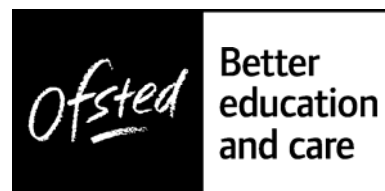


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1 February 2006

Dear Mrs Hatherley

## **SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST BUDEAUX FOUNDATION C OF E JUNIOR (AIDED) SCHOOL**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with David Curtis, Additional Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 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 May 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 the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the acting headteacher, the senior team, the chair of governors, an advisor from the local authority (LA) and a group of pupils.

### **Context**

The school experienced considerable difficulties with staffing last school year. There has been greater stability this year. The acting deputy headteacher in May 2005 has been appointed to the permanent position. The headteacher of the neighbouring infants' school is acting as headteacher for this year. The literacy coordinator is also on loan from the infants' school for this year. Two

other teaching appointments are temporary but planned to run for the year. There are continuing problems in recruitment. The governors will shortly be re-advertising for a new headteacher and for three permanent teaching posts.

In September pupils in Years 5 and 6 were split into three mixed age classes. The subsequent appointment of an additional member of staff has enabled these pupils to be taught in four smaller groups for the core subjects and, where appropriate, to separate the year groups. There are two classes of Year 4 pupils and two classes of Year 3 pupils.

### **Achievement and standards**

Standards in the 2005 Year 6 tests were broadly in line with national averages. These results were an improvement on the very poor achievement in 2004. In 2005 the pupils achieved satisfactorily in English given their starting points but underachieved in mathematics and science. Boys did not achieve as well as girls.

The acting headteacher and staff have determinedly set out to raise standards, getting to grips with assessing current standards, and identifying gaps in the pupils' prior learning that need to be plugged. Each week teachers strive to match work closely to the needs of the pupils. Marking, rightly, is expected to judge how well the pupils have learned and to point out next steps for them. Medium term targets have been set for the pupils. Some pupils are very familiar with their targets, others are more hesitant.

The sensible steps that the staff are taking to raise standards have demanded considerable time and commitment. Although much has been achieved, much still needs to be consolidated over time, for example pupils' awareness of their targets and what they need to do to achieve them.

Standards in English are improving. A detailed and thorough action plan has been backed up by useful staff training. As a result of work on speaking and listening, standards are satisfactory and sometimes good. Standards in writing have improved considerably since September. The quality of handwriting is better although not consistently in a joined-up style. Standards in spelling, grammar and punctuation are much improved, although pupils sometimes forget to apply the rules that they know well. Pupils and parents like the daily reading programme. The reading books are matched carefully to the pupils' reading level. Sensibly, an intensive programme of support is in place for a group of older boys with weak reading skills.

In mathematics the big thrust has been to improve planning and ensure that a range of strategies are taught as recommended in national guidance. The staff are incorporating the teaching of these mathematical techniques into their planning and are devoting more time to mental mathematics. Although pupils' progress in mathematics is much better overall, there were some

instances in the lessons of teachers' insecure subject knowledge and unskilled planning that, at times, slowed progress.

In information and communication technology (ICT) the major step has been to improve resources and assess the pupils' current learning. Resources have improved recently with the addition of a set of laptop computers and interactive whiteboards which are used regularly in lessons.

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

- raise standards in English—good progress
- raise standards in mathematics—satisfactory progress
- raise standards in ICT—not evaluated this visit.

### **Personal development and well-being**

There is a positive ethos around the school. Pupils like the rewards that they receive in recognition of their good efforts. They behaved well in lessons and many concentrated hard. In a particularly effective Year 3 lesson pupils listened very carefully and maturely discussed ideas with their partners. They were keen to share their thoughts with the class and did so confidently. These pupils are building up useful skills for adult life.

### **Quality of provision**

The staff have improved their weekly plans. Sensibly these identify the learning that should result at the end of each lesson and this makes lessons more purposeful. Staff evaluate the learning that was achieved in their lessons and this helps them to decide what to teach next. Resources for learning have improved. The interactive whiteboards enable stimulating material to be introduced speedily into lessons.

The school is doing the right things to improve teaching. There is some effective practice in the school and much which is broadly satisfactory. Consolidating planning and teaching skills supported by regular feedback from the acting headteacher or subject leader is rightly the major priority for this term. The school and LA need to ensure that support is coordinated productively to improve the weaker aspects of planning and teaching.

Teaching assistants play a valuable part in promoting learning in small group work sessions. Their time is used very productively throughout the lessons in some, but not all, classrooms. The use of display to promote learning is underdeveloped currently.

Appropriate assessment strategies are underway. The pupils' prior skills and understanding have been assessed thoroughly. This information is used productively to plan subsequent programmes of work. Grouping pupils with similar standards together for teaching is having a positive impact on raising

standards. There are sensible strategies for tracking pupils' progress over time. The targets set for pupils have been reviewed constructively in some classes but some are not signed off quickly enough.

The long term curricular plans have been updated and time allocated to teaching particular subjects. Monitoring of the impact of these developments is scheduled for this term.

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

- improve the quality of teaching and learning of the pupils throughout the school—good progress
- use assessment data information to plan pupils' next steps in learning—good progress
- improve the balance of the curriculum to allow for continuity of learning in those subjects identified in the report—not evaluated this visit.

### **Leadership and management**

The acting headteacher is leading the school very well. She knows what the school should be achieving and what the staff should be doing. Her accurate appraisal of strengths and weaknesses in teaching was confirmed in a joint lesson observation with HMI. She is aware of the steps required for significant improvements to be made and is wisely doing her very best to ensure that these steps are achieved as quickly as possible.

The subject leaders for literacy and mathematics have focused on relevant strategies and there is improvement in the provision for these two subjects. Rightly, implementing and strengthening subject leadership skills is top priority for this term.

The governors have improved their strategies for monitoring the school's progress and sound procedures are in place. An Ofsted committee receives focused reports from school staff each half term. There are agreed protocols for governors' visits to the school and structured discussions with school staff about action plan matters. Health and safety concerns raised during the Section 10 inspection have been taken seriously, professional advice sought, and appropriate safeguards identified.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- improve the quality of leadership and management—good progress
- ensure that all health and safety requirements are met—good progress.

## **External support**

The LA's statement of action outlines a range of relevant support. The LA has provided good support to date. Securing experienced leadership skills from the infants' school has helped staff to get underway with improvements quickly and confidently. The acting headteacher knows the pupils and parents well. She operates with the firm conviction that the pupils can achieve far better than they were doing. A major part of LA support has been the advice given to the subject leaders for literacy, mathematics and ICT. This has helped them to audit standards and plan sensible actions, providing training in relevant leadership skills.

The LA has sound mechanisms for managing the support provided. The school is clear about the timing of LA reviews. The key messages from the LA's first formal review were appropriate and understood. However, the LA could usefully clarify the content of the review, distinguishing more clearly between: evaluating the school's progress in making improvements; evaluating the current quality of provision and standards; identifying the next key steps; and evaluating the school's capacity to improve.

## **Main Judgements**

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Quality of LEA's statement of action – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

- Improve planning in mathematics
- ensure that the quality of teaching continues to improve
- ensure that new practices, such as the setting of medium term targets for individual pupils, are consolidated productively.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the diocese and the Director of Lifelong Learning for Plymouth.

Yours sincerely

Brenda Cusdin  
**H M Inspector**