

Nord Anglia Inspections
Anglia House
Carrs Road
Cheadle
Stockport SK8 2LA

T 0161 491 4191
F 0161 491 9677

Ofsted helpline
08456 404045



6 July 2006

Mrs P Smith
The Headteacher
The Oswaldtwistle School
Union Road
Oswaldtwistle
Accrington
Lancashire
BB5 3DA

Dear Mrs Smith,

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE OSWALDTWISTLE SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Andy Margerison, Additional Inspector, to your school on 4 July 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 January 2006.

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, visiting about a dozen learning sessions, scrutinised documents and some pupils' books, and met with the headteacher, several other staff, pupils, the chair of the management committee, and a local authority (LA) officer. Telephone conversations were held with three LA staff, and senior staff in four secondary schools with which this school has links. Visits were made to the Rossendale learning base, to a football tournament and to a work-based learning venue.

Context

Following the January inspection Year 11 pupils, who were educated at home by a distance learning arrangement, were brought into the school. At the time of this monitoring visit, all Year 11 pupils had left the school. A deputy headteacher who was in post, but not present, during the January inspection resigned with effect from April. A new deputy headteacher has since been appointed by internal promotion. There are a relatively large number of teacher vacancies for September.

Achievement and standards

In lessons, pupils were generally making at least satisfactory progress. Good achievement was seen in some of the work in English, mathematics and science. Pupils made good headway with activities in a variety of subjects that involved practical work and participation. Work in books often showed conscientious effort and was pitched at a level that enabled pupils to consolidate their learning and break new ground. This progress is facilitated by lessons that are generally appropriately planned to meet pupils' needs and by assessment that gauges their prior attainment reliably.

Many pupils participated in national tests at age 14 or took GCSE examinations this term.

Achievement of the few pupils based at the Rossendale centre is limited by lack of facilities and poor attendance.

Personal development and well-being

The centre is, in the main, an orderly and calm learning environment. This reflects the fact that most pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour are at least satisfactory. In some lessons attitudes and behaviour are good. Considering pupils' backgrounds, many pupils make good progress in developing their personal skills. Pupils clearly enjoy practical activities and take part enthusiastically. However, the behaviour of the youngest pupils is more persistently challenging than that of older ones, who often display mature attitudes and can be very responsive when activities engage and stimulate them. The behaviour and attitudes of the group who went to play football against other Lancashire short-stay schools was excellent.

Attendance has not improved overall since the last inspection, but the school has had success with a few pupils by increasing the rigour in which it pursues non-attendance. Girls' attendance is lower than boys'.

The school has maintained its good programme for encouraging pupils to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Quality of provision

Teaching

Teaching was satisfactory and often good. This was particularly so where pupils were on course for accreditation, for instance through GCSE, and the teaching was well targeted on that goal. Several teachers and teaching assistants were able to engage well with pupils and get the best from them despite hot weather and the imminence of the end of the school year. In the best lessons staff judged well how much to encourage and how far to chivvy pupils in order to secure the most productive learning. Occasionally, mundane activities went on too long and pupils became bored. Behaviour management in the classroom was appropriately low key and generally effective. Painstaking marking in, for example, English and science, gave pupils a clear indication of what they were doing right and how to correct errors.

At the time of the section 5 inspection in January about a third of the pupils on roll were learning at home or at staffed locations away from the school; the majority of these pupils were in Year 11. The inspection considered the arrangement inadequate. Subsequently most pupils who were 'distance learning' were brought into the school. Whilst this enabled them to benefit more directly from the school's provision, it was a contributory factor to the precipitation of serious behaviour incidents. These and the associated atmosphere had a negative impact on morale, including that of staff. The mixed success of this sudden change in provision illustrates the potential hazards of change that is at variance with what pupils have come to expect, and what staff have planned as most expedient for the school community. At the time of this monitoring visit, Year 11 pupils had left the school. The working environment was generally calm and orderly. Any challenging behaviour was well contained.

