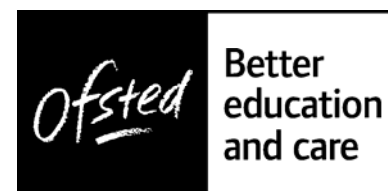


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9 February 2006

Mr J O'Neill
Headteacher
Newman Catholic School
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Dear Mr O'Neill

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF NEWMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Joe Clark, Gillian Salter-Smith and Judith Straw, Additional Inspectors to your school on 8 and 9 February 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2004.

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, including 10 lessons, scrutinised documents and met with yourself, senior staff, groups of pupils, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The school's senior management team is now complete, with the deputy headteacher having taken up his post. Other staffing appointments have brought greater stability to the school. There are discussions regarding the school's position in Carlisle's reorganisation, although at present no decision has been reached.

The present visit took place within seven working weeks of the last visit, and so evidence of further progress is relatively limited, however the inspectors' conclusions take this short time period into account.

Achievement and standards

Data on the school's performance shows that there has been a slight rise in GCSE results, mainly in mathematics and English. However the overall performance is reduced by achievement in a number of other subjects, notably history, religious education, art, biology and music. Several of these were significantly affected by the floods in January 2005 when equipment, resources and students' coursework were lost. Due to the school working on three sites, staff could not be deployed to the maximum effect, and the decision to provide maximum support to the examination years resulted in a reduced performance at Key Stage 3.

There remain concerns regarding the achievement of girls and the proportion (8%) who did not pass any examination. Standards at the end of Year 9 and GCSE are satisfactory, but there is still underachievement in Key Stage 3 core subjects and girls' GCSEs.

Targets for 2006 are higher than those for 2005. Based on students' current performance, the targets for Years 9 and 11 are not likely to be met in 2006. This judgement is supported by the recent mock GCSE examination results. The situation could change following recent staffing appointments.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2004:

- improve standards at the end of Year 9 and GCSE – inadequate

Personal development and well-being

During the last visit, concern was expressed at students' behaviour. As a result, inspectors considered this in more detail during the present visit. Whilst behaviour is satisfactory, students' attitudes vary from good to inadequate. In two sessions, students were very casual and at times rude to staff. Elsewhere attitudes were good, with students responding well to teachers and showing enthusiasm for their work. When asked, students noted that behaviour and attitudes had improved, but were variable, dependent upon the teacher's capacity to manage sessions effectively. There was good behaviour in the dining area where the school parliament has formulated rules for conduct.

Attendance is inadequate and has fallen significantly during the current academic year. It is highest in the younger year groups, where it is around 86.5% for the current term. In the older year groups it falls to below 70%. The school needs to identify more clearly the factors affecting this. Sixth-form students do not always attend registration, so inflating the absence figures. Other students report to Student Services despite being in time for registration, and so may be marked as absent or arriving late. Students who are attending provision elsewhere remain on

form lists and so are recorded as absent for lessons. This provision is often not for the full week, making a maximum attendance as low as two sessions or 20% of the week. The implications of such part-time provision on attendance statistics have not been quantified. Also the school does not hold discrete lists of students who are in the separate categories of persistent non-attenders receiving no support from other agencies and those who are receiving external support. Similarly it cannot currently provide statistics on the patterns of attendance for students who are not in these categories. These arrangements for recording and analysing attendance are inadequate and must be dealt with as a matter of urgency if the school is to have a clearly recorded view of what provision students are currently receiving.

The school has put in place a rewards system, and this is a positive development. However it has yet to have a significant impact on overall attendance levels.

There is good liaison with outside agencies through the Social Inclusion Forum; the student information forms do not have fully consistent details, as where some have percentages for attendance recorded and others describe this as 'low'. Overall the welfare system changed in September with the alterations to the management structure. The current structure has yet to bed down fully, and it is too soon for the deputy headteacher's welfare leadership role to be properly established.

There have been a number of positive developments since the last visit. More clubs and activities are organised and the forthcoming performance of *Bugsy Malone* signals a return to traditions interrupted by the floods last year. The school parliament has met twice and has begun to have an impact on developing the student voice in the school. It is appropriate that the student support staff are to receive training on some of the welfare aspects of their work.

