

Prospects Learning Services Ltd
132-138 High Street
Bromley
Kent
BR1 1EZ

T 020 8313 7760
F 020 8464 3393

Ofsted helpline
08456 404045



22 February 2006

Mrs Beverley Smith
The Headteacher
Ampfield C of E Primary School
Knapp Lane
Romsey
Hampshire
SO51 9BT

Dear Mrs Smith

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION of AMPFIELD C of E PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 8 February 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 June 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

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you, the chair of governors, teachers and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The school has undergone a period of significant turbulence since 2003 and there was a rapid decline in the school roll from over 70 to 33 pupils. Since the appointment of the substantive headteacher, in April 2005, this decline in numbers has been reversed and there are currently 47 pupils on roll. In September 2003 no children enrolled in the Reception year and, due to the

decline in the number on roll, the school's future was reviewed by the local authority. In October 2004 it was initially decided to keep Ampfield School open but this decision was very quickly reversed and public notices for closure were published. The proposed date for closure was August 2006. Objections to the proposed closure were raised and after much uncertainty the decision was taken in March 2005, after adjudication, to keep the school open.

The school is now experiencing a changing intake of pupils, with more pupils being on the special educational needs register. Three pupils are on school action plus and six are on school action programmes. The mobility of pupils, though now reducing, remains very high. Tests in 2005 show that standards in mathematics in Year 6 have improved, and are now average. Pupils made better progress in all subjects compared to how they achieved in Year 2. For example, there are no pupils in year six, and only one in year five, who started at the school in the Reception year.

Staffing is now relatively stable and this month the school hopes to appoint a replacement for the mathematics co-ordinator, who left in December 2005.

Achievement and standards

The very low numbers taking tests in 2005 mean that the analysis of data has to be treated with caution. An analysis of individual results from the 2005 Key Stage 2 by value added shows an improvement in mathematics. Tests in 2005 show that standards in mathematics in Year 6 have improved, and are now average. Pupils made good progress compared to how they achieved in Year 2. Value added scores have also improved

The mathematics coordinator left the school in December 2005. The headteacher has used available resources innovatively in allocating the role to an experienced teacher, so as to develop formal procedures from what was a very low base. This change in staffing has been effective but has inevitably slowed the pace of improvement.

The school has received effective specialist support in mathematics from the local authority. Visits have taken place termly to focus on specific aspects of mathematics teaching identified by the headteacher. These events have been valued by teachers. They are documented well and follow up actions agreed.

The school has carried out a review of its assessment policy and, as a result, has revised procedures appropriately. It has made a successful start in implementing the new policy. Regular assessments using 'special books' have begun to generate data on pupils' progress matched to the national curriculum levels. The school is now beginning to accumulate information about individual pupils to make predictions for the optional national tests and Key Stage Two tests. Further analysis is planned for when more data are available.

The recently introduced Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are developing well and include targets for English and mathematics, matched to national curriculum levels. Plans are in place to extend these to include targets for social skills for each pupil. These targets are linked to weekly planning of the curriculum and also to the medium term plans drawn up as part of the new policy. Due to their recent introduction, they are not yet having sufficient impact on the planning of individual objectives. It is intended that the PEPs will form a basis for informing parents of their children's targets and progress towards them.

In the mathematics lessons observed, most pupils made the progress expected of them but there were occasions where the more able pupils were not challenged sufficiently. In the Key Stage One lesson, the pupils in Year 2 made good progress in their work on number sequencing, and were able to explain clearly and logically the steps they were taking to solve problems.

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

- set specific targets for pupils and ensure they are linked to lesson objectives and teachers' plans – satisfactory progress.
- allocate time to the mathematics coordinator to enable her to work with other teachers to implement the new scheme and to check on standards – satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' attitudes to their learning were positive, as they were at the last inspection. Pupils were interested in their work and enjoyed the activities that had been set for them. The older pupils were able to talk articulately about their work and explain what they were doing and why they were doing it. Pupils in the reception class supported each other well, especially those with

additional needs. Pupils played energetically and happily in the playground at break times and prepared for lunch in a very sensible and orderly way, requiring only a minimum of supervision from adults. Children in the reception class cared for each other well and were keen to ensure that everybody got their turn in a numeracy activity involving the passing and unwrapping of a parcel.

