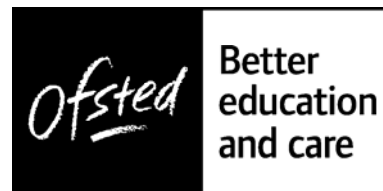


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Mrs C Connearn
The Acting Headteacher
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3 April 2006

Dear Mrs Connearn

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HARTSHILL SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Sheila Browning, Peter Dacombe and Nigel Pett, Additional Inspectors, 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2004.

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

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the executive headteacher, acting headteacher, several senior and middle managers, the chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), groups of pupils, and a senior member of the local authority.

Context

As a result of the judgement that inadequate progress had been made at the end of the last visit, the local authority, the IEB and the governors of Etone Community School and Technology College have agreed to create a 'loose federation' between Hartshill and Etone schools. There is already a similar arrangement with two schools in this part of Warwickshire. In this federation both schools will retain their own individual identity, their own governing body or IEB, headteacher and staff. The purpose of the federation is to enable the

schools to work collaboratively to the benefit of both schools in the short and long term. The federation will initially operate until the end of March 2007 and the arrangement will be reviewed in early spring 2007.

The present headteacher of Etone has been appointed as executive headteacher working across both schools and will be based at Hartshill for two or three days each week. The present acting headteacher at Hartshill is contracted to remain until the end of the summer term. Advertisements have been placed for the substantive post. Following resignations and retirements there are several posts to be filled for September.

Achievement and standards

The 2005 PANDA report has now been published. This confirms the findings of the last monitoring inspection concerning standards of achievement. In national tests taken at the end of Year 9 the pupils' overall achievement was satisfactory, although there were significant differences between subjects. In English, pupils did better than expected but in mathematics standards of achievement were below average. In GCSE examinations results were lower than in 2004 and fell significantly below national averages and also below the levels that would have been expected in similar schools. Given that pupils enter the school with standards which are close to the national average, the 2005 GCSE results reflect inadequate standards of achievement.

Since the start of 2006, significant steps have been taken to make better use of data so that pupils and their teachers have a much clearer picture of what should be expected of them. All pupils are now set targets so that they know what levels or grades they are expected to achieve. There are more regular tests and the results of these are collected on a more frequent basis so that teachers and senior managers can monitor the pupils' progress and intervene where necessary. At the same time, subject leaders have identified more clearly which areas of the curriculum pupils have to focus on to achieve their target grades.

In lessons observed there was clear evidence that these systems are beginning to have an impact on raising standards of achievement. Teachers are now more aware of their pupils' potential and are making better use of assessment data to set appropriate targets and to match lesson content to pupils' needs. Nevertheless, the systems of target setting, tracking, and use of assessment are still relatively new and are not yet consistently embedded. This is acknowledged by the school as an area for further development. This systematic use of data also allows the school to identify more accurately pupils who are on the borderline between grades D and C at GCSE and to organise targeted support for pupils such as booster classes in a number of subjects.

There are indications that test and examination results for 2006 will show an improvement on the previous year. In science and in mathematics, pupils in Year 9 are predicted to achieve test results which are close to both national averages and school targets. In English, recent mock test results for Year 9

are low and do not reflect pupils' typical working grades or previous good standards in this subject. Pupils are to sit a second practice examination in the near future.

At GCSE level, the tracking data shows that current standards are not far from the school target of 45% of pupils to achieve five or more A* to C grades. Predicted results for pupils achieving five or more A* to G grades are now similar to the national average which, if achieved, would represent a significant improvement compared to 2005. Results in English, mathematics, geography, history, modern foreign languages and in ICT are predicted to show significant improvements.

The role of the heads of year is evolving towards one where they will take greater responsibility for monitoring standards and achievement. However, the systems they have been using, based on effort grades, do not match well with the increasing school wide use of target grades and working grades based on attainment.

The school accepts that the 2006 GCSE targets remain relatively modest and while representing an improvement on past performance, do not fully reflect what pupils should be capable of. The recently agreed 2007 GCSE targets are, however, more challenging and more representative of what would be expected in similar schools. Overall, there is still much to do for pupils in Years 9 and 11 to achieve their potential based upon National Curriculum levels achieved at the end of Years 9 and 11.

Personal development and well-being

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. About the school the pupils' behaviour is satisfactory even if on occasions somewhat boisterous. In the majority of lessons, behaviour was satisfactory and in some lessons it was good. However, in a small minority of lessons the attitudes of a few affected other pupils' learning. Nevertheless, incidences of misbehaviour are falling and the school believes this is due to improved teaching and learning, a more consistent approach to behaviour through the introduction of a new behaviour policy, a shared behaviour code, and better relationships among staff and pupils. The number of fixed term exclusions has halved since last year and the number of permanent exclusions reduced. Effective systems such as rewarding positive behaviour, recent targeting of pupils, and intervention programmes are making a positive difference to re-engage and support pupils. About the school pupils are courteous and friendly to one another and visitors. Discussions with pupils reveal fewer incidents of bullying and incidents are monitored carefully and dealt with quickly. However, pupils do not show care for their environment and there is a considerable amount of litter.

The school is working hard to improve attendance levels through first day absence calling and closer liaison with parents and external agencies. The attendance figure for the academic year to date is 91.3 % with a significant reduction of unauthorised absence. Punctuality at the start of the day is poor.

Pupils enjoy taking responsibilities such as prefect duties, peer mentoring, sports partnerships and the school council. In discussions prefects said that they did not feel adequately supported. The school council was consulted about the positive behaviour rewards programme.

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is, in the main, satisfactory.

Quality of provision

The inspectors agree with the school that the quality of teaching is now satisfactory, although the inspection found that the proportion of good and outstanding teaching is still too low. There are strengths but also some important areas for development. There is a consistent use of the common form of planning for lessons and learning objectives are shared with the pupils. Where teaching is good, planning for lessons clearly focuses on the pupils' learning and how pupils will achieve success. Routines have been established to ensure that the pupils settle to their work quickly and good use is made of discussion groups and paired work in a number of subjects. In the lessons judged to be good or outstanding, questioning is used effectively by the teachers to ensure that pupils have understood each learning point before moving on. Teachers build well on the pupils' individual suggestions. They seize opportunities to reinforce what pupils already know to underpin new learning. Relationships are good and the pupils respond well to the teachers' calm management of their behaviour. Teachers make good use of interactive resources to enliven whole class learning and to gauge the pupils' responses to see when to move on briskly.

In some of the lessons where the teaching was satisfactory or inadequate the pupils lost interest in their work because it was not challenging enough and teachers did not give sufficient attention to the learning needs of individual students. In these lessons planning is focused on what teachers will do rather than how pupils will learn and there are insufficient checks on the progress being made.

In around half of the classes visited the pupils produced work of a good standard and took pride in their books. Key areas for development are reinforced effectively, for example, in emphasising the importance of grammar, spelling and punctuation when writing. Elsewhere, work is incomplete and scrappy and it is evident that the expectations of the school have not been met. The quality of marking and guidance towards improvement varies greatly in departments and across the school and remains, on the whole, unsatisfactory.

The curriculum is satisfactory. National requirements are met and religious education meets the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. There is a satisfactory range of courses for pupils in Years 10 and 11 and these have been extended to provide additional vocational and work based experiences so that the economic well-being of pupils is further supported. Senior managers understand the need for further improvements in this range of

options and to address the needs of those pupils who easily become disaffected. The planning for the essential skills of literacy and numeracy are inconsistent. The use of ICT in subjects across the curriculum is satisfactory although there is effective provision in the curriculum for discrete ICT. All pupils in Year 10 receive one hour per week in RE and PSHCE as separate subjects but pupils in the present Year 11 continue to follow the blocked two year programme which delivers them alternately. This unsatisfactory arrangement will cease at the end of this academic year. Planned curriculum provision for pupils with special educational needs and for those who are gifted and talented is satisfactory.

Support, care and guidance are satisfactory. Pupils are well known and on a one to one basis they are well cared for and supported when they encounter problems. The use of tutorial time varies from being very good to unsatisfactory. In the best practice tutors use the time to support pupils in developing their values and beliefs as they consider responses to the school's programme of 'thoughts'. Overall, the requirements for collective worship are not met.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2004:

- raise the pupils' achievement by improving the quality of teaching—satisfactory progress
- to meet statutory requirements: ensure all pupils have their full entitlement in information and communication technology (ICT) and religious education, provide reports to parents on their child's progress in citizenship—satisfactory progress
- provide a daily act of collective worship—inadequate progress.

Leadership and management

It is recognised that the acting headteacher has had to address a considerable number of difficult staffing issues and to contend with a huge budget deficit. The school has been in special measures for over two years and the pace of change has been too slow. The leadership and management are now generally satisfactory and the appointment of an experienced practitioner as the executive headteacher will enhance the school's capacity to improve. The progress referred to in this letter is at an early stage of development and only time will tell if further improvements will take place.

Some modifications have been made to the responsibilities and accountabilities of the senior team, as a result of which, they are clearer about their roles in achieving the goals set for improvement. A survey of staff views about a variety of elements of management has been undertaken and, although some comments were particularly challenging, the findings have been considered. The school's view of its management performance through the School Evaluation Form (SEF) is accurate and staff and IEB members are concentrating their efforts on improving the right things. It is reported that there was little discussion among the staff in general hence their involvement

in the preparation of the next version of the SEF will enable staff to see their role in future developments.

The leadership of subjects is variable, but there are examples of good practice. The coordination of literacy, numeracy and ICT across the curriculum is underdeveloped.

The members of the IEB support the school well and give their time generously. They have a sound grasp of its financial position and a good appreciation of the current issues it faces. They have a clear vision for the aims of the school and how it helps develop the pupils but the means to challenge this remain elusive.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2004:

- ensure governors carry out roles in checking the work of the school—satisfactory progress
- ensure that policies are implemented consistently at all levels and that data is analysed fully to drive whole school improvement—satisfactory progress
- ensure managers apply monitoring systems more consistently and rigorously and tackle underperformance fearlessly—satisfactory progress.

External support

The local authority has done much to address the issues raised in the last letter and their support is judged to be good. Advisers, consultants and advanced skills teachers have been engaged in this support. The intervention of the County Education Officer, with the support of the IEB, resulted in the introduction of the federation.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures—inadequate.

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection—satisfactory.

Priorities for further improvement:

- Raise standards.
- Further improve the effectiveness of senior and middle managers.
- Increase the amount of good and outstanding teaching.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of the IEB and the County Education Officer for Warwickshire.

Yours sincerely

Keith Gilbert
Additional Inspector