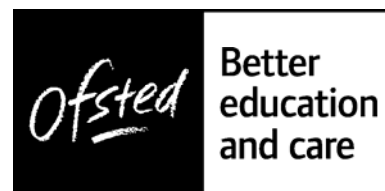


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13 December 2005

Mr T Samain
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Samain

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE HEWETT SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Mrs Blakelock, Mr Bancroft and Mrs Nolan, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 21 and 22 November 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in December 2004.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior members of staff, the chair of governors, members of the school council and representatives from the LEA.

Context

There has been a significant fall in the number of pupils on roll; the intake for Key Stage 3 this year has fallen by a third. The reduction in numbers has affected staffing levels and created fears about job security. However, the school has managed to attract a significant number of new teachers and new Heads of Faculty are now in post. The timetable has been simplified to five one-hour lessons each day and includes a planned five minute travel time between periods.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' attainment overall in the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests has been broadly in line with the national average over the last two years. In 2005 the percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected Level 5 increased, particularly in mathematics which reached the school's target. Although there were improvements in English and science, the percentages reached were still below the school's targets in English and significantly below in science.

In 2004 the progress of pupils from Key Stage 2 to the end of Key Stage 3 was broadly in line with the national average although progress was weak in science where a significant proportion of pupils did not make the expected progress. In 2005 there was significant underachievement by boys in reading.

The percentages of pupils in Key Stage 4 who achieved five passes at A* to C were the same in 2004 and 2005 and have remained significantly below the national average. However, while the percentage of pupils that achieved A* to C in science fell in 2005, there was improvement in the percentage of pupils that achieved A* to C in English and particularly in mathematics which increased significantly. The percentage of pupils achieving five passes at A* to G also increased. The overall attainment by girls increased but the attainment of boys fell. Although there was improvement in 2005, the school's targets were not met.

The contextual value added data placed the school in the bottom 30% of all schools nationally in 2004 for the amount of progress pupils made from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. Pupils' progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 was in the bottom 15% of all schools. Only the more able pupils made satisfactory progress as all other groups underperformed. The progress made in mathematics was extremely poor and was at the very bottom of the scale. In 2005 pupils made better progress overall but underachievement remained, particularly in mathematics. This degree of underachievement means that achievement and standards are inadequate overall.

Standards and students' progress in the Sixth Form are satisfactory and improving. In 2005, the A to C pass rate increased significantly and the A to E pass rate increased. Overall attainment also improved. Standards match national expectations although girls achieve better than boys.

Pupils' progress in lessons across the school is improving. There were more lessons during this inspection that showed satisfactory or better progress. However, the standard of the pupils' work remains too variable. While oracy skills are generally well developed the quality of presentation is often weak. Poor listening skills, coupled with fragile motivation and careless presentation, limited the learning in some classes. Some pupils in Year 9 were hampered by weak recall of earlier work, as well as by low-level number skills. Some pupils in Year 8 were hampered by weak spelling. High standards of work were seen in some lessons such as in German, art and history, but in too many lessons pupils' attainment remained below national expectations.

Personal development and well-being

The behaviour of pupils has improved significantly. Movement around school is usually quiet and much calmer with pupils showing courtesy to each other and to staff. The presence of teachers around the building at break and lunch-times has been fundamental in bringing about this positive change and is helping to develop more positive relationships between staff and pupils. The zoning of the school into different areas has been very effective and pupils are enjoying taking more responsibility for their social areas. Most pupils believe there is less bullying now and that it is dealt with appropriately.

In nearly all lessons, the attitudes of most pupils were good. They entered the classroom sensibly and settled promptly to the lesson, showing respect to their teachers. However, there is still a small number of pupils who do not come to lessons prepared to learn. These pupils displayed a casual attitude to work and hampered the progress of other pupils by calling out and being reluctant to follow the teachers' instructions. Their inappropriate attitudes and behaviour were not always dealt with effectively or consistently by the teachers. Positive attitudes to learning were evident in all those lessons where the work given was interesting and involved several different activities which suited pupils' learning needs. In these lessons pupils showed great pride in their work.

Attendance has improved but is still well below the national average. The figure since the beginning of term is 90.5% for Key Stages 3 and 4. Analysis of the data and the numbers of pupils seen in lessons during the inspection highlight that attendance is weakest in Key Stage 4 and among the lower ability groups. The school has implemented a number of strategies which are being implemented consistently and having a positive impact. The appointment of an attendance support worker liaising closely with the student achievement officer has already been effective in improving the attendance of long term absentees. First day calling home about absentees is resulting in parents working more closely with the school. Each pupil has their own attendance target and the awarding of certificates in assemblies is beginning to raise pupils' awareness of the importance of good attendance and the value the school places on it.

Punctuality to both school and lessons has improved. Good progress has been made as lateness to school has been reduced significantly and lateness to lessons is becoming unusual. Pupils in Key Stage 4 are those most likely to be late to school and to lessons. Overall, while the consistent sanctions imposed on latecomers are being effective they are not embedded. The school is aware that these sanctions must be rigorously enforced to maintain this improvement.

The number of exclusions since September has risen slightly compared to the same period last year but the number of days served has tumbled by two thirds. The reduction in the length of exclusions has been achieved through the effective time-out scheme and the referral of disruptive pupils to the student achievement centre. However, there is some inconsistency in the use of referral procedures which reduces the impact of this service. There is also insufficient checking to ensure all pupils make their way quickly to the centre.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2004:

- To improve the pupils' attitudes to learning and their attendance and punctuality – good progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved. The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 89% of the lessons and good or better in just over half the lessons. In two lessons the teaching was outstanding. However, in four lessons the teaching was inadequate and in several of the satisfactory lessons there was a fine balance of positive and negative features.

Where teaching was effective pupils applied themselves well. The best lessons were typified by high expectations. The learning objectives skilfully identified the specific skills, knowledge and understanding that were to be learned in the lesson and pupils were clear about what they needed to do to achieve at a higher standard. The lessons were purposeful, well paced and provided opportunities for pupils to respond independently. Considerable effort was made to provide a stimulating learning environment for the lesson.

Generally, relationships between teachers and pupils are good. Many pupils clearly enjoy lessons. However, some teachers did not have high enough expectations of pupils and accepted inappropriate behaviour. In these lessons pupils showed little pride in their work and quickly became restless.

The planning of lessons is more consistent and a common format is in place for all subjects. However, in some lessons the learning objectives were vague and pupils were not clear about what they needed to do to improve their work. Some lesson plans still did not give enough attention to how the needs of pupils of differing abilities would be met. This applies especially to meeting the needs of lower attaining pupils and those who have special educational needs. In some lessons there was not enough support to ensure that these pupils were able to learn as well as they should.

The marking of pupils' work is variable. Sometimes it provides pupils with helpful comments about what they need to do to improve. In other instances, books contain very little marking that is helpful and constructive. This limited marking does not help pupils improve their work or show pupils that their work is valued.

Pupils are usually knowledgeable about the grades they are expected to attain but not always clear about what they need to do to achieve at a higher level. The implications of this are significant for examination courses where pupils find it difficult to achieve above their classification.

The school continues to place a high emphasis on developing personalised learning pathways at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. Progress has been made in ensuring all Year 10 pupils benefit from religious studies as well as post-16 students

because of changes to the tutorial programme. Nevertheless, the daily practice of an act of collective worship is not yet well embedded in form time in the main school, nor always well managed in assembly.

A number of events such as enterprise days, a health fair and a global education programme extended the personal, social and moral experiences of Year 9 and Year 10 pupils in the summer term. The school is developing the teaching of citizenship and improving careers education and guidance in the main school. Changes to the structure of the school day have been successful in improving punctuality. However, there are some unsatisfactory clashes between subjects that require further attention.

Provision for the very large number of students in the Sixth Form is effective. A wide range of courses at Level 3 is offered and the school is exploring ways to increase the range of Level 2 qualifications in conjunction with other partnership institutions. Students reported a high degree of satisfaction with both the range of provision and with their care guidance and support.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2004:

- To raise the pupils' achievement by improving the quality of teaching and learning, particularly the expectations of what pupils can do – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

There are clear signs that the impact of better leadership and management is starting to be seen in the school's capacity to improve. The ethos is much calmer and the first step of addressing poor behaviour has generally been achieved. The headteacher is well respected by pupils and staff and there is a strong team of Heads of Faculty who are committed to further improvement. All senior managers are well aware of the work still needed and are implementing appropriate actions. Most teachers are working hard to secure the necessary improvements. The role of the post-16 co-ordinator has been strengthened and the tutorial system has been re-organised. Students appreciate the good balance between taking responsibility for their own learning and getting the help they need.

The monitoring process is well developed and starting to impact upon the quality of teaching although weaknesses remain in some subjects. All teachers have been monitored and the development of paired observations has been particularly effective. The skilful inclusion of pupils' attitudes within the lesson observations has led to the identification of groups that include pupils with more challenging behaviour and appropriate support provided. However, the lack of consistent behaviour management by some teachers is working against more rapid progress.

Pupils' progress is being tracked more effectively although there are inconsistencies in the way pupils are assessed and the limited use of data to identify the extent of underachievement.

The weaknesses in the school's action plan have been addressed and attention has been given to the points raised in the last inspection. The school evaluation form provides detailed information about the actions taken although the evaluation is not as perceptive as that produced on the key issues. The judgements made are generally accurate, although inspectors have a more positive view and see teaching and learning, leadership and management now as satisfactory.

The governing body is acting more effectively as a critical friend asking pertinent questions and analysing data. There is an increased emphasis on basing actions on evidence and increased recognition of the need to work to clearer and more challenging targets. Governors are fully involved in the improvement of attendance through implementing fast track prosecution meetings.

The school council is making a significant contribution to the school. Members are selected rigorously and manage their own meetings. They have already had a direct impact on the quality of lunches and the school uniform and have raised funds for several charities. They are appreciative of how the school is changing for the better and are perceptive about what still needs to be done. For example, they highlighted the need for greater consistency in behaviour management and for more celebration of what the school does well. They enjoy the cultural and ability mix of the school and are working to ensure that rewards reflect both consistent effort as well as marked improvement. The Sixth Form students make valuable contributions to the school council and to the opportunities for younger pupils.

While there are positive signs of improvement there is still much to be done. The Local Authority (LA) consultant has completed the initial stage of supporting the change of management structure and appropriate consideration is now being given to a different type of support, for example, through a drive on eliminating underachievement. This support is required urgently if the pace of improvement is to be increased sufficiently to enable the school to be removed from special measures in the shorter term.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2004:

- To ensure that policies, systems and strategies are consistently translated into practice and the senior managers rigorously apply monitoring systems that enable them to tackle underperformance – satisfactory progress.

External support

The LA has provided increasingly effective support that has become integrated into the development plans of the school. The LA consultant has completed the initial stage of development and sensible consideration is being given to identifying the most appropriate support that will help increase the pace of improvement.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Priorities for further improvement

- Make behaviour management more consistent.
- Improve the quality of teaching by making the learning objectives clearer and by helping pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work and achieve at a higher standard.
- Have a concerted drive on eliminating pupils' underachievement – particularly boys.

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

Yours sincerely

Anthony Knight
H M Inspector