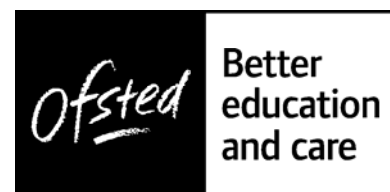


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13 February 2006

Mrs Irene Casey-Evans
North Thoresby Primary School
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Dear Mrs Casey-Evans

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF NORTH THORESBY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 23 and 24 January, 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.

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the senior management team, the chair and vice-chair of governors, parents, and a representative from the LEA. He observed seven lessons or parts of lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke informally to pupils and other members of staff.

Context

Prior to the appointment of the present headteacher 18 months ago, the school had been through a period of considerable disruption in leadership and management, with three headteachers in four years. There had also been long term absences of teaching and administrative staff over the last three years. The staffing structure is now more stable, although a fall in pupil numbers is to result in a reduction of the teaching complement in the near future.

Achievement and standards

There are only a small number of pupils in each year group, a high level of pupil mobility and an above the national average percentage of pupils with learning difficulties. Consequently, results tend to fluctuate from year to year. Nevertheless, there has been a trend of underachievement at the school. This has been particularly apparent for the more able pupils in Years 1 and 2 and the legacy of this has carried forward into Years 3-6. Test results at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2005 showed an increase in the percentage of pupils reaching the level expected of 7-year-olds. Performance at the next higher level was weak. Results at the end of Key Stage 2 have declined overall since 2003. Standards in 2005 were well below the national average, although pupils' performance and progress in science was better than in English, and particularly in mathematics, where attainment was exceptionally low. Too few pupils exceed the level expected of 11-year-olds.

Children's attainment levels on starting school have declined over the last three years and are below average overall. Reception aged children and pupils in Years 1 and 2 are taught together. More effective teaching and learning in this class now mean that all pupils are making satisfactory progress although there are times when the level of challenge does not always hit the mark. Standards are currently well below average for Year 2 pupils but this reflects the high level of learning difficulties for this group of pupils. The achievement and progress of all pupils in Years 3-6 is satisfactory overall. The momentum is good and stronger for the older pupils in school because it is here that teaching is consistently good and challenging. However, it is clear that pupils still have ground to make up. Pupils, at times, rely quite heavily on adult guidance to write imaginatively and expressively for different audiences and purposes. In addition opportunities are not always exploited in Years 1-6 to develop pupils' writing skills in other areas of the curriculum. There are also gaps in pupils' understanding of some mathematical concepts and in their ability to predict, hypothesise or instigate their own investigations in science. These weaknesses are being tackled well with the good support of the LEA.

Judgement

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

- Raise standards and achievement for Year 1 and 2 pupils - the school has made satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils continue to have good attitudes to school and to learning and are keen to do well. Pupils particularly enjoy practical and investigative tasks and are always ready to rise to the challenges set. Occasionally, when pupils lose interest or attentiveness, it is because teaching does not seize and maintain their interest. Relationships are very good and add much to the family ethos of the school. Pupils are polite and behaviour in class and around the school is good and often very good. Pupils readily look out for one another. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. Pupils have a good awareness of

healthy lifestyles because the school promotes well the importance of eating healthily and keeping fit. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to contribute to the life of the school as a community. Pupils are active participants in fund-raising activities for the school and are attentive to the needs of others. This not only adds to their awareness of the wider world but gives them an insight into the economic well-being of the world in which they live.

Quality of provision

Of the seven lessons observed, teaching was good in three and satisfactory in the remainder. No teaching was unsatisfactory. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. It provides an adequate balance of learning experiences that enable children to learn through practical, “hands-on” activities and the direct teaching of key skills. Teaching in Years 1 and 2 has improved well since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. Teaching is most successful when the lesson rattles along at a good pace, work consistently challenges the most able pupils and high expectations are set as to how pupils are to listen and to follow good social conventions when contributing to discussions. These characteristics are not always present. In addition, planning is not always clear as to the difference between a learning activity and what precisely the teacher wants pupils to learn during the lesson. This prevents pupils’ progress from being even stronger.

