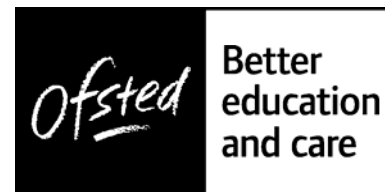


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18 July 2005

Mrs S Lees
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lees

Implementation of Dover Grammar School for Boys Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 6 and 7 July 2005 with my colleague Mrs T Herring HMI, I write to confirm the findings and to notify you of the outcomes.

As you know, the inspection was part of a policy involving a broader series of visits by HMI and Additional Inspectors to check on the development and improvement of schools where the section 10 inspection indicated that the school was underachieving. You will recall that the aims of the visit were to assess the progress made in addressing and eliminating underachievement and meeting the targets given in the action plan. We also evaluated standards of achievement and the quality of education, especially in relation to areas of underachievement.

During the visit we inspected 24 part lessons; attended three registration periods and an assembly; visited the learning centre; observed part of a meeting of the school council; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions with yourself and nominated staff on the causes and areas of underachievement. We also examined a range of the pupils' work and spoke informally with other staff and pupils.

On the basis of the evidence gathered during the visit, we made the following observations to you and the chair of governors in the presence of the deputy headteacher, two assistant headteachers and a representative of the LEA.

The school's action plan following the inspection in December 2004 is satisfactory. It is clearly presented and concise and has been followed up usefully with an evaluation of progress to July 2005, using a complementary format. The plan identifies clearly the actions needed to eliminate underachievement with a correct focus on Key Stage 4, the GCSE years. However, although the plan identifies the lead manager or team for each action, some of the success criteria rely too heavily

on processes to be completed rather than measurable outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation are not always distinguished clearly enough.

The Key Stage 3 results in 2004 showed a marginal decline from 2003 in English, but a continuing slight improvement in mathematics and science. Overall, the results, which are improving broadly in line with the national trend, were above the national average but below the national benchmarks for schools in a similar context.

At GCSE in 2004, 89 per cent of the year group gained five or more A*-C grades, a lower proportion than in the previous four years. The trend in the average points score per pupil over the past five years shows a slight decline, compared with the national picture which has been improving overall.

In the sixth form, the 2004 results show a rising trend at AS level. However, at A level, after a good year in 2002 when 56 per cent of the awards were at grades A or B, the corresponding figures in 2003 and 2004 were 32 and 31 per cent respectively. The school has produced a useful analysis of results in the sixth form against its projections, showing areas that are stronger or weaker.

Measures of added value compared with similar schools show performance marginally below the national average from entry to the school to the end of Year 9, but in the bottom five per cent for progress from Year 9 to the end of Year 11. This indicates the underachievement in Key Stage 4 which is recognised and addressed in the action plan.

The school has produced a thorough and searching analysis of test and examination results and knows where there are weaknesses and strengths. There are actions in hand to raise standards overall, with incremental targets and reports each term to the student committee of the governing body. There is an important action to make sure that "schemes of work address explicitly the requirements for the highest grades", and evidence of this was seen in lessons. The setting of targets has improved markedly, and is flowing through to optimism about whole-school performance.

Assessment procedures are improving rapidly. The school now has a robust system for collecting and collating data. The teachers and pupils have been taught to use mechanisms such as regression lines, based on LEA and national norms, to assess their progress against expectations and targets. Most parents have responded positively to the detail of this information and returns from pupil and parent questionnaires show positive trends. In some subjects, analysis of components and strands in learning show where effort might usefully be focused. The use of a "traffic light" system for individual pupils, to show where performance is above, on target or below expectations, is usefully informing medium-term and lesson planning. However, the marking seen was unduly variable, with much that was too cursory or infrequent, and the pupils' presentation and neatness were too often below reasonable expectations. Assessment is used effectively to inform overall

curriculum planning, with the range of options and opportunities at Key Stage 4 being extended, for instance in science, information and communication technology (ICT) and business studies. There is now a better informed match of the pupils' capabilities to the subjects and examination tiers for which they are entered.

Overall, the attitudes of the pupils are very good and behaviour is good, in lessons and about the school. There is a good presence of teachers in the common areas during breaks and change of lessons and there is a good social atmosphere. In lessons, the positive attitudes of the pupils contributed significantly to the quality of learning and their progress. In 21 of the lessons, the pupils' attitudes were good, including seven in which they were very good. No unsatisfactory attitudes or behaviour were seen.

