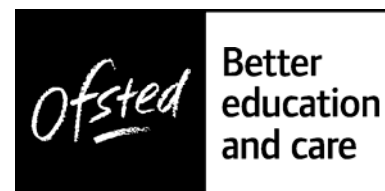


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Miss A Murphy
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Murphy

Implementation of Bishop Douglass RC School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Caroline Bolton HMI, Tina Herring HMI, Ramesh Kapadia HMI and Robert Ellis HMI to your school on 27 and 28 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the school; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

The school has made reasonable progress since the last monitoring inspection and reasonable progress overall since being subject to special measures.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF BISHOP DOUGLASS RC SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit 42 lessons or parts of lessons, five registration sessions and an assembly were inspected. Lessons were seen in Key Stage 3 and in Years 10 and 12. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the senior managers and a number of middle managers, the chair of governors, and representatives of the diocese and the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, the chair of the governing body and representatives from the LEA and the diocese.

In the GCSE examinations this summer, the school predicts that the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades will be at least 33 per cent and that the figure is more likely to be over 40 per cent and therefore close to the target and to the corresponding figure in 2004. Approximately 97 per cent of the pupils in the cohort are expected to achieve at least one overall pass. The school has provided a broad range of extra support for the pupils taking external examinations and national tests this summer. Much of the additional teaching and guidance has been provided in times beyond the school day and the staff report that these sessions have been well attended and well received by the pupils. A significant amount of support, from within the school and from the London Challenge initiative, has been targeted at the pupils on the borderline of C and D grades.

At Key Stage 3, the school's assessments indicate that the proportions of pupils attaining the age-expected Level 5 or above in the 2005 national tests will be about 70 per cent in each of the core subjects. Results of this order would be in line with expectations from the Fischer Family Trust data.

In just over eight out of ten lessons, the teaching was at least satisfactory and in four in ten it was good or very good. It was better in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form than in Year 10. In the most successful lessons, the presentation was stimulating, sometimes involving expert demonstration, and the pupils were engaged and challenged by the questioning and by the lively pace of the discussions. Assessment was well used in the planning to build on the pupils' prior learning. Careful attention was paid to the development of the pupils' skills in speaking and listening, as well as in literacy. Questioning was demanding and used to engage the less confident pupils and to check the understanding of all of those present. The best marking was encouraging and informative. Lesson planning was of good quality, with clear learning objectives and an appropriate focus upon the

intended learning outcomes for the pupils. Relationships were good and teachers had no difficulty in maintaining secure class control. Resources, including interactive whiteboards, were well chosen and well used. In science and in drama, there were examples of the effective use of peer assessment. The quality of the provision in design and technology has improved significantly; teachers in the department encouraged safe working, and a timely survey is planned to assess risk in the teaching areas for the subject.

There remain a number of weaknesses in the teaching. The quality of lesson plans was uneven; while learning objectives were routinely shared with the pupils, some were in fact activities rather than the skills and knowledge which pupils were expected to acquire as a result of completing the tasks. Learning outcomes were not always clearly identified. The three-part lesson structure was in evidence across Key Stage 3 but time was not always well used at the ends of sessions. The use of assessment in lesson planning was inconsistent and the work was not always well matched to the range of the pupils' needs and attainment. The school has not resolved the issue raised during the last monitoring inspection of the inconsistency of the teachers' marking in supporting the pupils' progress in literacy, particularly in the spelling of subject-specific vocabulary. It was noted at the last monitoring visit that adults were not always providing good and accurate models in their own use of written language and this continues to be the case. The teachers' expectations of the pupils' attainment and conduct were too low in some lessons.

The pupils' progress was at least satisfactory in just over eight in ten lessons and in a third it was good. The pupils' progress mirrored the teaching in that it was better in Key Stage 3 and in Year 12 than in Year 10. It was good in lessons in which assessment information had been used to ensure that work was matched to the pupils' differing needs and in which there was an appropriate focus upon learning, with regular evaluation of progress towards the objectives. However, the needs of the higher attainers were not always met by the activities and resources and there was little information in planning about the provision for the pupils who have special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language. As at the last monitoring visit, there were too many gaps in the pupils' homework diaries.