Teaching in Years 3-6 is satisfactory. There is some good practice for pupils in Years 3 and 4 and it is consistently good for pupils in Years 5 and 6 in English, mathematics and science. When teaching is at its best it plans work that is closely matched to the individual needs of pupils and provides demanding and interesting learning activities that capture pupils’ interest and imagination. Pupils in Year 5 and 6 are provided with a good range of practical and investigative learning tasks that really get them thinking. Pupils invariably rise to the challenges that are set and the teacher’s good use of subject knowledge is used well to find out precisely what pupils do and do not know. Throughout Years 3-6, pupils are managed well and good open-ended questioning involves and includes pupils of all abilities in the lesson. Occasionally, teaching lacks a rigour and urgency or vibrancy to exploit pupils’ potential to the full. Good use is made of computers to support pupils’ learning in different subjects, and in Years 5 and 6, teaching is good at putting pupils’ mathematical skills to effective use in science. The practice of developing pupils’ writing skills in other subjects is not yet good enough. Where teaching assistants were observed in class, they were often making a good quality contribution to pupils’ learning.

The headteacher has introduced good systems for assessing and tracking pupils’ progress across different subjects of the curriculum. Teachers are becoming more accustomed in using the information to check on how well pupils are doing. However, the information is not yet being used robustly enough in all classes to guide teachers’ planning in matching work to pupils’ specific needs or attainment. Pupils’ awareness of targets they are working towards is improving. However, they are not yet active enough in setting and reviewing their own targets in order to heighten their awareness of the role that they can play in their own learning and

achievement. The marking of pupils' work is satisfactory and is good when clear pointers for improvement are clearly identified.

There is a satisfactory curriculum with a clear focus on raising standards in English, mathematics and science. An appropriate emphasis is given and time allocated to the teaching of other subjects. Improved planning formats help to ensure that prior knowledge and skills are being increasingly well built on. The Governing Body has recently ratified a policy for sex and relationships education which is to be followed in conjunction with the school's PSHE programme of study. The school is also to provide a forum of parents with the opportunity to evaluate the policy before its formal implementation. Curriculum enrichment opportunities through visits, visitors and after-school clubs are satisfactory. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties is good. The quality of care for pupils is good although procedures for academic support and guidance are not strong enough. Pupils are given a voice in school and their views are listened to and taken on board. Pupils recognise and appreciate this.

Judgement

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

- Increase the pace and challenge of teaching in Years 1 and 2 - the school has made satisfactory progress.
- Complete the formal adoption of the policy for sex and relationships education- the school has made satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides good leadership and management of the school and has played a pivotal role in moving the school forward. She has tackled weaknesses in teaching in a rigorous but professional manner. There is now a good team spirit in school and all staff share the head's vision for raising standards and achievement. The LEA has worked well with the school in identifying priorities for improvement and tackling weaknesses. The headteacher uses thorough methods for evaluating the work of the school through lesson observations, monitoring planning and pupils' work and the analysis of test results. However, other staff are not yet sufficiently involved in this process so as to give them a clearer and first-hand view of where improvements are needed. The school's self-evaluation is honest, frank and accurate and the headteacher clearly flags up the fact that there is still work to be done.

The action plan is well-constructed, showing clearly what is to be done to address the areas for improvement. The timings are realistic and responsibilities allocated well. Measures to monitor and evaluate are thorough and success criteria specific. The plan is carefully costed. The setting up of parents' forums, informative newsletters and the greater involvement of the school in the community have proven successful in improving communication and partnership with parents and the wider community. They now feel far more involved in and better informed about the life of the school. The implementation of the action plan has also led to improvements in teaching, learning and achievement. However, there is still work to

be done in further raising the incidence of good and better teaching and ensuring all pupils achieve well.

Governors are providing good support for the school and have played an important role in monitoring and evaluating and, in some aspects, implementing the action plan. The chair and vice-chair of governors have been particularly effective and have a clear understanding of what needs to be done to further improve the standard of education. At present not all governors play a formal enough role in monitoring the work of the school. Nonetheless, the school is well placed for further and sustained improvement.

Judgement

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

- Ensure that any significant changes to school policy and organisation are carefully explained to parents and the wider community - the school has made good progress.

External support

The LEA has provided good support for the school. The post-inspection statement demonstrates that it has been aware of the school's difficulties for some time and has provided effective support for teaching, learning and leadership and management. The LEA's own plans indicate that it is to continue to provide support and training for the school, its staff and governors. Procedures are to remain in place to enable the LEA to monitor the work and progress of the school closely. The LEA has useful strategies in place to evaluate the impact of its own actions.

Main Judgements

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

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure assessment is used to best effect to further improve teaching and pupils' involvement in their own learning.
- Ensure that all staff work with the headteacher in gaining a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning and how well pupils are doing.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Newell

Additional Inspector