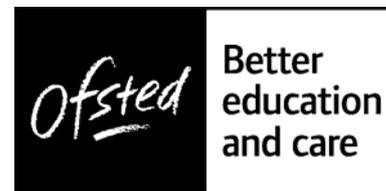


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4 July 2005

Mr J O'Neill
Headteacher
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CA1 1NA

Dear Mr O'Neill

Implementation of Newman Catholic School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Martin Bradley HMI to your school on 28 and 29 June 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings which are recorded in the attached note.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the quality of the action plan; the current situation of the school following the floods earlier this year; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan, including aspects of the leadership and management of the school. It was not possible to look in any detail at the standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

The school's action plan is satisfactory.

The LEA's statement of action is satisfactory.

The school has made reasonable progress since being subject to special measures.

The LEA's target date of the autumn term 2006 for the removal of special measures is realistic, providing the timescales of the action plan are adhered to, especially in the autumn term 2005.

The school should not appoint newly qualified teachers until further notice.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Corporate Director of Education for Cumbria and the Diocese of Lancaster. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF NEWMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

Findings of the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures

Following the inspection in November 2004, the school suffered badly from floods to a level of 1.5 metres which also affected many students' homes. It was agreed by Ofsted that HMI would not visit until the school had been able to deal in part with the impact of the floods, and this was the first visit.

HMI's visit was to assess the state of progress made by the school since the inspection bearing in mind the impact of the floods. This was not a full monitoring inspection. Instead the focus was on:

- discussion with senior staff, chair of governors, LEA representative and diocesan representative evaluating their perceptions of the current situation and capacity for improvement;
- analysis of the action plan and the current progress made where start and/or target dates up to June 2005 have been identified;
- examination and analysis of the school's documentation relevant to addressing the points noted for improvement in the inspection report;
- seeing parts of three lessons (in English, mathematics and science) chosen by the school, including a brief look at pupils' work in progress and some discussions with pupils in lessons and informally around the school. It was not intended to provide a view on standards or quality of teaching across the school.

Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, the acting assistant headteacher, the chair of the governing body, and representatives from the LEA and the Diocese of Lancaster.

The quality of the action plan is satisfactory, although timescales are inevitably tight, given the loss of time before the next inspection due to the floods and subsequent disruption. The plan identifies the autumn term 2005 as a crucial point when major changes will be introduced. These will include revised management structures, self-evaluation procedures, planning, and monitoring arrangements directed towards raising standards. It will be important for the school to monitor progress throughout the term to ensure that planned changes stay on track.

The LEA's statement of action is satisfactory. The LEA's actions taken thus far have been supportive, and future intentions are appropriate. The LEA has a clear and accurate view of the school's current situation and needs, as well as of the ways in which standards might be raised. The impact of the LEA's support cannot yet be assessed, however this will be considered during future visits.

The senior leadership team is not yet fully in place. An acting deputy headteacher will take up a full-time appointment in September, although there will be a

temporary deputy headteacher for a term, following the failure to appoint on the first trawl. However there is a clear vision, sense of purpose and, above all, a focus on raising standards of achievement held by senior management and particularly the headteacher. Many staff share this vision and focus, but for others it is less clear. It will be crucial for all staff to share these views for overall standards to be improved. The proposed changes to the senior management structure have yet to be fully established. It will be important to future developments to set these changes in place at the earliest reasonable opportunity, given the timescales of the action plan.

The school faces two major issues: the planned removal of special measures by raising standards through the action plan; and the completion of the building works in a short a time as is possible whilst maintaining appropriate standards. The school and the governing body are aware of ways of proceeding with the latter so that it makes the least impact on the former – it is most important that the senior leadership team is not distracted from the need to raise educational standards by issues related to the premises, more than absolutely necessary.

Strategic planning and the senior leadership team's ability to initiate change are satisfactory and potentially good, if planned changes are implemented within the timescales identified by the action plan. There is a clear commitment to equality of opportunity.

Self-evaluation by the senior leadership team has been significantly supported by the current consultant and the LEA. This is now at least satisfactory and potentially good. Issues remain about recruitment and retention, and there are some matters of deployment which are currently being addressed, especially in relation to the restructuring of the current house and sixth-form arrangements. These have the potential to affect the rest of the action plan because of the tight timescales caused by the flood. The appointment of a business manager should focus attention even more on financial management, resources and best value. Interim systems of management are being put in place and there are clear plans for final systems to be established during the autumn term. It is noted that the headteacher did not have mentor support following his appointment.

The roles of co-ordinators and middle management are subject to discussion within the school. The proposed structures provide a clear focus on educational standards in ways which are not fully supported by the current arrangements. The school will need to address this in order to raise standards to higher levels.

The governing body has improved its knowledge of the working of the school and has reduced the number of committees. However there are some vacancies on the governors and the committees have not all met in the current term and in some cases since January or February. In the absence of permanent post-holders for the acting deputy headteacher and deputy headteacher, this restricts the support received by the headteacher, although working groups have partially filled this gap.

The diocese has supported the governing body with training, as well as with additional support for some members.

Action taken to make the improvement needed

1: improve standards at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE

Progress is reasonable.

2: improve the quality of teaching in Years 7 to 11 with better planning, delivery and assessment

Progress is reasonable.

3: increase the amount and quality of monitoring and evaluation of the school by subject managers, reinforced by senior managers, in order to raise standards

Progress is good.

4: assess students' attainment against the standards they have demonstrated previously in order to ensure they make the necessary progress

Progress is limited.

5: meet statutory requirements

Progress is limited.