In addition to the senior leadership team (SLT), the school establishment is seven teachers. Because of staff departures or promotion to the SLT, there has been one new appointment and there are five teaching vacancies for September. Some lessons are at present covered by supply staff and in some cases pupils have had several supply teachers for the same subject this term. This instability in staffing is a major concern. The school must look to the LA for significant support with staffing in these difficult circumstances.

Curriculum

In the main, the school's procedures for assessing pupils' academic standards and behavioural needs on entry are rigorous. Pupils are therefore generally launched with appropriate teaching and in a suitable class group. However, some excluding schools are dilatory in making available pupils' records. There is not always as much liaison as there should be to ensure curriculum and pastoral continuity at or before the time at which pupils join this short-stay school.

With the assistance of LA advice, the school has identified a range of possible progression routes for pupils moving into Year 10, or joining at the start of that year. It has now 'booked' a number of out-placements for various forms of education, training or work-based learning. These are likely to provide good opportunities for pupils at present in Year 9 and have been mapped out after taking stock of the needs and aptitudes of those pupils. The fruition of this initiative must be evaluated next term, once it has bedded down.

Pupils at present in Year 10 have two alternative curriculum models: one involves two days on work-based learning, outdoor pursuits or off-site education; the other is school-based and more academic. The willingness of some employers and trainers to take on difficult pupils is commendable. For some pupils college courses had been planned for next year. As some of these pupils have very recently been involved in incidents of highly challenging behaviour, college placements for four of them have been rescinded. This is disappointing for the pupils and for senior staff who have made every endeavour to facilitate the pupils' move on from this short-stay school. The school has, or is investigating, reasonable fall-back provision to deal with this contingency.

There has been a sound track record of successful re-integration of pupils into mainstream schools, though some such ventures have needed considerable investment of care by this short-stay school and the receiving school. The willingness of mainstream schools to accommodate the needs of potential re-integration pupils is variable; some have gone out of their way to do everything possible to help.

Senior staff are aware that pupils joining this short-stay school should have a clear and coherent forward plan. For the most part, the school tries effectively to put in hand re-integration, a move to a special school, or placement for education, training or work-based learning elsewhere. Curriculum coherence is limited by the present high inward flow of pupils, staffing difficulties at the school, and understandably tepid enthusiasm on the part of some other education providers to receive pupils.

Most subjects taught at the school are reasonably resourced. Facilities for information and communication technology are good. There is a lack of provision for outdoor play and physical education because of delays in attending to the surfacing of the outdoor area. A football tournament with other Lancashire units was highly successful in expanding pupils' social experience and giving focus to their enthusiasm for football and the associated skill development.

The provision in a community centre in Rossendale for three pupils whose attendance at the main site would be inappropriate is limited by lack of resources and the pupils' poor attendance. Better arrangements for these pupils should be considered.

Care guidance and support

The provision for the care, guidance and support of pupils has improved since the inspection and is now satisfactory. This is because, with the exception of one centre that caters for three very challenging pupils, almost all of the distance learning provision has ceased. In addition, the school has improved its procedures for monitoring attendance when pupils are at college or on work experience. As a result, the school is in a much more secure position to know where pupils are at any given time. The attendance and progress of the pupils who are educated at the Rossendale site are monitored on a weekly basis by school staff. However, the lack of a permanent pupil support officer limits the school's capacity to tackle non-attendance and other issues, for example, by follow-up home visits and closer liaison with parents.

The school has begun to revise its procedures to track pupils' academic and personal progress from the time when they join the school. The school is hampered in this by the lack of information received about some pupils when they arrive. However, the new systems should help the school monitor pupils' progress more effectively and help to involve pupils more in setting learning targets.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2006:

- ensuring that all pupils are taught and receive full-time education to allow them to achieve as well as they can – satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

A substantive second deputy headteacher has recently been appointed by internal promotion. The SLT is now well placed to tackle robustly the challenges facing the school. Some personnel issues have been resolved. However, there are major staffing difficulties. Besides the SLT, the school has seven teaching posts. A new mathematics teacher has been appointed for September; there are five other vacancies, some at present covered by supply teachers. The school needs the support of the LA in dealing with this short-term emergency. The school is interested in exploring with the LA the possibility of longer-term arrangements that might at the same time secure staffing and foster professional links with the secondary schools for which it provides a service.

