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Mr P King
Headteacher
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Dear Mr King

Schools Where the Pupils' Behaviour has been Identified as a Concern by Inspection: Monitoring Inspection of Foulstone School

Introduction

Following my visit with Mr P Davies, Additional Inspector, to your school on 6 and 7 July 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring inspection as part of the programme of visits to schools where the pupils' behaviour has been identified as a concern by inspection.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior staff, groups of teachers and middle managers, a group of pupils, the chair of the governing body, and representatives from the LEA.

Context

The school is an average-sized 11-16 comprehensive school with 905 pupils on roll. It is situated in the village of Darfield, outside Barnsley, and serves a socially and economically disadvantaged community. Twenty four per cent of the pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is above the national average. Around 20 per cent of the pupils have special educational needs, including 21 who have a Statement of Special Educational Need. Very few pupils come from minority

ethnic groups and very few speak English as an additional language. Twenty one teachers have joined the school since the last inspection. The local authority expects to rebuild the school by 2012 when it will amalgamate with a neighbouring school.

Achievement and standards

The pupils' achievement is improving; it is good for many pupils at Key Stage 4 but it remains unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3, and in the core subjects it is often weaker than elsewhere. At 45 per cent, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A*-C GCSE passes in 2004 was well above the average for similar schools and was in line with the school's challenging target. However, the proportion of the pupils achieving five or more GCSE passes remains too low. At Key Stage 3, the proportions of the pupils achieving the expected Level 5 or above in the national tests were broadly in line with those achieved by pupils in similar schools, although performance was weaker in mathematics than in the other core subjects and too many of the pupils did not make enough progress overall at Key Stage 3. The provisional results for 2005 show that the proportion of the pupils achieving the expected levels rose from 54 to 63 per cent in mathematics and from 46 to 55 per cent in science.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' behaviour has improved since the last inspection when a significant minority of the pupils, particularly in Year 10, were allowed to disrupt the learning of others. Much of the school's work has focused successfully on training the teachers to implement a procedure for promoting good behaviour and for challenging unsatisfactory behaviour. This work has been accompanied by the development of greater curriculum choice at Key Stage 4 and better systems for the early identification of underachievement. A significant factor in improving the pupils' behaviour was the robust support given to the school by the LEA.

During the visit, the pupils' attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better in 21 of the 23 lessons. They were good in nine, very good in two and excellent in one. The pupils were usually attentive, were eager to earn merits and other rewards, and consequently followed well-defined classroom rules. Most made a discernible mental and physical effort in lessons, working steadily and quietly when asked to work independently. In practical lessons, routines were established and the pupils handled equipment safely. Although the pupils were allowed to become overly noisy in a small number of lessons, the teachers generally followed the school's procedures for managing the pupils with reasonable consistency.

Around the school, the pupils usually behaved kindly and sensibly, and supervision was generally adequate, although a small group of pupils gathered undetected to smoke at lunchtime. The number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen from 212 two years ago to only 51 in 2004/05.

The inspection in September 2003 identified the following as an area for improvement:

- ensure that all teachers deal with unsatisfactory behaviour firmly, and in the same way, so that pupils understand the limits clearly

Progress is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory or better in twenty of the twenty three lessons. It was good or better in ten. It was unsatisfactory in two and poor in one. The school has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and, during the visit, inspectors saw all the teachers identified by the school as needing some support. Teaching was notably weaker in mathematics than in other subjects. It was particularly strong in humanities.

The best teaching was lively and interested the pupils. It drew on previous work and involved them from the start in activities they understood and enjoyed. Relationships were very good and many teachers enjoyed an easy banter with the pupils that did not detract from good discipline.

Most lessons were focused clearly on objectives but not all concentrated enough on assessing the pupils' learning during or at the end of the lesson, for example through mini-plenary and plenary sessions. Although the best lessons were planned in detail, lesson planning was often too cursory and the school has not adopted a uniform approach to short- and medium-term planning. The teachers' lessons plans are not checked frequently enough by middle or senior managers. This was particularly problematic in those lessons where the teacher lacked a natural authority, or where they had not established friendly but firm relationships with the class, as the lessons were not structured in enough detail to make sure that the pupils learnt and behaved adequately. In a very small number of lessons, some of the work set did not challenge the higher-attaining pupils.

There are some good systems in the school for setting the pupils challenging targets and at both key stages, a range of intervention strategies support the pupils who are, or who are at risk of, underachieving. However, information about the progress of different groups of pupils is not always monitored or analysed carefully

enough. Marking was variable; some was very good but often it did not set out what the pupils should do to improve.

A notable weakness of many lessons, including in some of those that were satisfactory or better overall, was the lack of structured opportunities for the pupils to develop and practise their use of standard English. In some instances, this was compounded by the unsatisfactory example set by some of the teachers' spoken English.

The pupils who have special educational needs are identified early and teachers have access to individual education plans (IEPs). However, not all teachers use these when planning lessons. Teaching assistants often support well in lessons, but they are not consistently well directed and their role in monitoring the progress of the pupils is underplayed. The learning support unit helps some pupils cope with their everyday difficulties but not all of the work set is demanding or wide ranging enough and the arrangements for measuring the impact of its work are too loose. Individual pupils are withdrawn from lessons for counselling and support from various external agencies: the rationale for this withdrawal lacks clarity and the arrangements for evaluating the effectiveness of this provision are underdeveloped.

At Key Stage 4, the curriculum has been modified and extended so that Year 10 pupils have access to work-related learning and this has led to better attendance and behaviour. The school's accommodation is unsatisfactory and much of it is poorly maintained.

Leadership and management

The school is well led and the senior management team has demonstrated that it can bring about improvement; it has been strengthened considerably by recent appointments and this has enhanced its capacity to improve the school. Senior managers have a generally realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching across the school and are addressing these through a well formulated development plan. Much middle management is strong and is eager to assume responsibility for improving teaching, behaviour and achievement. Some useful work in establishing more formal and rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluation has begun. However, the school does not always analyse trends in performance in enough detail nor does it think carefully enough about how it will measure the impact of initiatives and this makes strategic management unnecessarily difficult.

The governing body has acted resolutely to remedy the shortcomings in governance noted after the last inspection. Statutory requirements are now met, with the exception of a daily act of collective worship. Increasingly, they receive

useful information about the school's performance that enables them to hold it to account.

External support

The support agreement drawn up with the local authority is very good. It is well focused on the school's key priorities and sets out what support is needed, by when it should occur, and what is expected to improve as a result. The work of the teaching and learning consultants has been well received by the school and has had a marked impact on improving the skills of the teachers in managing the pupils' behaviour. Funding from the Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG) and from the Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP) has been used to strengthen the senior leadership team.

Main judgments

The school has made satisfactory progress.

Priorities for further improvement

The school development recognises where improvement is needed. The priorities for further improvement are:

- increase the amount of good or better teaching by improving the quality of lesson planning;
- strengthen strategic management by developing more frequent and rigorous monitoring and evaluation;
- raise standards further, particularly by improving the rate of progress made by many pupils at Key Stage 3;
- provide more opportunities for the pupils to develop their use of standard English;
- improve the quality of the accommodation.

I am copying this letter to the secretary of Secretary of State, the chair of governors, and the Director of Education for Barnsley.

Yours sincerely

MICHAEL CLADINGBOWL
HM Inspector of Schools