Quality of provision

There are indications that the quality of teaching has improved and that the recent additions to the staff are having a positive impact on the work in their subjects. The need to monitor the quality of teaching remains and the inspectors were concerned to note that the frequency of this monitoring appeared to have slowed in recent months. It is most important that the school maintains the momentum of its work to improve teaching, particularly in terms of the quality of planning and assessment. Where teaching has been identified as requiring improvement, there are clear indications of improvement resulting from the support provided by the local authority and the senior management of the school.

Work on developing assessment is satisfactory insofar as there has been progress in putting data on student performance into a usable form for analysis. However the overall target system is not fully in place. It does not meet the needs of students as practices are not sufficiently consistent across departments, with some departments still not setting targets and other departments setting whole-class targets, rather than ones tailored to individual students' capabilities. Where targets are set, there is no clear policy whereby staff must inform students of these: instead there is an intention to do this, which results in variable practice. Also some staff are not clear

about the data sources used to devise targets. Additionally there is no system of minimal targets and others to which students might aspire. Significantly, several students are providing the latter for themselves, saying 'I have been predicted a C, but I really want to aim for a B'.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2004:

- improve the quality of teaching in Years 7 to 11 with better planning, delivery and assessment – satisfactory
- assess students' attainment against the standards they have demonstrated previously in order to ensure that they make the necessary progress – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The school has devised a development plan and the governing body minutes record a view that the Post Ofsted Action Plan is redundant. The development plan does not fully take account of major points in the action plan, and there are too many items where actions originally proposed, and which have not been achieved, have not been translated into the development plan. This is inadequate. The development plan is a draft, and requires clearer targets: for instance, the number of exclusions is to be reduced but this is not quantified - in fact this year they have risen.

The development plan also lacks clear end dates for the completion of tasks: the dates provided are either interim dates or indications as to when the issues will be considered. Job descriptions are not fully in place, despite the action plan's timescale, and the programme of departmental review appears to have slipped from its original target dates. Also the development plan does not identify senior staff responsible for ensuring that the success criteria for student achievement are met and the pace of improvement increased.

Leadership and management structures have been clarified since September, however not all members of the senior team have job descriptions for their current roles. The job descriptions that exist are not sufficiently closely related to the priorities identified following the inspection in 2004. There is some evidence that additional tasks allocated at the start of the present term are reducing the overall coherence of roles, especially for welfare aspects. Roles may become clearer as staff have more time to work into their new posts and for others to become accustomed to the new structures.

One Key Issue (5) is not fully included in the action plan and progress on citizenship is inadequate. The discrete time allocation for citizenship is 50 minutes per week, but this time is shared with personal, social and health education. This is only just enough to cover the programmes of study for citizenship and is not enough to provide a coherent programme with opportunity to revisit topics and build on prior learning. Some citizenship work is being delivered across the curriculum but the subject audit is not complete and so it is not possible to identify how and when it is being taught through other subjects. It is not being assessed as citizenship. The

other compliance issue – reporting to parents by the governing body - is not addressed in the plan, however the regulations regarding this have changed and the school is compliant with current requirements.

The headteacher now has a mentor as well as support from a Catholic school in a neighbouring authority. These arrangements could usefully be more clearly structured to provide a programme of planned support.

Overall, the school has begun to put in place some significant developments since the last visit, but there is a need to maintain the momentum of progress. The inspectors consider that whilst progress is currently satisfactory, it appears to be slowing in some respects. It is important that the school does not lose sight of the remaining issues from the last inspection if it is to continue to improve. There remain significant tasks to be completed and the school should be aware of the urgency to address these before the next full inspection.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2004:

- increase the amount and quality of monitoring and evaluation of the school by subject managers, reinforced by senior managers, in order to raise standards – satisfactory
- compliance with the statutory requirements for citizenship – inadequate
- compliance with the statutory requirements for reporting to parents – the regulations have changed and the school now complies with the current requirements.

External support

The local authority's school improvement officer continues to make weekly visits to the school. These are valued. However there has not been any extended review by the authority since the last inspection and the last such visit was curtailed due to bad weather, only one of the planned two days being used. There has also been a helpful programme of support from consultants and local authority staff for individual subjects.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures - satisfactory

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that the development plan takes full account of the issues identified in the original action plan.
- Raise attendance in all year groups and improve the systems for accurately recording and monitoring this. Ensure that all students

receive their entitlement to full-time education, including those who attend provision elsewhere on a part time basis.

- Increase the pace of progress in all aspects of the school's work; in particular improve academic achievement and the quality of teaching.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Corporate Director of Education for Cumbria and the Diocese of Lancaster.

Yours sincerely

Martin Bradley
H M Inspector