael Lynes HMI, Isobel Randall and Doug Masterton, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 21 and 22 March 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring inspection as part of the programme of visits to schools where the pupils' behaviour has been identified as a concern by inspection.

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, members of the leadership team, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from Kent Local Authority.

Context

There have been no significant changes in the school's context since the inspection in March 2005.

Achievement and standards

Standards seen in lessons were broadly in line with expectations for the pupils' ages and in the better lessons progress was at least satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Personal development is satisfactory overall. Lessons observed included visiting speakers from the police and fire services who gave good contributions towards citizenship awareness and personal responsibility. Relationships between pupils are generally satisfactory. However, the pupils do not feel safe because of fears of what a small minority of other pupils might do to them. Year 8 pupils in particular felt that bullying had increased and that the school is not doing enough to improve the situation. The school's figures for the number of reported cases of bullying show an increase but the school attributes part of this to a more open culture, following an anti-bullying week, which has resulted in pupils being more confident about reporting incidents. Some teachers adopt a confrontational approach when dealing with pupils and this has a negative impact on attitudes to learning.

There are good opportunities for pupils to participate in sport and to take responsibility and contribute to decision making but opportunities to develop other skills relevant to future economic well-being are limited.

Attendance is lower than it was at this time last year and is now below the average for secondary schools. Exclusions have reduced significantly.

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

- Work hard to eliminate bullying from the school, and to improve behaviour in lessons and about the school, especially in Years 7 and 8—inadequate progress.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning overall are inadequate. The proportion of inadequate lessons seen was broadly similar to the school's evaluation of the quality of teaching where, in a monitored sample of 132 lessons, around one in ten was judged to be inadequate. Inspectors also noted deficiencies in the regularity, consistency and standard of marking thus depriving pupils of information on their standards and how to improve. Teaching in too many lessons did not cater for all abilities or engage all pupils in active learning and class assistants

were not able to make an effective contribution because of poor behaviour and ineffective classroom management.

The quality of teaching in some subjects is compromised by difficulties the school is experiencing in recruitment and covering for staff absences including extended illness. This has greatly weakened the teaching of religious education but other subjects too, such as science, are affected to a lesser degree. Weakness in teaching contributes directly to the incidence of poor behaviour in lessons. When lessons are poorly planned, activities are inappropriate and undemanding and, where pupils do not get the instruction they need, the resulting disobedience and inattentiveness is predictable. In the best lessons, teachers provide a good stimulus, there is interesting work for pupils to undertake, feedback gives advice and encouragement and, consequently, behaviour issues do not arise.

The school has satisfactory procedures in place for monitoring the quality of teaching and seeks to support staff through advice, peer observation and with help from subject leaders. However, management intervention is not sufficiently robust to limit the negative impact of key shortages of expertise and to secure the adoption of good teaching and behaviour management by all staff.

Assessment procedures are well designed but are not sufficiently well implemented across the school to have a positive impact on student progress. Good systems to record and analyse assessments in relation to National Curriculum levels and GCSE grade criteria are based on regular testing in all subjects. This data is used to inform setting of pupils in core subjects and provides a good level of information to subject teachers throughout the school including the sixth form. However, teachers could make better use of this information when planning their lessons. The introduction of mixed ability classes in foundation subjects at Key Stage 3 is therefore seen by students and by some staff as a retrograde step, with needs of the highest and lowest attainers not being addressed.

Target setting is securely based on the pupils' prior attainment. Tracking the achievement of pupils in relation to their targets is used in a limited way to identify those pupils who are likely to underachieve and in science, for example, booster classes are provided for them. Although higher attainers are identified, the school has not yet acted on this information to ensure that they are sufficiently challenged.

Individual pupils are informed about their subject targets. In the best instances teachers mark in terms of progress towards targets and give specific advice on how pupils can improve or develop their work. Pupils report

that this happens in fewer than half of their classes. Although most work is marked, comments often only relate to presentation and effort.

The school leadership team have begun to address all of this uneven practice by linking class and subject targets to performance management, but without sufficient impact at present.

Pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities are not always well supported in lessons. In some mixed ability classes pupils do not receive the support they need and resources are not sufficiently adapted to enable pupils to make satisfactory progress.

The curriculum has not developed significantly since the last inspection. It is not well matched to the needs and aspirations of pupils.

In response to the last inspection the school has attempted to reorganise Key Stage 3 classes to ensure that pupils have good opportunities to make progress. However, this has developed very slowly and the impact on improving behaviour or the pupils' progress has been limited. Pupils do not enjoy learning in these new groups because they feel that they are unable to make good progress.

The Key Stage 4 curriculum will offer additional options from September 2006 such as photography and media studies. However, there are only limited opportunities for pupils to follow vocational pathways or any form of alternative curriculum. The sixth form consortium arrangements offer opportunities to study additional subjects but only a small proportion of students take advantage of these arrangements.

The personal, social and health education programme offers appropriate opportunities to discuss relevant issues and behaviour is satisfactory in these lessons. There are good opportunities for extracurricular activities in sport but these are not effectively monitored.

Leadership and management

The senior leadership team has attempted to address improving the pupils' attitudes and behaviour by the introduction of a range of initiatives. These include the appointment of two non teaching Pastoral Support Managers who are expected to deal swiftly with issues relating to the pupils' behaviour and the establishment of a group of staff to consider how behaviour might be improved. The school has planned to put in place systems and procedures which will record and track the incidence of inappropriate behaviour.

However, senior leaders recognise that these systems do not sufficiently recognise good conduct.

The actions taken have had insufficient impact on improving behaviour and there remain some inconsistencies in how individual teachers interpret and implement the school's behaviour policy. The quality of leadership of middle managers is variable and some have not addressed the consistent implementation of the school's behaviour policy with sufficient urgency or rigour. Although senior managers know the strengths and weaknesses of the school progress in addressing those weaknesses has been too slow and as a result they have not demonstrated sufficient capacity to improve.

External support

The local authority has provided a good range of support through its consultants and advisors. Their monitoring reports provide a clear picture of where the school is doing well and what it needs to do to improve further. The school improvement partner has drawn up a useful support plan to coordinate the support provided by various agencies and evaluate its impact. However, it does not identify the time periods over which this support will operate.

Main Judgements

The school has made inadequate progress towards improving the pupils' behaviour. This visit has raised serious concerns about the standard of education provided by the school and I am recommending a return visit.

The school and LA should send a short report to the lead HMI outlining the actions they intend to take to improve the pupils' behaviour and address other weaknesses identified by this inspection. This report should be received within 20 working days of the end of this monitoring inspection. This report will inform the timing of the return visit.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of teaching.
- Eliminate inconsistencies in the implementation of the school's policies.
- Continue to improve pupils' attitudes and behaviour

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Strategic Director of Education and Libraries for Kent and other bodies involved with the school.

Yours sincerely

Robert Ellis
H M Inspector