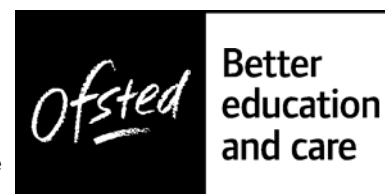


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13 January 2006

Mr D Muir
Headteacher
Doncaster School for the Deaf
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Dear Mr Muir

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF DONCASTER SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF (Non-Maintained)

Introduction

Following my visit with Katharine Halifax Additional Inspector to your school on 11 and 12 January 2006, 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 became subject to special measures in June 2005.

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 a number of lessons, scrutinised documents, sampled pupils work and met with the headteacher and members of the school council. We also met with the chair of governors and the chair of the board of trustees. We held a series of discussions with senior and middle managers in connection with the key issues, and engaged some teaching and support staff in conversations about their work with pupils. In addition, we visited an assembly and observed the school at break and lunchtime. Inspectors also looked at the residential provision onsite at the school.

Context

The school has experienced some important changes during the course of the past year. The long standing headteacher retired in December 2004 and the former deputy headteacher was made interim acting headteacher until March 2005.

Because of falling pupil numbers and concerns the trustees had about the viability and value for money the school offered, they commissioned an independent review in November 2004. Following the findings of the review, which raised some serious concerns about the school and its effectiveness, they took the step of employing an experienced senior manager with a strong record of accomplishment in deaf education, who worked as a consultant headteacher with the interim acting headteacher. This was designed to kick-start the improvement process and tackle the highlighted deficiencies in the schools leadership and management, and the quality and appropriateness of its provision. The findings of the independent review were confirmed when the school was placed in special measures following an Ofsted inspection in June 2005. The consultant headteacher was subsequently appointed as the permanent Head of the school. After a lengthy absence, the interim acting headteacher took early retirement, and in May 2005, five governors including the chair resigned. The school has since successfully recruited a new full governing body.

As a result of the falling pupil numbers the school has considered closing, but the trustees have decided to market the school to boost pupil numbers and increase revenue. They have agreed to underwrite the significant deficit budget that has accumulated. There currently exists nursery provision on site and the school hopes in time this will provide additional pupils to the main school. The school has recently appointed a number of experienced qualified teachers to lead the development of specialist subjects. The local authority has chosen not to refer pupils to this non-maintained school, and many local deaf children are therefore educated out of area. This remains a concern for the school as they are attempting to strengthen links with the local authority.

Achievement and standards

There is little or no use of national data to monitor and assess the progress and achievement of pupils at the school, although very recently pupils are being assessed and grouped according to ability. There is a lack of baseline information and tracking of pupils, it is therefore difficult to evaluate the progress pupils have made. This situation needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The results from 2005 for accredited courses including GCSE's, the award scheme development and accreditation network (ASDAN) and entry level unit accreditation

show that overall standards of attainment are low amongst pupils. Pupils did however experience high levels of success in obtaining the stage 1 British sign language (BSL) qualification. The moves towards ability groupings in some areas, appointing more experienced specialist teachers, amendments to the curriculum and changes in the teaching and learning philosophy are beginning to have a positive impact upon the progress pupils are making. However, overall pupils are still making insufficient progress in relation to their capabilities. The foundations have been laid for a shift in the right direction, but at this stage the respective strategies have not yet had sufficient time to evidence their full impact. There appears to be no difference in the attainment and progress of different groups of pupils at the school.

Personal development and well-being

The implementation of the revised behaviour policy and staff training has resulted in considerable improvement in pupils' attitude and behaviour. While there are still occasional outbursts of inappropriate behaviour, pupils follow the good example set by adults and show respect. They now listen to each other, take turns in conversations and make eye contact. Where appropriate, pupils have individual behaviour plans which are used consistently. Though initially exclusions rose whilst pupils tested out the new regime, the number of exclusions fell from 42 in the first half of the autumn term to 22 in the second half of the term. The programme for personal, social, health and citizenship education is at an early stage of implementation, but is already beginning to affect pupils' attitude and behaviour. For example, there has been great improvement in behaviour at break times, and lunchtimes are now pleasant social occasions. The work done on anti-bullying has been particularly effective and is now paying dividends. Pupils report there is far less bullying and, when instances do occur, these are dealt with immediately and fairly. Teachers now plan and provide useful opportunities to extend pupils' social and moral development, through daily routines, assemblies and individual targets. Pupils are helped successfully to adopt a healthy lifestyle and are prepared well for the next stage of their education. The focus on communication has greatly improved pupil confidence and self-esteem and their aspirations when making career choices. Pupils are encouraged to be independent and make choices, however, on occasions the high adult to pupil ratio limits opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their learning.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified in the inspection of June 2005

- Systems to improve pupils' behaviour and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and eliminate any bullying and harassment - **good**

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection, and there is more good or better teaching than there was. Nevertheless, it is still only satisfactory overall. The addition of some very experienced and talented teachers of the deaf is beginning to bear fruit. Other staff at the school have benefited from additional internal and externally delivered training aimed at improving the quality of their planning, assessment and knowledge and understanding of working with deaf children. In particular, the increase in permanent staff and specially trained teachers of the deaf has led to much better continuity for pupils and has resulted in major improvements in the pace, differentiation and the degree of challenge in lessons. The higher expectations staff now have of pupils is mirrored by the increased aspirations and self-confidence of some pupils. Underpinning this is an increasing awareness of the need to provide individually tailored learning experiences.

