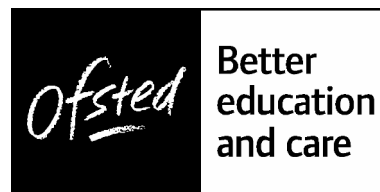


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Mrs S Farr
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4 January 2006

Dear Mrs Farr

OFSTED MONITORING OF SCHOOLS WITH NOTICE TO IMPROVE

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school with Tim Bristow HMI on 6 December 2006.

As a result of the inspection on 17 and 18 May 2006, the school was asked to improve the quality of teaching, to make more effective use of assessment information, and to strengthen systems to improve pupils' attendance. Improvements were most urgently needed in Key Stage 2 where standards were particularly low and pupils' underachievement was most significant. The inspection also identified key aspects of teaching in literacy, mathematics and science that required improvement.

Suitable steps have been taken to improve the school's provision and to raise standards. Many of these actions were already in place before the inspection in May, but the pace of change has accelerated since September. Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement.

Standards of attainment are rising as pupils make better progress in lessons and over time. Results in the most recent Key Stage 2 national tests in 2006 showed significant improvement across all subjects. Increases in the proportion of pupils that attained the expected Level 4 in writing and in science were particularly dramatic. Nonetheless, the results were below the school's challenging targets and demonstrate further that the legacy of inadequate teaching remains an impediment for good achievement for a many of the pupils. The standard of most pupils' work across most subjects is below age related expectations. Too many pupils do not yet achieve well enough.

Procedures for assessing and tracking the pupils' progress are more systematic and robust. These indicate that most pupils are making better rates of progress than in previous years and that the school is well placed to sustain and increase its improvement in standards. The school is able to use this assessment information to analyse and evaluate the progress that pupils are making so that any anomaly or dip, such as the most recent assessment results for pupils in Key Stage 1, can be properly explained and acted on.

The school has taken suitable steps to further improve its ethos. All stakeholders report that its climate is more settled. There is greater clarity in the way that challenging behaviour is handled, with stepped sanctions applied more consistently and rewards used to encourage positive attitudes. Many of the support staff are particularly adroit at handling or diffusing potentially difficult situations, although not all teachers manage inappropriate behaviour effectively or appropriately. Although most pupils behave well, the distracted attitudes and inappropriate behaviour of a small number of pupils disrupts learning in some lessons.

Attendance has improved since the last inspection. Figures for the term to date are above those for the same period last year. The additional time for the learning mentor, combined with tightened procedures for monitoring absence, have both contributed to improving attendance. The establishment of a school council has been a positive development which is already building pupils' sense of responsibility and self esteem. Initiatives to give pupils better opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills are developing well.

The overall quality of teaching has strengthened, although there remains some teaching that is inadequate and there is not enough that is good. The quality of short term planning has improved. Lessons are more sharply focused on specific learning objectives and outcomes and pupils are given a better range of activities that more actively engage them in their learning. Teachers have a clearer understanding of the criteria against which pupils' progress needs to be assessed and marking is consequently more purposeful and specific in guiding improvement. However, the impact of these developments varies widely between different classes. Where common procedures have been adopted uncritically they have not had sufficient impact on increasing pupils' rates of progress. For example, where target setting has been properly embedded, pupils know their targets and understand what they need to do to improve their writing. In other classes however, little or no reference is made to individual or group targets either in teaching or in marking, and pupils continue to repeat the same basic mistakes. In some lessons teachers' expectations of the pupils' work and behaviour are too low.

The headteacher has worked determinedly since the school amalgamated in September 2004 to improve provision and raise standards. This has been a

very challenging time because responsibility for leading improvement has rested for too long with the headteacher alone and she has been inadequately supported by the senior management team. However, since April, she has been very well supported for two days per week by the associate headteacher. This support has increased the school's leadership capacity and has enabled the headteacher to take a more confident and unequivocal approach to addressing weaknesses. Improved team working amongst staff, with the implementation of common procedures and practices, is beginning to have a positive impact on the overall quality of teaching and on pupils' rates of progress and attendance. However, it has taken a while for these actions to become embedded in everyday practice, and agreed routines are not yet applied consistently by all staff. In addition, the school is not sufficiently rigorous in its analysis and evaluation of improvements. For example, the specific impact of improvements in teaching has not been quantified through systematic lesson observations or scrutinies of pupils' work.

Leadership in literacy is good. Assessment information is used to identify and analyse key weaknesses and subsequent actions have been implemented. Other senior leaders fulfil management responsibilities but do too little to support the headteacher in leading key areas for improvement. Leadership at all levels is underdeveloped.

The governing body has been strengthened by recent appointments. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and have effective systems and procedures to be able to hold the school to account.

Since the last inspection local authority support for the school has been suitably focused and well managed. This effective external support and guidance has been welcomed by the school.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector