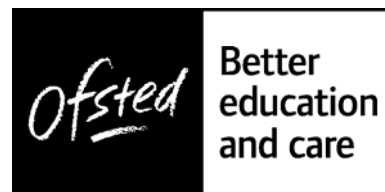


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Mr David Mellor
The Headteacher
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26 May 2006

Dear Mr Mellor

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST LEONARD'S C OF E FIRST SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 17 and 18 May 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 November 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

Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with pupils, staff, governors and a representative from the local authority. HMI also observed an assembly, lessons or parts of lessons in each class and evaluated a sample of pupils' work.

Context

St Leonard's First School is much smaller than average with fewer than 50 pupils on roll. It is emerging from an unsettled period where instability in leadership and management prevented it from making the progress expected and basic safety procedures were not satisfactory. The new headteacher took up his permanent post in April 2006 and is the fourth person to fulfil that role

in two years. The school moved into new premises in 1999. The pupils are all from the surrounding villages and there are none who are in the early stages of learning English. There are few pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and all are from White British backgrounds. Very few are currently eligible for free school meals.

Achievement and standards

There is a recent improvement in the standard of work but pupils are not yet working to potential. Standards are broadly average up to age seven but remain below national levels for older pupils. Standards are inadequate overall. The results achieved by the more able pupils in English and mathematics, and by all pupils in writing, are a cause for concern. In 2005 no pupils aged seven reached the higher levels in writing.

Pupil progress is now monitored more accurately but prior to this the school had a generous and inaccurate view of achievement. The school has now set appropriate targets for pupils to reach by the time they leave at the end of Year 4, although these are cautious rather than ambitious.

In English, standards are inadequate. Some pupils use punctuation well but this is not consistently applied in Years 3 and 4 and, as a result, sentence construction is barely satisfactory. However, some pupils show an extensive vocabulary and contribute well to discussions but this extended vocabulary is not used as effectively as it could be to improve the quality of written work.

Errors are not always corrected and, as a consequence, mistakes are repeated. Spelling is not secure and not all pupils have strategies for attacking unfamiliar words. An acceptance that simple strategies need to be taught more systematically is helping progress to improve.

Mathematics remains an area of concern for pupils aged between seven and nine and the school has rightly identified this as an area of priority. Pupils throughout the school show a fragile grasp of basic number skills and problem solving. Worksheets are used frequently and misconceptions are not always corrected. For example, in one class pupils were using the skill of estimation to order weights but did not securely use the correct notation required and, whilst good work is helping the youngest pupils to learn counting skills, simple arithmetic misunderstanding is allowed to continue. On occasions the level of work produced by pupils is kept at a 'safe' level rather than using the pupils' natural enthusiasm to explore new areas of thinking.

There are still too few opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and this limits the progress being made overall.

Pupils who have particular learning needs also make inconsistent progress. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities who have additional support make better progress in general than others. However, those pupils of high

abilities do not make satisfactory progress as a result of low expectations and a lack of challenge.

The school does not yet set ambitious enough targets for all pupils, especially Year 4.

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

- monitor pupils' progress and ensure they achieve the standards of which they are capable – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils show good attitudes to learning and respond well to challenges and instructions. Behaviour is generally good and the pupils show consideration towards each other during lessons and outside of the classrooms. Behaviour deteriorated where pupils were struggling to complete tasks that were too difficult or were bored with tasks that lacked challenge. Pupils report that there are no examples of bullying and that relationships are good. Several pupils expressed a desire to have 'harder work'.

Attendance is good and remains above average at 97.4%. There have been no exclusions and the school works hard to maintain this good performance. There is an emphasis on checking the reasons for any absence and this helps ensure that pupils attend well. The school was closed for a day recently because there was 'insufficient staffing to ensure the safety of the pupils'. This does not sit easily with the efforts to reinforce the importance of being in school.

The staff show genuine care and interest in the pupils' welfare and safety. In recent months the statutory provision for child protection has improved and is now satisfactory. There are appropriate opportunities for pupils to consider the multicultural community they will eventually live in and the school has a spiritual strength and ethos that befits a church school. The recently established school council are very keen to start their work and make a contribution to the community.

Quality of provision

Staff are working hard to improve the education the pupils receive and they are beginning to make the changes required.

Teaching is satisfactory and no inadequate teaching was observed. However, there are generic issues which prevented teaching achieving a higher standard. Assessment is not used to measure pupils' progress. There are low levels of expectation and a lack of focus on clear learning objectives. Similarly teachers sometimes take too long on introductory parts of lessons thus reducing the progress made in the main part and restricting the final plenary

to an over brief discussion. However, some teachers are now increasing the opportunities for independent learning and, in one class, the youngest pupils were able to work in pairs on separate activities for extended periods of time.

The quality of teachers' marking is improving and is now satisfactory overall although there are still too many examples where comments remain encouraging rather than helpful in improving learning, especially in English. There were too few opportunities for pupils to use extended vocabulary and this lack of opportunity to develop literacy skills in other subjects was a feature throughout the school.

The breadth of the curriculum has been improved and is now satisfactory. The school has a suitable range of information and communication technology (ICT) provision and plans to improve this still further.

Teachers' planning is generally satisfactory but sometimes fails to take account of what the pupils already know. However, teachers do not always make sufficient allowance for mixed age classes and, as a result, some pupils do not make the progress they are capable of. Despite this, some planning does match work to different abilities. This has helped to improve the level of challenge to pupils but, again, has not yet had the desired impact on standards.

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

- help teachers increase the challenge in the work set for pupils – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The newly appointed headteacher has been in post only one month and the senior teacher is on maternity leave. Leadership remains insecure and recent changes have not yet raised standards.

However, there are signs of early promise. The range of planned professional development for teachers is more appropriate and relevant to the school's needs. The recently completed parental satisfaction questionnaire shows an increasing confidence in the amount and quality of communication. The new headteacher has already identified specific aspects that require improvement and has taken quick action to improve the level of resources in school, especially in ICT. He has a rigorous approach to identifying areas of weakness and is working hard to ensure the actions required actually take place. In a short period of time he has completed an accurate analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

The governors are committed to the school and have a rapidly increasing awareness of its relative strengths and weaknesses. They operate core committee functions well and have taken a robust approach to the problems

identified in the previous report. They are sensitive to the arrival of a new headteacher and are starting to establish routines that will help hold the school to account.

The monitoring of pupils' progress now takes place more frequently but is not yet consistent enough to make a difference to standards and progress. For example, lessons are observed by a variety of people but the outcomes of these observations are not yet used to improve provision.

The school's original improvement plan is now out of date and inappropriate. It is replaced by the response to the inspection. This has been written by the previous acting headteacher with the support of the local authority but did not involve the school's other leaders. As a result, monitoring continues to rely on external opinions and the school has not yet developed effective self-evaluation.

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

- improve the ways in which the school examines its own work and the quality of its provision – inadequate.

External support

The school has received good support from the local authority through a range of consultant and management advisers. The local authority has produced a good action plan which contains an appropriate level of detail and has an ambitious timescale for bringing about improvements. Some of the actions, however, emphasise monitoring activity at the expense of better outcomes for pupils and do not always secure the school's active involvement. The level of additional resources provided is also good.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed to the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Monitor both the progress pupils make and the quality of teaching.
- Raise teachers' expectations of pupils in lessons.
- Set ambitious targets for each year group.
- Use assessment information to inform teachers' planning.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire and the Diocesan Director of Education for Litchfield.

Yours sincerely

Ceri Morgan
H M Inspector