The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved significantly particularly in the effectiveness of communication systems for pupils who are deaf. This is the result of the appointment of knowledgeable, skilled teachers for literacy and language, through staff training and the high expectations of the headteacher. Despite advertising, no suitable applicants were available for the post of special educational needs co-ordinator. While the headteacher has oversight of this important area and is providing good support and guidance for staff, the legally required special needs policy has still to be produced. Nevertheless, the provision for pupils with additional learning difficulties and/or disabilities such as physical needs and complex behaviours has shown discernable improvement.

As at the time of this inspection, systems to ensure the care, welfare, health and safety of pupils continue to be good, with support and advice being satisfactory. Though assessment procedures are being introduced, they are not sufficiently well established to effectively contribute to the guidance pupils receive. Residential care and support from other professionals continue to be a strong feature of the school. Pupils especially appreciate the change in atmosphere in the school. They say teachers have more time to listen to them and that the headteacher is always available to help them sort out their problems.

Assessment practice is still in its infancy and the new planning and assessment policy, although well conceived has yet to become fully embedded across the school. However, staff are fully aware of their responsibilities in this regard, and subjects such as English are leading the way in disseminating and sharing good practice. There has been a recent move to assess and group pupils according to ability and in a number of areas national curriculum levels are recorded. These however are rarely shared with the pupils. While there has been extensive staff training to support the implementation of the new policy, systematic tracking and monitoring across the school is not yet evident. The marking of pupils work is variable.

The quality of the curriculum is better overall than it was at the time of the last inspection. It is broader and has better balance to it, with increasing elements of choice. It has work based learning opportunities, and pupils receive some guidance on preparation for life after they leave the school. The appointment of a curriculum co-ordinator has been pivotal to these improvements. In addition, there are now curriculum leaders for each subject area. There are also plans to extend provision by using outside providers to offer additional vocational courses. Accreditation opportunities are also being expanded. A number of subjects have departmental plans and appropriate schemes in place, while others are still at the review or audit stage. There is room for further improvements however, particularly in the extra-curricular area.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified in the inspection of June 2005:

- To clarify and prepare for the range of the special educational needs of pupils that it admits and employ an effective methodology to teach deaf children - **good**
- To establish effective management within the school of all areas of the curriculum - **satisfactory**

Leadership and management

The newly appointed headteacher has had a significant impact on the school since his arrival. He has brought strategic direction, strong leadership and management skills, a vision, and a real sense of purpose, which are having an increasing impact on shaping the future direction and overall effectiveness of the school. Supported by a team of senior managers, the headteacher has introduced a number of important systems and structures designed to radically improve and regenerate the school. In particular, he has spearheaded a shift in culture and philosophy in terms of atmosphere and ethos, behaviour management, teaching and learning and curriculum development. Although in their infancy, many of the newly introduced strategies are showing signs of success and beginning to become embedded across the school. In this regard, the schools planning for improvement has been well conceived with a sharp focus upon raising standards and dealing with the areas highlighted in the last inspection report. The school is developing an increasing awareness of its strengths and weaknesses through monitoring and critically evaluating its progress. The board of trustees provide invaluable support and guidance in the strategic leadership and management of the school. It is their patronage, which enables the school to stay afloat despite a significant deficit budget.

In a very short time the headteacher and trustees have co-opted an enthusiastic and energetic governing body whose individual skills, for example in child and health

care, and a deaf governor, are of considerable value to the school. Legal requirements are now met in the annual review of Statements of Special Educational Needs. Music is now being taught although the composing element is not strong. Work has begun on the legally required policies with further discussion due to take place at the next governors meeting. The appointment of a voluntary parental liaison officer is strengthening links with parents as well as encouraging greater involvement in their child's learning. A detailed parents' handbook, alongside an information pack and a commercially produced DVD are designed to provide helpful guidance for parents and meet requirements. Regular newsletters keep parents well informed of what is happening. The provision of overnight accommodation for parents who live some distance from the school encourages greater involvement in their child's learning. There has been a remarkable increase in the number of parents attending events such as Prize Day. Overall management shows a strong capacity to make the necessary improvements.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified in the inspection of June 2005:

- Ensure effective leadership and management by appointing a permanent leader for the school who has the necessary vision and skills to lead developments particularly in; pupils' achievement, teaching, assessment, learning and the curriculum - **good**
- Ensure that governance is effective in fulfilling statutory duties – **satisfactory**
- Ensure that all pupils have the required music lessons – **satisfactory**
- Governors should check on all procedures, including race equality and race relations. They should ensure that all parents are consulted and receive full annual prospectus information about attendance, the school's results, its special educational needs policy, the provision and rights to opt out of religious education, assemblies and sex and relationships education - **satisfactory**

External support

The school currently receives no external support, but there are collaborative links with Derby School for the Deaf, and St Johns School for the Deaf in York.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures –

- **Good**
- **Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed**

Priorities for further improvement

The priorities remain those identified in the inspection of June 2005. Additional emphasis should be given within these areas to the following:

- to ensure that all teachers use assessment to accurately record pupils achievement and inform their planning
- to ensure as a matter of urgency that all legally required policies are in place
- to ensure that all curriculum leaders have realistic and effective plans to raise the achievement of pupils

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Chair of the board of trustees.

Yours sincerely



John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector