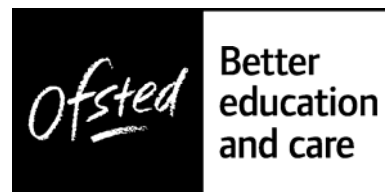


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Mrs M Mooney
The Interim Headteacher
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14 July 2006

Dear Mrs Mooney

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WADHAM SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Susan Kara HMI, Michael Merchant and John Carnaghan, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 29 and 30 June 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 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

Inspectors observed the school at work, including 18 lessons, and scrutinised a range of documents. Inspectors held discussions with students in Years 9 and 10 and undertook a scrutiny of students' work. They also met the interim headteacher and nominated members of staff, the chair of governors and representatives of the local authority.

Context

Following the departure of the temporary executive team in March 2006, the school has been led by an interim headteacher. The senior leadership group,

comprising two deputy headteachers and two assistant headteachers, remains the same as at the time of the section 5 inspection.

The school has successfully recruited a new permanent headteacher who takes up post in September 2006.

Delegated powers were removed from the governing body in February 2006.

Achievement and standards

The overall progress students make and the standards they attain remain inadequate. There are, however, early signs of improvement in the standards being attained by students at the age of 14. The unvalidated Key Stage 3 results for 2006 in mathematics and science indicate that the school has exceeded its targets. Eighty-one per cent of the students have reached the nationally expected levels in mathematics and 79% in science. For mathematics the results are particularly encouraging being 5% above the schools predicted target. Teacher assessments in English indicate that students are likely at least to meet their targets.

By the age of sixteen, 100% of the students who entered the course achieved a nationally recognised award in basic skills. The school is confidently predicting an improvement in the GCSE results compared to last year and anticipates that at least 45% of the students will achieve five or more higher GCSE grades. This is slightly below the school's target. The school recognises the demanding challenges it still faces to improve the rate of students' progress and the standards students reach. This is reflected in the exacting 2007 target of 59% of students reaching five or more higher GCSE grades.

The school is rightly focusing on improving progress and standards through strengthening provision for lower ability students, transforming the quality of teaching and learning, and improving behaviour. The intervention programme to support Year 11 students, implemented between February and June 2006, is judged by the school to be a key contributor to the predicted improvements in this year's GCSE results. There is variation in the degree of the success of the six strands of the programme as the school's evaluation demonstrates. The mentoring programme was appreciated by students and judged by staff to be particularly valuable in engaging targeted students in their examination preparation. The increase in applications for the sixth form, compared to last year, is an indication of the movement away from some of the negative attitudes that were prevalent at the time of the section 5 inspection.

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

- Raise achievement in GCSE – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Students' behaviour is satisfactory. Many students are courteous and polite and behave in a sensible manner around the school and in lessons. The school's strategies for managing behaviour are ensuring that there is generally a sense of calm and order. This is supported by the greater involvement of senior and subject and pastoral leaders and other members of staff in implementing whole school behaviour policies. Pockets of poor behaviour, however, remain. This is particularly noticeable where teaching is less successful and as a result uninspired and unmotivated students disrupt lessons.

Students report that they now have fewer concerns about behaviour and they are generally more positive about school. They welcome the use of praise and rewards to recognise a range of achievements. However, some students' attitudes to learning remain an area for improvement. Again, this directly links to the less successful teaching in the school which allows students to be too reliant on the teacher and accept minimal responsibility for their learning.

Students report that incidents of bullying have declined. This is supported by the fall in the number of exclusions related to bullying. There have been no such exclusions so far in the current term. Students report that they feel safe in school and have confidence that the school deals effectively with any bullying that occurs.

The school has made strenuous efforts to improve students' attendance. As a result, levels of attendance have improved considerably in recent months and are now only slightly below the national average. Improvements in students' personal development are also reflected in the halving of the number of exclusions in the period since the previous monitoring inspection. The number of students referred to the Supervised Learning Unit for inappropriate behaviour has also reduced. The work of this unit is being refocused from September 2006 when it becomes a 'Return to Learning' centre with a greater emphasis on supporting students with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD).

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

- improve behaviour – satisfactory
- improve attitudes to learning – satisfactory.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved and this is reflected particularly in the higher number of good lessons. There remain, however, too many inadequate lessons. The school has a thorough programme for monitoring teaching and learning and it has a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement.

Where teaching is good it is dynamic and engages students' enthusiasm and interest through a stimulating range of absorbing activities. Teachers ensure lessons move at a vigorous pace with no time for learning being lost. Thorough planning in these lessons ensures that the differing needs of students are met. Enabling students to work in pairs and groups is effectively used to foster collaborative learning and encourage students to learn from research and each other.

