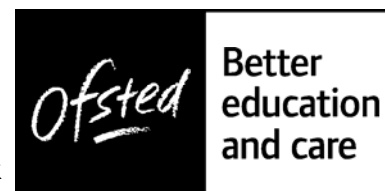


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27 February 2006

Dear Mrs Harwood

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WOLSTON ST MARGARET'S C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Suzanne Gerred, Additional Inspector, to your school on 31 January and 1 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

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, middle managers, the chair and vice chair of governors, the school council and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since the school was inspected in June 2005, one new teacher has been appointed. During this inspection the Reception Year teacher was away from school and another of the school's permanent teachers taught the class.

Achievement and standards

Children continue to enter the Nursery with overall attainment at the level expected for their age. As at the last inspection they make good progress across all the areas of learning. However, it is still the case that this good start is not built on adequately in the Reception Year where children fail to make the progress they should.

Pupils continue to make inadequate progress in Years 1 and 2. The underachievement in these years is more widespread than at the last inspection, affecting all groups of pupils. Boys are doing particularly poorly, although there is underachievement among both boys and girls. The test results of pupils at the end of Year 2 in 2005 were a little below average in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards presently in Year 2 are lower than this.

Pupils in Years 3 to 6 are making satisfactory progress overall although there is some underperformance by the most capable pupils. Progress is strongest in the combined Years 4 and 5 class where most pupils make good gains in their learning. In 2005 pupils' results in the national tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6 were broadly average. However, not all pupils did well enough in relation to their starting points in Year 3.

Overall standards in information and communication technology (ICT) remain too low and pupils still do not use ICT across the different subjects as they should. Pupils' progress is unsatisfactory because the school still does not have the equipment necessary to support effective progress.

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

- raise levels of achievement in the Foundation Stage (Reception Year)–inadequate progress
- improve standards of attainment in writing, mathematics, science and ICT by the age of seven, particularly for those pupils who are higher attaining–inadequate progress.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory overall. However, there is considerable variation in different classes. Children in the Nursery come on in leaps and bounds in their personal, social and emotional development. They quickly learn the school routines and understand the standard of behaviour expected of them. They gain independence well as they choose for themselves activities from a range provided by the Nursery nurses. They work and play together sensibly.

Good behaviour and positive attitudes were also observed in lessons in the Reception Year. Children relate well to the teaching assistant who works with them and readily adapted to working with a temporary teacher. Almost all pupils in Years 3 to 6 enjoy school, want to learn, and behave well. They work well together. Some show mature and sensible attitudes as, for example in the combined Years 4 and 5

class when they tell each other about the myths and legends they are planning to write. Not all pupils, however, take enough care with the quality of their presentation and handwriting.

The picture is less positive in Years 1 and 2. In the classes in these year groups pupils frequently lose interest in activities, 'drift away' and seldom approach activities with real enthusiasm. There are exceptions to this, such as in a mathematics lesson for the upper ability half of the two year groups, when pupils eagerly responded to the opportunity to calculate with money. However, in one of the classes in Years 1 and 2, the behaviour of the boys is unsatisfactory because they are not managed well enough and the teaching does not engage them. This spills over to situations outside the classroom, resulting in a small number of these boys not behaving well enough at lunchtimes. The school recognises that the unsatisfactory behaviour needs to be tackled urgently.

Pupils of all ages are developing awareness of healthy eating and the importance of exercise. They make a satisfactory contribution to the school and wider community, such as through involvement in the school council. Pupils satisfactorily develop the skills necessary for their future economic well-being in most classes but not well enough in the Reception Year to Year 2 where they do not develop enough independence and initiative.

The attendance rate fluctuates and was below the national average in the last school year.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is inadequate overall but varies in different classes. It was satisfactory or better in 10 of the 14 lessons observed, including five in which it was good. However, it was inadequate in four lessons. In the short reading sessions observed the teaching was satisfactory.

As at the last inspection, teaching is satisfactory overall in Years 3 to 6, with good teaching in the combined Years 4 and 5 class. It also continues to be good in the Nursery. Although the teaching seen during the inspection was satisfactory in the Reception Year with some good features, children's recorded work shows that the teaching children have experienced throughout this school year has not improved and remains unsatisfactory. It is also inadequate in Years 1 and 2. Weaknesses in teaching in the Reception Year to Year 2 are the main causes of the significant underachievement in these year groups.

Where teaching is inadequate it is not well enough matched to pupils' individual needs. Expectations of the standards pupils are capable of attaining are not high enough and the pace of many activities is too slow. Not only are the more capable pupils not challenged well enough but also pupils of average capability are not pushed on sufficiently. The lowest attaining pupils, including those with learning difficulties and those who are vulnerable, do not always receive the support they need. Questioning is not used well enough to engage pupils and challenge their

thinking or to check understanding. In one class in Years 1 and 2, a significant number of boys are now responding to these weaknesses by misbehaving.

In other classes where teaching is at least satisfactory, teachers are clear about what they want pupils to learn. They explain the purpose of the lessons to the pupils so that the pupils know what they are working to achieve. Activities are organised well and resources are readily to hand. Most lessons proceed at an appropriate pace. Even though the teaching is satisfactory in these classes the more capable pupils are not always well enough challenged.

Good teaching is characterised by high expectations of all pupils and is sharply focused on their differing needs. It is often stimulating and imaginative. Swift action is taken to help any pupils who have been absent to catch up with what they have missed.

In all classes teaching assistants give at least satisfactory support to pupils' learning. Often, they think on their feet and are proactive in providing support where they see a pupil struggling. Assistants give effective, targeted support when deployed to work with individuals or small groups.

In the Reception Year to Year 2, assessment information is not used well enough to pitch teaching at the right level. Day to day assessment through marking is undertaken conscientiously in most classes with some good marking in Years 3 to 6 providing guidance to pupils about how to do better.

The curriculum covers the required subjects but is still inadequate in ICT and in the level at which topics are pitched in the Reception Year to Year 2. Plans are in place for building work for an ICT suite, for improvement of resources, and staff training. However, the current resources and level of staff confidence are inadequate to consistently build pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills in ICT as they move up through the school. The curriculum in the Nursery is stimulating and imaginative with a good balance of adult directed activities and those that children select for themselves from a range provided.

Resources for reading have improved since the last inspection, with action taken to band books according to levels of difficulty. The school recognises that further work is needed on this and that presently there are too few books to challenge the more capable pupils. A mathematics scheme has been purchased to support learning and to help teachers to pitch work correctly.

The care for pupils' welfare is satisfactory although the attention to vulnerable pupils' needs is insufficiently consistent in one class. The school continues to provide a safe and clean environment for pupils to work in and the building is secure. The quality of guidance to pupils about how to improve their work is too patchy and reflects the variations between different classes in how well the teaching meets the pupils' individual needs. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 do not have a good enough understanding of how they can make progress.

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

- improve the quality of hardware and software in ICT and its use by all pupils across subjects—inadequate progress
- improve levels of learning resources in English and mathematics, particularly in relation to reading and a structured scheme of work—satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and governing body have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are committed to eradicating underachievement. They are working closely with the local authority and have welcomed the external support provided particularly the recent practical support to monitor and improve the quality of teaching.

The school's planning for improvement is satisfactory and links well with the local authority's support plan. It has some good features, such as the measurable success criteria related to raising standards and the involvement of named governors, as well as senior staff, in monitoring each main area of development.

Although there is clear awareness of the areas in which improvement is needed the monitoring of teaching and how it contributes to learning is insufficiently frequent and rigorous to support the pace of improvement now required. The headteacher recognises the need to substantially increase her involvement in checking how teaching supports learning and in setting teachers clear targets. There has been a main focus on improving the Reception Year provision. Much more focus is also required now on improving teaching in Years 1 and 2. There is presently too little involvement of the assistant headteacher in developing the quality of teaching.

The involvement of subject coordinators in checking the quality of provision in their subjects and in being accountable for standards has improved satisfactorily but is still at very early stages.

The senior leaders' and governors' secure understanding of the weaknesses in provision and their clear action plan indicate that the school has the capacity to make the necessary improvements. This is supported by the recognition by staff that improvements are necessary. So far progress has been slow because the emphasis in the first half of the autumn term was on planning the strategies for improvement. Action has been stepped up since the start of November and improvement is starting.

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

- provide more opportunities for subject coordinators to monitor teaching and learning in their subjects—satisfactory progress.

External support

The quality and impact of the external support provided by the local authority are satisfactory. The focus in the first half of the autumn term was on helping the school

to establish a clear strategy for improvement. Attention was also given to improving the Reception class provision but this has not so far brought about the amount of improvement that might reasonably be expected.

A good amount of practical support is now being put in place but there has been insufficient time for this to take effect. Good features include the support this term aimed at improving teaching in Years 1 and 2. Following a local authority review of the school last week it is recognised that this support needs to be longer term and even more intensive than is shown on the current plan.

The overall judgement on the school's statement of action is that it is satisfactory.

Main Judgements

The school has made inadequate progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses. This visit has raised some concerns about the standard of education provided and the school's performance will be monitored.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve teaching in the Reception Year to Year 2 in particular by matching it to pupils' individual needs so that they all do as well as they should.
- Increase the frequency and rigour of the monitoring of teaching and learning so that all teachers fully understand what improvements are necessary and take effective action.

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

Yours sincerely

Alison Grainger

Additional Inspector