Quality of provision

Teaching was satisfactory overall which is in line with the school's own evaluation of its quality. There are strengths in the relationships that members of staff have with pupils, and in the consistent and calm way pupils are managed. Pupils respond well to this, listen attentively to whole-class teaching and enjoy their lessons. Teachers plan a range of interesting activities and account is generally taken of the learning needs of groups of pupils of different abilities. Where the teaching was good, activities built well on individual pupils' prior learning and a suitable degree of challenge enabled them to make good progress. In a Key Stage One mathematics lesson, pupils listened carefully to instructions on how to carry out a range of group tasks. After checking that pupils understood clearly what was expected of them, the teacher supported pupils well and checked frequently on their progress. She challenged them through effective questioning, enabling them to solve problems for themselves and hence make good progress in their learning. The interactive whiteboard was used with great confidence by pupils in an effective summary of the lesson.

The work set in lessons met the learning needs of most pupils. Occasionally, opportunities were missed to extend the more able pupils and a minority of tasks, though enjoyable, lacked sufficient challenge. In one classroom, Key Stage Two pupils had been divided appropriately into two groups. When both teachers were talking at the same time it was difficult for some pupils to hear and this resulted in a minority of them being unclear about what they should be doing.

Teaching assistants made a valuable contribution in lessons and provided effective, targeted support, especially to pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. This enabled all pupils to participate fully in lessons.

The school has invested in appropriate staff development for teachers, often in partnership with the local authority, in line with the revision of its policies and strategic plan.

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

- support teachers to enable them to set challenging work for all pupils – satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The headteacher was formally appointed to her permanent post in May 2005 after a period as acting headteacher, during which the school went through times of significant uncertainty and turbulence. She has quickly taken appropriate action to address the weaknesses identified at the inspection in June 2005. The school's post inspection action plan is simple, yet clear and coherent and is monitored frequently and rigorously by the headteacher. She has sensibly sought support from the local authority on key aspects for improvement, such as teaching and learning.

After having much of their time focused on issues surrounding the possible closure of the school, governors are now effective in monitoring quality and standards through detailed reports received from the headteacher. For example, at the meeting on 30th January 2006, governors considered progress against the post inspection action plan, the new assessment policy, outcomes from the recent s23 inspection by the diocese, the data relating to pupils' achievements and the procedures for self evaluation.

The headteacher frequently carries out formal observations of lessons taught by all teaching staff. A proportion of these are carried out jointly with advisors from the local authority who act in an advisory and moderating role. The introduction of formal observations has been received well by teachers. Plans for other experienced staff to carry out observations of lessons are well advanced. A particularly successful aspect of the observation scheme introduced by the headteacher is the thorough recording of the feedback with regard to areas for development. These aspects of teaching are then followed up at the next observation, a procedure which teachers feel contributes well to their professional development. This formal system is becoming very effective in enabling the headteacher to monitor the quality of teaching in the

school. The headteacher holds regular formal meetings with every teacher to discuss pupils' progress, the outcomes of which are documented thoroughly.

The school has produced a detailed self-evaluation, which is shortly to be updated. The headteacher acknowledges that there is a need for the self evaluation form to be less descriptive in parts and to be more evaluative overall. Again, this is acknowledged by the headteacher, who recognises that the very appropriate actions taken to address the causes of the serious weaknesses identified in the inspection of June 2005 are only just beginning to make an impact on outcomes.

The headteacher knows her school well. She has been successful in embedding a self-critical culture in the school. She is aware of what needs to improve and is taking appropriate actions to address these areas. Despite the long period of uncertainty the school has been through, staff remain very enthusiastic and committed and morale is high. The school has good capacity to improve.

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

- provide training to the headteacher to extend her role to check on the quality of teaching and the progress made by pupils – good progress.

External support

The local authority has provided effective support to the school in general, and the headteacher in particular, with regard to implementing the post-inspection action plan. The provision of joint observations of lessons has been successful in enabling the headteacher to develop an effective system for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching in the school. The local authority's statement of action addresses each key issue in detail. It contains clear success criteria and all actions are costed. It also contains clear timescales for actions together with information as to how their effectiveness will be evaluated. There is an anomaly in that the statement sets a target date for the removal from the category of serious weaknesses. Schools can only be removed from the category of serious weaknesses following a full inspection. The local authority's statement of action and the support provided to the school in helping it to remove the causes of serious weaknesses is good.

Main Judgements

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

Priorities for further improvement

- continue to develop the Personal Education Plans and link them to individual lesson plans.
- further develop the use of data on individual pupils' progress and achievement so as to develop specific targets for each pupil.
- provide further training for teachers in planning learning activities that challenge the more able pupils effectively.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Martyn Rhowbotham
HM Inspector