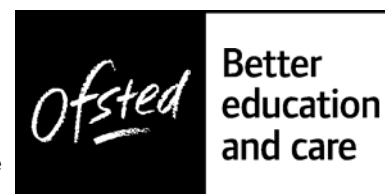


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23 June 2006

Mrs P Allen
Chair of Governors
Doncaster School for the Deaf
Ledger Way
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Dear Mrs Allen

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF DONCASTER SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

Introduction

Following my visit with Jeffery Plumb Additional Inspector to your school on 21 and 22 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 June 2005.

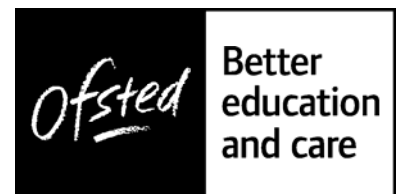
This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Evidence

Inspectors observed a number of lessons and scrutinised relevant documentation. We spoke with pupils and sampled pupils work, and met with the headteacher and senior staff in connection with the key issues. We also met with the chair of governors and the chair of the board of trustees. In addition we spoke with many of the staff about their roles and work with the children, and we attended an assembly.

Context

The trustees have undertaken to continue their financial subsidy of the school for the next two years and this has assured its immediate future despite the unremitting fall in pupil numbers, and the associated reduction in revenue. The school feels the status as a school causing concern is adversely affecting its ability to attract new pupils. The school has adopted an astute marketing campaign to raise its profile and has recently received some positive publicity, including one member of staff who



won the North Region 'Special Needs Teacher of the Year' award. The school has re-launched the baby unit and Nursery, and pupil numbers here are growing steadily.

Importantly Doncaster local authority has referred two pupils to the baby unit, which it has not done previously and the school hopes to build on this improved relationship and secure further referrals.

Achievement and standards

Overall the standards pupils attain are low, although a few pupils do attain high standards for their age. This overall position is gradually improving, fuelled by a number of changes. These include grouping pupils by ability and/or their level of development, the appointment of experienced teachers of the deaf, some important amendments to the curriculum and change of approach to teaching and learning. These are increasingly having a positive impact upon the standards that pupils attain, although a clear view on the progress they are making is not possible at this time across all subjects. To address this the school has recently agreed a new baseline assessment procedure so that it can standardise the way in which it monitors and subsequently tracks the progress pupils are making.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils enjoy school and their attitude to learning has improved significantly since the last inspection. They say: 'We like English, mathematics and science'. They are enthusiastic about the opportunities they are given to take responsibility; including researching how to initiate a diving club. Behaviour is satisfactory and improving rapidly as pupils gain better communication skills and begin to feel increasingly valued. The behaviour policy, which focuses on rewards and sets clear boundaries, together with the consistent use of British Sign Language (BSL), has contributed to the much-improved behaviour. The needs of pupils with complex behaviour difficulties are skilfully managed. Since the last monitoring visit, exclusions and instances of restraint have fallen greatly. This is now a happy school where pupils consider that their voice is heard and acted upon. They say that: 'Bullying is rare and where it does occur it is dealt with quickly'. In particular they say 'Racist bullying has stopped'.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified in the inspection of June 2005

- Systems to improve pupils' behaviour and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and eliminate any bullying and harassment - **good**

Quality of provision

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning remains satisfactory, as at the time of the last monitoring visit. However, the amount of good teaching has increased and there is some outstanding teaching. The best teaching is delivered at a cracking pace and activities are suitably matched to the needs of the pupils. In these lessons there are very good visual cues to help pupils with their learning, relationships are outstanding, and instructions are communicated clearly using BSL. Learning support assistants are skilfully deployed to manage pupils with challenging behaviour and they make a very valuable contribution to pupils' learning. All staff in the school work in effective partnership to support pupils in their learning. It is important now that the satisfactory teaching is improved to match the quality of the best teaching. Enjoyment in learning has increased since the last visit and standards are beginning to rise for a number of pupils. Although assessment has improved there is not yet a coherent whole-school approach to assessment to monitor the progress of every pupil nor to inform planning to further raise achievement.

Aspects of care, guidance and support remain good, as identified by the last monitoring visit. Child protection procedures are robust. Detailed and thorough risk assessments are carried out. All adults are carefully checked for their suitability to work with children. Pupils say: 'We feel safe and there are adults who we trust'. Pupils' medical needs are known and the school nurse has clear protocols for the safe keeping and administering of tablets and medicines. Excellent use is made of external agencies to support pupils with additional emotional and behavioural needs. Pupils benefit from the involvement of the York Deaf Child and Family Service. Careers guidance is good. The personal adviser from Connexions has a good understanding of the needs of deaf children. There is not yet a consistent approach to tracking pupils' academic progress throughout the school. However, there is an action plan to launch a suitable commercial assessment programme to enable the school to demonstrate the progress made by all pupils, including the very small steps of progress made by pupils with additional complex learning difficulties. Assessment systems and procedures are becoming more formalised across the school, but are not yet embedded. A number of staff are still finalising subject-specific assessment strategies, and consequently have not yet implemented them. Scrutiny of these plans shows that they will involve baseline, formative and summative elements, which mirrors good practice. Making a baseline assessment will provide a standardised starting point for these systems. It should enable staff to signpost the progress pupils are making, when used in tandem with its tracking and monitoring systems. Importantly there are plans to involve pupils in the negotiation of their subsequent targets, to reinforce their commitment to achieving the targets. This proposed system will need time to bed in and careful monitoring will need to be undertaken to evaluate its effectiveness. The staff continues to access appropriate training to support the implementation of this strategy. The headteacher has taken a considered approach in this matter. He has consulted with all staff to ensure that the best possible assessment system, suitable for deaf children at this school, is adopted.

