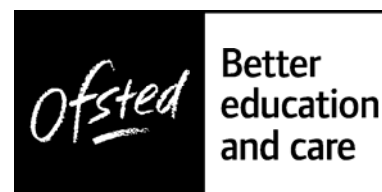


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22 February 2006

Mrs E Stanley
The Headteacher
Whitnash Primary School
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Warwickshire
CV31 2EX

Dear Mrs Stanley

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WHITNASH PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 25 and 26 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 July 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

I observed 10 lessons, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, key post holders, groups of pupils, parents, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Whitnash Primary School was judged to require special measures in July 2005. In September 2004 there had been a large turnover of staff. An inexperienced deputy headteacher and two newly qualified teachers had joined the school. In September 2005 the senior management team was increased and a new member of staff became the learning coordinator. During the monitoring inspection two classes were being taught by temporary teachers due to staff illness and maternity leave. The school has also contracted additional time from a teacher to help address some of the gaps in

the learning of pupils who had experienced disrupted teaching last year. A large proportion of pupils join the school at times other than the beginning of Reception. The number of pupils on roll has fallen from 142 to 115. The school reports that this fall is a direct result of Whitnash Primary School being put into a category of concern.

Achievement and standards

Pupils make good progress in Reception but a large group still enter Key Stage 1 with levels below that usually expected of pupils of the same age. At Key Stage 1 standards in reading and writing are above the levels of the previous two years although mathematics has declined.

Overall attainment at the end of Year 6 improved in the 2005 national tests but was still below the national average. Progress made by the pupils when compared with similar pupils in other schools is satisfactory and no groups underachieved. Standards rose significantly in English, slightly in mathematics but remained constant in science where the pupils also made less progress than in previous years.

The school has monitored lessons, analysed test results, and looked at pupils' work. From this analysis the school has introduced strategies to help those pupils with average ability to make better progress. Targets related to the intensifying support programme (ISP) focus on the development of literacy and numeracy. The progress made by pupils in this target group has improved. Teachers have a greater understanding of how to analyse progress data and this has helped them set relevant targets for some pupils.

The school has been tracking the progress pupils make following the introduction of ISP and has correctly identified that more needs to be done to increase the progress of the more able pupils and those who have special educational needs.

In lessons the rate of progress made by pupils depends heavily on the quality of teaching. However, some pupils also have gaps in previous learning which hinder their progress. To help raise standards the school has rightly introduced a system of careful assessment in English and mathematics but has yet to ensure robust assessment across all subjects. Where assessment is well used, teachers set challenging targets whilst also addressing gaps in understanding.

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

- eradicate the underachievement in Years 1 to 6—satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils enjoy school. Parents confirmed this. They know that their children are always keen to come to school and find them motivated to talk about what they have learnt. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Pupils are keen to learn more and have good working practices within classrooms. The teachers use positive strategies and well planned intervention from learning support assistants to help keep pupils focused on their learning. However, there has not been sufficient opportunity for pupils to develop skills in reflecting upon their own work in order to challenge themselves.

Attendance is satisfactory. The school effectively tracks and acts upon poor attendance patterns. Pupils feel safe at the school and know who to talk to if they have concerns or worries. One pupil has been permanently excluded this year and one pupil has had a fixed term exclusion for one day.

Relationships between pupils are good and they are able to work constructively with others from their class. Pupils are given many opportunities to work in pairs or small groups and are able to cooperate well. Their conversations remain focused on learning and help them to explain their thoughts more effectively.

The school council is an effective forum to raise issues. Pupils welcome the opportunity to share their ideas and members of the school council welcome the chance they are given to resolve issues. They have been involved in organising fundraising events and deciding how this money can be spent.

There are good opportunities for spiritual development in school assemblies, helped by the introduction of a time for reflection. It is less well developed in the classrooms and few opportunities are highlighted in short term planning.

Similarly, cultural development is clearly planned in some areas of curriculum planning but there is insufficient evidence of how this is helping pupils progress in this area.

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

- improve the attention given to pupils' spiritual and cultural development—satisfactory progress.

Quality of provision

Of the ten lessons observed five were satisfactory, three were good and two were inadequate. Even in the inadequate lessons there were examples of satisfactory and good practice. The weaknesses related to particular groups of pupils making less than satisfactory progress.

Use of different targets for groups of pupils has helped to increase the focus of teaching for some pupils particularly those of middle ability. However, there are still situations where work could be more effectively targeted to challenge the most able pupils further and provide more guidance for those who find the work difficult.

In all lessons relationships between staff and pupils and amongst pupils are good. There are clear expectations for behaviour and learning support assistants are well deployed so that they can help pupils make more progress. Lessons are interesting and an element of practical, active involvement is always present. This helped motivate pupils and, as they reported, ensured learning was 'fun'.

In the best teaching seen the teachers find out what the pupils know about the topic and make sure pupils understand what is being taught. From this they adapt their teaching to increase the progress made. In a few lessons pupils working independently are not making as much progress as they could. Similar tasks for the whole class need to be made more challenging for some pupils whilst others need greater guidance to ensure they are practising the concept intended. Occasionally subject knowledge of staff is not good enough to clarify misunderstandings.

Assessment in English and mathematics has begun to help teachers improve targeted teaching. The assessment in other areas is not as well developed and therefore gaps in learning have not been fully identified. Marking of pupils' work clearly identifies where pupils have achieved and how they can improve in the future. However, comments or requests made are not always followed up.

Planning has helped to identify opportunities for more cultural and spiritual development particularly in history and geography. The school is currently working with the LA adviser to improve planning for religious education. There are some good examples of opportunities created in history or geography lessons but this is not consistent across the school. Other extracurricular events, for example, sharing Christmas celebrations in the community, have been good experiences for the pupils and have helped increase their progress in this area.

Long term planning has been drafted and this effectively ensures coverage of subjects. Timetables have been reviewed to make sure the time is available for different subjects. In addition, professional development work to establish literacy and numeracy across the curriculum has begun to have a positive impact. Although not consistent there are some good examples of high expectations for literacy and numeracy in other subjects. The headteacher reviews planning and this has ensured that pupils have had opportunities for learning in all areas of the curriculum. There still remains an issue of some work not being completed.

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

- ensure that teaching takes full account of pupils' differing needs—satisfactory progress
- rectify the weaknesses in the curriculum to ensure proper coverage of subjects—satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have successfully led the staff team. All staff in the school during the monitoring inspection were highly motivated to make the necessary improvements. There is a very high level of commitment to improve the progress made by all pupils.

Monitoring has been effectively established and the senior management regularly reviews planning, pupils' work, and carries out lesson observations. From the monitoring information guidance and support are given to individual teachers. The senior management team has a good understanding of the improvements being made by individuals but the amount of support required in some areas has overshadowed evaluation of whole school progress. The necessary rigour of finding out which new ways of working are having the greatest impact across the school has not been established.

The senior management team has a good understanding of what good teaching looks like. Feedback from lesson observations is clear but does not always focus sufficiently on learning and the progress made by all pupils in the class. Staff have not had the opportunity to reflect on what is good progress for all pupils in lessons.

The school's action plan is detailed and meets the needs of the school well. Outcomes are measurable and linked to a timescale. A few outcomes do not support evaluation during the process as they are not broken down into small steps and closely related to stages in the timeline. Actions taken, and being supported by the LA, are becoming more tailor made to the needs of the school. For example, the headteacher has accurately identified issues with using the ISP. Training has been put in place but more needs to be done on planning a range of activities to meet the needs of all pupils.

The chair of governors has established protocols that ensure the available information is used more effectively to challenge and support the school in its progress. More knowledge about analysing the standards and progress made by the pupils at the school has been identified as a priority for the governing body. The chair of governors has ensured that there is an effective balance of challenge and support, which has increased the school's capacity to improve.

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

- improve leadership and management and ensure that there is a concerted approach to raising standards through checking and improving provision—satisfactory progress.

External support

The LA identified that the school had significant weaknesses before the inspection took place in July 2005. It has provided a considerable amount of effective advice and additional resources which have contributed to the school's progress. There is planned training for all governors to build upon the work already undertaken with the chair of governors.

The LA's statement of action complements the school's action plan effectively. It is clear and effectively identifies timescales, resources and monitoring arrangements. Outcomes are measurable and there is a suitable hierarchy of reporting arrangements which ensures information on the school's progress is regularly provided to senior LA personnel and council members. The length of time given for the school to address the identified areas of improvement so that the school will no longer require special measures is over generous and does not reflect the context of the school sufficiently.

The link inspector has worked effectively with the school. Areas of strength, and where further improvement is required, have been correctly identified. From this information the link inspector has started to help the school ensure new ways of working are adapted to the particular needs of the pupils at Whitnash Primary School. The LA agrees with the school that there is a need to review the impact of new ways of working on the high percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those of higher ability.

Successful links have been made with local schools and the headteacher has benefited from support from other headteacher colleagues.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures—satisfactory.
Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Provide more challenge for pupils of higher ability and more effectively target small steps of learning for pupils with learning difficulties by adapting strategies used to raise achievement of the middle ability groups.

- Raise standards by improving the use of assessment so that teaching accurately challenges all pupils and ensures gaps in previous learning are identified and addressed.
- Develop recording of the experiences provided for pupils to support their spiritual and cultural development.
- Use the information from monitoring activities to more rigorously evaluate the impact of developments across the whole school.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Head of Children's Services for Warwickshire.

Yours sincerely

Janet Thompson
H M Inspector