In nine out of ten lessons, the pupils' personal development was at least satisfactory and in just over four in ten it was good or very good. It was significantly better in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form than in Year 10. In most lessons, the pupils were co-operative and their relationships with adults were positive. Their levels of engagement and interest were more variable, however, and many were content to opt out of class discussion. Punctuality to lessons was satisfactory and there was a strong presence of staff and prefects on corridors to speed the pupils on their way to lessons. Punctuality to school is improving but it

continues to be an issue, in part because of the late arrival of some school buses. Around the site, the pupils' behaviour was generally satisfactory but it was sometimes boisterous and involved horseplay. However, the pupils were generally courteous in their conduct towards adults. The LEA's most recent figure for attendance is 89.4 per cent, a figure which accords with the attendance in lessons observed by HMI.

The school has continued to develop external partnerships to the benefit of its pupils. The support provided by the LEA is felt to be well co-ordinated and responsive to the school's needs. The staff also report positively on the work carried out within the London Challenge initiative.

Action taken to make the improvements needed

1: ensure that the drive to improve teaching and standards is more rigorously and consistently addressed so that the good practice in some subjects becomes more widespread

The systematic monitoring of the quality of teaching and of the pupils' progress enables the senior staff to be aware of weaknesses in the provision and to take action to remedy them. At the time of this monitoring inspection, for example, pupils in Year 9 were taking part in an initiative to raise their attainment in information and communication technology and to address the gaps in the provision resulting from the past difficulties in the subject.

The school continues to provide a broad and appropriate range of professional development opportunities for new and established staff. The system of peer observation is developing well and the outcomes are carefully recorded. The notes from the lessons seen indicate that observers are making good use of the experience by collecting ideas for improving their own practice. The induction programme for teachers new to the school is well considered and appropriate to the current priorities of the school, as well as to the anticipated needs of the staff concerned.

At the time of the last monitoring visit, in just under nine in ten lessons the teaching was at least satisfactory and in just under a half it was good. There is no evidence from this visit that the quality of the teaching has risen since then. The school continues to implement a good range of measures to improve the quality of teaching and learning but their impact since the last visit has been limited.

2: take further action to improve the behaviour of pupils especially in the life of the school that is outside lessons

The pupils' personal development was satisfactory or better in nine in ten lessons and good in four lessons in ten but these overall figures mask differences between the key stages. Attitudes and behaviour were good in almost half of all the lessons but they were good in only one of the eight lessons in Year 10. The school is seeking to engage the pupils at risk of disaffection by the development of new courses which meet their needs and aspirations. Some already attend off-site courses, and an alternative Key Stage 4 vocational programme will begin in September 2005.

Attendance remains unsatisfactory and below the target of 91 per cent. The school's analysis shows attendance figures of over 91 per cent in the first half of the autumn term, dropping to 89.2 per cent in the second half of the same term. The figure for the first half of the summer term was 90.4 per cent and the current estimate for the year is 89.4 per cent. During the spring term, efforts to improve attendance were hampered until a new educational welfare officer began work in the present term. There have also been problems with the database. A number of interventions have been planned, including a fast-track prosecution process, and this has had a beneficial effect upon the attendance of a few pupils. Meetings with staff and pupils have been held to stress the importance of regular attendance. These measures have led to a slight overall rise in attendance and a reduction in unauthorised absence. A system of rewards has been established, playing an important role in assemblies for year groups.

There have been no permanent exclusions in the summer term, following 13 earlier in the year. Fixed term exclusions are reported to have dropped to about 30 each half term, from a high of almost 70 in the second half of the autumn term. At the time of the last monitoring visit, the school reported that there had been 16 fixed-term exclusions for the spring term up to the time of the inspection. This figure was incorrect, however, and the number of fixed-term exclusions remains high. There are electronic systems for recording the reasons for each exclusion, the highest categories being for physical assault and defiance, but no reason has been recorded for a third of the cases. Analysis also indicates that a higher proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups have been excluded. The school draws upon colleagues from external agencies in order to help in supporting the more vulnerable pupils.