The consistent approach to promoting communication for deaf children is effective. As a result they have become less frustrated. Their access to learning has improved. Their behaviour is significantly better than at the time of the last inspection. In a short space of time their attitude to learning has come on leaps and bounds. Staff and pupils are comfortable with the use of BSL. There is a strong commitment to a visual approach to motivate learning.

The needs of pupils with additional and complex needs are carefully identified. Effective programmes are put in place to meet their needs. Anger management programmes, a focus on emotional literacy, and the use of collaborative external links to support pupils with challenging behaviour are effective. The behaviour of these pupils has improved significantly. The behavioural targets on individual education plans are sharp, and used well to build pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Effective use is made of an educational psychologist, as appropriate, to assess the additional needs of pupils.

The curriculum is becoming increasingly appropriate for the full range of learners at the school. It is broader and has better balance to it, with in-built elements of choice. There are work-based learning opportunities, and the school makes the most of the good links it has with Doncaster College for the Deaf to enhance pupils learning and accreditation opportunities. All areas of the National Curriculum are now offered, including music.

The curriculum coordinator has ensured that subject leaders have developed and are delivering a realistic and appropriate curriculum. More recently related action plans have been evaluated and reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose. It is hoped by the school that the enhancements in curriculum provision will spark improvements in achievement. This has already been seen in English, where recent developments have improved pupils' motivation and access to the curriculum.

Extra-curricular provision is an improving area and staff are now more confident in taking pupils off-site. Recently the school attended the National Deaf Athletics Championships. This has coincided with a major improvement in the attitudes and behaviour of pupils, who have embraced the schools 'respect' policy.

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

- To clarify and prepare for the range of the special educational needs of pupils that it admits and employ an effective methodology to teach deaf children - **good progress, action completed**
- To establish effective management within the school of all areas of the curriculum – **good**

- Ensure that all pupils have the required music lessons - **good progress, action completed**

Leadership and management

The headteacher continues to provide dynamic and highly effective leadership. He has a firm grasp of what needs to be done and has strategically deployed staff to ensure key issues are being tackled. Importantly many of the action points highlighted by the last inspection have been successfully addressed.

A major improvement has been seen in the culture and ethos of the school. Staff report that there is a greater transparency and that they genuinely feel part of a team working towards a common purpose. Although they are now more accountable staff feel happier and are very committed to providing a high quality education for the children.

Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are established. The behaviour strategy, coupled with the change in learning methodology has greatly improved pupils' access to the curriculum.

The school has made appropriate progress in addressing the additional priorities for improvement identified at the last monitoring visit.

The board of trustees continues to provide invaluable support and guidance in the strategic leadership and management of the school.

Governance is satisfactory. An effective committee structure and clear terms of reference enable the governing body to meet their statutory responsibilities. All policies required by law, including a race policy, are in place. Good systems enable the governors to keep a careful check on the school's performance. Important issues such as the number of exclusions and restraints feature as standard items at every governing body meeting. The chair of the governing body visits the school regularly to see how recently introduced plans to improve behaviour and raise achievement are beginning to make a difference for the pupils. Parents now receive good information about all aspects of school life and are made fully aware of their rights and responsibilities, but this valuable information has not yet been brought together into a coherent and user- friendly prospectus. Governors act as good critical friends to the headteacher. There is a very good balance between support and challenge.

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

- Ensure effective leadership and management by appointing a permanent leader for the school who has the necessary vision and skills to lead

developments particularly in; pupils achievement, teaching, assessment, learning and the curriculum – **good progress, action completed**

- Ensure that governance is effective in fulfilling statutory duties – **good progress, action completed**
- Governors should check on all procedures, including race equality and race relations. They should ensure that all parents are consulted and receive full annual prospectus information about attendance, the school's results, its special educational needs policy, the provision and rights to opt out of religious education, assemblies and sex and relationships education - **good progress, action completed**

External support

The school has collaborative links with Derby School for the Deaf and St Johns School for the Deaf in York.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – **good**

Progress since the last monitoring visit – **good**

Priorities for further improvement

The priorities for further improvement are those listed below.

- Systems to improve pupils' behaviour and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and eliminate any bullying and harassment
- To establish effective management within the school of all areas of the curriculum
- to ensure that all teachers use assessment to accurately record pupils' achievement and inform their planning
- To ensure that all curriculum leaders have realistic and effective plans to raise the achievement of pupils



I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the chair of the board of trustees.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Young'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J' and 'Y'.

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector