



23 March 2006

Mrs R Pichowski
The Headteacher
St Andrew's Church of England First School
High Street
Great Linford
Milton Keynes
MK14 5AX

Dear Mrs Pichowski

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST ANDREW'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND FIRST SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 14 and 15 March 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 was found to have serious weaknesses in July 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 headteacher, the chair of governors, two representatives of the local authority (LA), a representative of the diocese of Oxford and a parent.

Context

There have been no significant changes since the school was inspected. The school's roll stands at 29 pupils, 13 of whom are in the reception year. The LA is in the process of consulting on possible options for the school's future, as set out in its statement of action. If the school remains open, it will become an infant school from September this year.

Achievement and standards

There are small numbers of pupils in each year group, which means that comparisons of results at the end of Key Stage 1 from year to year are not helpful. However, in last year's national tests all six Year 2 pupils achieved the expected Level 2 in reading and mathematics, and all but one did so in writing. All of the current Year 2 are on track to reach Level 2 and Level 3 in reading, writing and mathematics. Lesson observations and scrutiny of work in the pupils' books show that most pupils are working at levels in line with, or above what is expected for their age. Many of the pupils are articulate and have a good general knowledge; for example, three pupils in the reception class talked confidently about animals that are extinct. Older pupils observed closely fruit and vegetables and recorded their findings accurately during a science lesson. In their literacy books, their writing is detailed and shows some imagination and sense of audience.

The school's tracking records show that the pupils generally make the progress that is expected of them.

Personal development and well-being

When the school was inspected in July 2005, this aspect of the school's work was one of its strengths, and this has been maintained. The pupils are lively and enthusiastic, and enjoy their time at school. They engage willingly in lessons and concentrate well, producing a good amount of work. They are keen to share their ideas and opinions. Some occasionally find sitting still and listening difficult, and a few call out answers when asked not to, but on the whole they rise to the teachers' expectations of good behaviour. Outdoors, the pupils play happily and energetically. Having achieved a bronze 'Healthy Schools' award, the school is now working towards the silver. The pupils were certainly keen to try the different vegetables the examined in their science lesson.

The school has taken steps to try to improve levels of attendance, and the reasons for all absences are meticulously recorded. Parents complete a form every time their child is away from school. In 2004/05, attendance was well below the national figure at 90.6%. To date in this academic year, attendance is 93.6%, which is a good improvement. However, the school's target for attendance is well in excess of last year's national figure and this is probably unrealistic.

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

- Seek the support of parents and carers to improve the children's attendance – satisfactory progress

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching was satisfactory overall when the school was inspected in July 2005, and evidence from this inspection and the school's records show that this has been maintained. There are good features to the teaching, including the positive relationships between staff and pupils, the interesting activities that are planned and the knowledge that staff have of each individual child. In the mixed-age class, evident thought has been given to making sure that the pupils are provided with work at the levels expected for their age, so that even though all year groups follow the same theme in lessons, the tasks they are given are different. The teachers have improved how they mark the pupils' work, and give clear feedback to the pupils on how well they have done with reference to the learning intention for the lesson. However, there is no evidence of the pupils following up the teachers' questions and comments so it is not clear how much they have understood.

The pupils' attainment is regularly tracked, and records show that most pupils meet or exceed the targets that are set for them in the light of what they have achieved. This suggests that some of the targets may have been too modest and the school should make sure that pupils are always sufficiently challenged. The school has begun to set curriculum targets for individual pupils, which have been discussed with their parents. However, this work is in the early stages of implementation and it is not clear that the pupils are fully aware of what they are working towards, or what they need to do next.

The staff take good care of the pupils and know them well. The inspection in July 2005 required the school to make sure that procedures for the protection of children met statutory requirements and were well known. The school has an agreed policy, a named member of staff and a governor with responsibility for child protection and training for staff and governors has taken place; the school has met its obligations.

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

- As a matter of urgency ensure that staff are trained in the issues of child protection - good progress
- Implement the new assessment procedures consistently so that teachers marking is relevant and pupils are set individual targets to help them improve - satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The school's action plan following the inspection is succinct and easy to follow. In some places, there are specific criteria for measuring success, but in others, although what the school is aiming for is appropriate, it is not clear how the school will know it has achieved what it set out to do. For example, the school rightly aims for its self-evaluation procedures to be effective, but does not say what things will look like when they are.

Progress has been affected by the LA's decision to consult on the school's future. Morale has dipped, and governors and staff have given much time to meetings and preparation for the consultation. This has meant that some aspects of the action plan have not been implemented to the original timescale. Nevertheless, there has been some progress, including training for the governing body and their greater involvement in school. Several governors have undertaken visits to school and their knowledge of the school's work is growing at first hand. The work of the governing body has been constrained by vacancies and illness, but there is a determination to move forward. Although the governing body is not yet in a position to share in determining the strategic direction for the school, positive steps have been taken.

Some monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning have taken place, and teachers have been given useful feedback on the particular lessons which were observed. However, the rationale for the observations is not clear, other than to gain a picture of the effectiveness of these lessons, and the findings are not analysed and used to develop a longer-term strategy for improving teaching in order to make sure that standards are as high as possible. Monitoring of teaching is not yet informed by the school's priorities.

The headteacher has a secure and accurate understanding of what has been achieved and where things have fallen behind.

The school has the support of parents, who value the family atmosphere and the good climate for learning. One parent spoke warmly of the help his son had been given in learning English, which had helped him make rapid progress.

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

- Establish more rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluating provision to establish clear priorities for development – satisfactory progress

- Ensure that the governing body is proactive in leading the direction of the school and in evaluating what it provides - satisfactory progress

External support

The LA's commentary and statement of action are good. The statement is clear and helpful. The statement shows that the school will receive a good level of support from advisory staff and additional funding to cover the cost of administrative support and supply cover. There are clear criteria by which the LA will judge its success. Support for the school has been provided in line with the LA's intentions and has been well received.

Main Judgements

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

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to develop and implement the school's self- evaluation procedures
- Continue to improve the work of the governing body

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Diocese of Oxford and the Group Director School Improvement & Planning for Milton Keynes.

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
H M Inspector