Where teaching is weak expectations are low and students are too often bored and disaffected. Poor planning does not ensure that students of all abilities are appropriately challenged. A limited range of activities fail to inspire or motivate students to want to learn. In these inadequate lessons the pace of work is too slow and much time is wasted. Some lessons start very late.

There are still too few teachers making enough use of day to day assessment to help students make appropriate progress in lessons. The marking of students' work is inconsistent in its quality, both between subjects and within them. Some students' books have not been marked for months, in others there were no clear subject specific targets or tangible advice to students to help them know how to improve.

The school is putting in place measures to improve the curriculum. Students now begin GCSE mathematics in Year 9 and all students in Year 10 will take both GCSE English language and literature from September 2006.

Provision for students with LDD is being significantly strengthened from September 2006 following a radical review of procedures, processes and the deployment of staff. Good plans include the establishment of a 'Return to Learning' centre to support these students. Closer liaison with partner schools has ensured that the needs of students with LDD entering the school in September have been assessed. Strategies to secure effective communication within the school between staff supporting students with LDD and subject teachers are stronger. There is, however, still more to do to ensure that the progress of these students is carefully tracked and evaluated.

The monitoring of the academic progress of all students has improved and is now satisfactory. Subject and pastoral leaders have a better understanding of data and how it can be used to set realistic individual targets for students. Underachieving students are now clearly identified. The information, however, is not yet being effectively used in lesson planning to ensure that teaching closely matches individual learning needs. Targets are not always shared with students and the methods of tracking students' progress towards meeting them are not yet consistent. This means that students are not always clear about what they are expected to achieve in each of their subjects.

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

- monitor students' progress more effectively – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The interim headteacher is providing very good leadership of the school. She has successfully restored a sense of optimism and shared endeavour amongst staff. Whilst there is clear recognition of the range of challenging issues still to be addressed, there is increased confidence and determination to do so.

A sharp focus has been on changing the culture of dependency within the school to one of accepting responsibility and being accountable. Good investment in developing the capacity of senior and subject and pastoral leaders has led to clearer expectations and a better understanding of roles and responsibilities. Leaders are enthusiastic and feel empowered to accept responsibility and they welcome opportunities to contribute to, and influence, developments in the school. Their growing understanding and commitment is demonstrated, for example, in their stronger contributions to ensuring that the school's behaviour strategies are more consistently implemented.

Senior leaders are more widely involved in leading and managing the school and have valuable opportunities to develop and demonstrate their skills. This has enabled them to contribute to the satisfactory progress being made by the school. Following training, the deputy headteachers now appropriately contribute to the school's monitoring of teaching and learning.

Subject and pastoral leaders have generally responded positively to opportunities to develop their roles. A planned programme to support this, including training on the use of data and on judging the quality of teaching and learning, has supported them in gaining a sound grasp of their key responsibilities. There are now some good subject leaders who are honestly and effectively questioning the work of their area and devising appropriate strategies to secure improvement. In aspects of their work, these leaders are formulating systems within their own subjects where whole school processes have either not yet been determined or implemented. This leads to inconsistencies, for example in aspects of tracking students' progress. Continuing to strengthen the contribution all subject and pastoral leaders make to improving the progress students' make and the standards they achieve rightly remains a priority for the school. Whilst there is wider acceptance of responsibilities, accountability through line management is not fully established.

The school reports that it is already working closely with the new headteacher and strategies for a smooth transition of leadership appear to be well in place. Planning and actions for this term are reported as being undertaken in consultation with the new headteacher, including agreements on aspects to

be deferred until his arrival. One example of the latter is further work on defining and implementing leadership and management responsibilities.

The school has yet to undertake a full review of specialist school status.

The governing body now has a clearer understanding of its roles and responsibilities. With effective support from the local authority, it is establishing more robust systems and processes and appropriately preparing for the return of delegated powers in September 2006.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2005

- improve the impact of and consistency of management policies – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has provided a range of effective support for the school. This includes good support from advisers and consultants on improving teaching and learning, pertinent advice and guidance in reviewing procedures and processes for supporting students with LDD and valuable support and training for the governing body. The leadership of the school, both in the short and the long term, has been successfully secured. The purpose and procedures of the core group have been reviewed and clarified. There is a clear understanding that the monitoring of the school's progress will be closely tied to the new school improvement plan which will be formulated by the new headteacher.

Main Judgements

Progress since being made subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring visit – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

Improve teaching and learning through:

- the effective planning of lessons to meet the needs of all students
- ensuring students know and understand the level at which they are working and what they need to do next to improve
- providing a stimulating and appropriately challenging range of learning opportunities.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Children and Young People for Somerset and the Diocesan Director of Education for Bath and Wells.

Yours sincerely

Valerie Pearson
H M Inspector