Reasonable progress has been made on this area for improvement.

3: use data about pupils' prior attainment to improve learning so as to match teaching and curriculum provision better to the needs of pupils across the school

The school is developing systems to record and analyse the pupils' attainment and progress. The teachers have access to a helpful range of assessment information which identifies prior attainment and they have benefited from training to raise their awareness of how assessment can be used to improve learning. The school has a clear and helpful draft marking policy but too much of the marking is cursory and provides little information about how the pupils might improve their work. Where the teachers did provide constructive comments these were not always followed up by the pupils concerned. Opportunities for assessing the pupils' learning were often missed and explicit reference to assessment opportunities was not made routinely in lesson planning. In the better lessons the teachers used assessment information to plan tasks and activities that were well matched to the pupils' needs and prior attainment; effective questioning enabled them to assess what the pupils had understood and some then modified their plans if it was apparent that the learning objective was not being met. The staff in some subject areas are starting to involve the pupils in assessing their own work and that of other pupils, but this practice is not embedded across the school.

At whole-school level, systems for tracking pupils' progress have become more effective and there has been analysis of the performance of different groups of pupils, followed by intervention programmes to boost attainment where underachievement has been identified. The school reports that difficulties with some elements of the school's computer-based system for recording assessment information have limited the impact of some of the planned actions.

The staff have sensibly recognised the need to ensure that targets are realistic and appropriately challenging and has planned to develop the use of computer-based predictive systems in conjunction with teacher assessment information to inform target-setting for individual pupils.

Progress overall has been reasonable on this area for improvement.

4: address the underdevelopment of senior managers and resulting ineffectiveness of the team, establishing roles that more appropriately reflect leadership responsibilities and accountabilities for improving the school as a whole and standards in particular and

5: ensure that plans for improvement are followed through thoroughly and monitored effectively by the leadership team

The effectiveness of senior and middle management continues to improve through robust line management, monitoring and accounting systems and training. Raising achievement is a key priority for the school's leaders, and heads of year have a good understanding of the issues which need to be addressed. Targets for pupil achievement are now included in the performance management of all the teachers, and the school's leaders have taken difficult but appropriate actions to address unsatisfactory performance where it has been identified.

The leadership team has a deep understanding of outstanding issues and well considered plans to overcome shortcomings in the provision. These include improvements in the provision for inclusion and literacy. The headteacher has been creative in her efforts to secure additional funding and to improve the learning environment. The successful appointment of several new staff for September 2005 has the potential to strengthen the capacity of senior management, subject leadership and the quality of teaching.

The middle managers of the core subjects have a sound understanding of the relationship between achievement and the quality of teaching and they accept their responsibilities for both. The Leading from the Middle course has been completed by two staff, who found it useful, and a further group has begun the programme. Nevertheless, the overall performance of heads of department remains a key issue. It is unreasonable that senior managers should have to monitor tightly and pursue some individuals in order to ensure that their tasks are completed to the required standard. Generally, however, staff morale has improved and a recent whole-school activities week was a very positive event. The staff appreciate that the senior staff are highly visible and accessible but some find some demands for paperwork excessive.

The governors are well informed, review progress regularly and hold the school account. The current budget deficit of £130,000 is a vast improvement on the predicted overspend of £650,000, and a plan for the school's financial recovery over a five-year period has been submitted for consideration to the LEA. The current budget allows for the full implementation of the workforce reform agenda. The governors are rightly concerned about pupil numbers and the whole school

community has begun a campaign to raise the profile of the school and to improve recruitment for the future.

Progress on these two areas for improvement has been reasonable.

Statutory requirements

Ensure that requirements for ICT and citizenship are met

This issue has been addressed by the school.