Attendance is well above the national average and although some pupils were late in the morning, it was mostly due to the lateness of buses. Some of the pupils were, however, late for lessons immediately after the morning break and lunchtime because their social area was a long way from the classroom.

In lessons, the pupils made good progress. Progress was at least satisfactory in all lessons, and in three quarters it was good or better. Where progress was most evident, the pupils clearly enjoyed their learning and worked collaboratively in pairs or in groups. They saw a real purpose and challenge in the activities and wanted to complete them to the best of their ability. Progress was less marked in those lessons in which the pupils' tasks were mundane or not well enough matched to their levels of attainment. On these occasions the pupils were always compliant and co-operative but worked too slowly or too quickly and with less accuracy. However, because of perceptive questioning by the pupils, who drew out the teachers' knowledge and expertise, their progress was sometimes better than the teaching they received.

Most of the pupils displayed good independent learning habits and collaborative skills. They were genuinely interested in the criteria for assessment and wanted to achieve their best. The pupils' good skills in speaking and listening helped their learning but, for some, their comparatively weak skills in written work were a barrier to accelerated progress. They frequently failed to check written work for errors and some presentation was unacceptable. The introduction of literacy intervention groups is a timely development. The school has successfully engaged its pupils in discussions about the quality of learning and teaching and their views have appropriately contributed to the development of policy in this area.

The quality of the teaching was good overall. It was at least satisfactory in all lessons, good in 16 and very good in three. There were no marked differences across the key stages. Overall, teaching has benefited recently from a more consistent approach to planning and the structuring of lessons. Positive relationships underpinned most teaching, while praise and encouragement motivated the pupils to work hard. The positive behaviour of the pupils enabled

most teachers to share their enthusiasm for their subjects in a pleasant atmosphere.

Where the teaching was effective the teachers were ambitious and adventurous in the ways in which they presented and taught new knowledge, catering for the wide range of learning styles and needs within each lesson. Their confidence was rooted in authoritative subject knowledge and meticulously prepared resources for active learning opportunities. These teachers tackled the explanation of difficult concepts in imaginative ways. Assessment criteria were routinely discussed; the teachers asked demanding questions and prompted a level of thinking that stretched the pupils to achieve their potential. Key words were profitably displayed and reinforced; display supported independent learning and homework was set as an integral part of the lessons. Circulation of the classroom to give individual support and guidance allowed the teachers to assess understanding and offer well-judged advice. Occasionally, but not often enough, ICT was well used by staff and pupils. Plenary sessions were well used to assess learning, address misconception and challenge the higher attaining pupils.

Where teaching was less successful, there was excessively long exposition by teachers and the pupils had too little time to complete their tasks. There was insufficient focus on the learning outcomes and emphasis was on the completion of the planned activities. Tasks and resources did not meet fully the needs of all the pupils, especially the highest attainers, who were not offered enough intellectual challenge. There were missed opportunities for structured talk and to engage the pupils in whole class discussions. Because timings went awry, the ends of lessons were often rushed and less than effective.

Provision for the pupils with additional needs is satisfactory and improving. The learning centre is a welcoming facility for the pupils and the staff. The management of teaching assistants is sound and they report that most of the teachers helpfully share their planning prior to lessons. The identification on lesson plans of pupils with additional needs is a positive development, as is the guidance given to the staff on suitable intervention strategies. However, individual education plans are unsatisfactory because they are not reviewed frequently enough. Provision for those pupils who are identified as gifted and talented is also improving but remains at an early stage of development. Nevertheless, the quality of teaching is still too varied to ensure that all groups of pupils make good progress.

The headteacher and the senior team are leading the school effectively, with a realistic but challenging programme to move the school forward. Instability in staffing at senior management level, and particularly in science and ICT, has been overcome. The heads of department understand the scope of their responsibilities and are being held to account rigorously. The headteacher now has the team and the capacity to continue to move the school forward and to eliminate the underachievement until recently so marked at Key Stage 4.

The LEA is giving good support, particularly in improving the accommodation, providing specialist advice and support, and in giving expertise and guidance in human resource management.

Evaluation of Progress:

The school is making good progress towards raising pupils' attainment and eliminating underachievement.

In relation to the action plan and the impact of the actions taken, good progress has been made in addressing the key tasks which relate to the school's underachievement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of governors and the Strategic Director for Education and Libraries for Kent. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

MICHAEL PIPES
Additional Inspector

cc chair of governors
LEA