Senior staff, with the help of LA colleagues, have made good headway in monitoring the school's work and planning ahead. This has been frustrated by a number of setbacks: staff departures, recent short-term behaviour problems in the school, and disappointments with some planned out-placements.

The school enjoys well appointed classrooms and a generally welcoming and attractively decorated building. However, there is delay in sorting out small difficulties with the surfacing of land behind the school for outdoor play and physical education. The LA may need to hurry this along.

To a large extent, pupils with a statement of special educational need are moved on appropriately. A protocol of no more than sixteen weeks between assessment for a statement specifying special school provision and the realisation of such a placement is generally honoured. However, there are delays in reviewing mainstream statements that some individuals have on entry to this short-stay school, and in providing assessment when it is sought. With two pupils currently on roll, this is resulting in a four term 'limbo' period between mainstream and special school. The practice of retaining the excluding school's educational psychologist initially, before handing over to Oswaldtwistle School's educational psychologist, should be reviewed by the LA. Where there are reasonable grounds to think that a special school may be needed, procedures should be expedited, so that the matter can be settled and the pupil either transferred or settled into a plan at the Unit.

The chair of the management committee has a good appreciation of the challenges that the school faces and the obstacles to be overcome. However, the committee is small and often has less than full attendance. The LA should support the school by seeking to bolster the committee, increasing senior representation from the secondary schools that the Unit serves.

Senior staff and the LA have worked together well in coming to a thorough self-evaluation of urgent and longer-term priorities for improvement. There is good capacity for improvement. In its thoughtful consideration of the sometimes rapidly changing needs of individual pupils, the concern and care shown by the headteacher and senior staff for pupils' welfare are impressive.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2006:

- creating an effective senior management team to speed up improvement especially in relation to distance learning – satisfactory progress.
- reducing the numbers, and length of stay, of pupils with statements of special educational need, to ensure that they receive the education they are entitled to – satisfactory progress.

External support

The school has had satisfactory support from the LA through an action plan that had close correspondence with the issues set out in the inspection report. The LA's advisory staff have given good support in developing monitoring methods, planning curricular innovation and helping the school to weigh up how things stand in a rapidly changing situation. The LA has been instrumental in bringing about some improvement in moving on pupils with a stated need for a special school placement.

However, there is an urgent need for LA support to stabilise staffing. The LA should help the school by seeking improvement in provision for those now at the Rossendale base. The LA might also assist with regard to the possibly recurring issue of rescinded out-placements. In the course of the next few terms, the LA should seek greater harmonisation of provision for difficult pupils in this part of the county,

with excluding secondary schools and other educational providers shouldering more collective responsibility for the onward progress of excluded pupils.

It is noted that the action plan anticipates review in the light of this first monitoring visit. Priority points for consideration are set out below; other points appear in the earlier text of this letter.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Quality of LA's statement of action – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed at the present time. However, the newly qualified supply teacher who is at present in the school may continue if there is work for him to do.

Priorities for further improvement

- With the help of the LA, stabilise staffing for September.
- With the help of the LA, settle appropriate access to vocational provision for Key Stage 4 pupils in September.
- Prevail on the relevant council services to deal with the playground project which has been at a stand still for too long, so that the facility is available for use in the autumn term.
- With the help of the LA, seek to ensure that those who may need a special school are dealt with more speedily, so that by the end of the autumn term instances of long waits for assessment have been reduced.
- With the help of the LA, during the next school year begin to secure the curriculum by starting to improve liaison with mainstream schools at the point of exclusion and in negotiation of phased re-integration.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State the chair of the management committee and the Director of Education and Standards for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Bennetts". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name. To the right of the signature is a vertical red line.

Jim Bennetts
H M Inspector