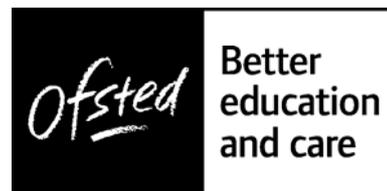


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8 December 2005

Mr P Spurr
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Spurr

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BROMSGROVE, CATSHILL MIDDLE SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Emma Ing HMI, Anne Johns and Rashida Sharif, additional inspectors to your school on 16 and 17 November 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the sixth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 2003.

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, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteachers, subject leaders, the headteacher's personal assistant, the vice chair of governors and two representatives from the local authority. Inspectors had informal discussions with pupils in lessons and at break times.

Context

The headteacher left at the end of the summer term and an experienced middle school headteacher has been appointed on a two year contract. The building programme is completed providing an additional art room.

Achievement and standards

Results in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 in summer 2005 indicate that the proportion of pupils attaining the expected Level 4 and above dropped in English, mathematics and science. However, the percentage of pupils attaining the higher Level 5 increased in both mathematics and science. Standards observed in lessons were in line with national expectations.

Although last summer's results show improvement in the progress made by higher attaining pupils, overall, pupils did not make the progress that they should have done. This was especially true of potentially middle attaining boys. Systems are not yet in place that will enable the school to determine the progress of vulnerable children or those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Attainment in lessons was in line with expectations in just over three quarters of the lessons. Work in top sets was at a suitably higher level. In the majority of lessons the pupils made good progress in their learning. However, progress in a small number of lessons was inadequate as a result of low expectations, slow pace, and unclear explanations given by the teachers.

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour was good overall although occasionally some of the pupils were a little boisterous when moving between lessons. The school has identified this and is addressing it appropriately, for example, in year assemblies. Overall, the pupils were more responsive and attentive in lessons than was the case on the last monitoring visit. There was a noticeable improvement in the pupils' attitude in lessons and around the school. Effective procedures for managing behaviour are in place and are being monitored and reinforced on a regular basis. The Behaviour Recovery Room is used to good effect to provide a calm and supportive environment for any pupils who do not respond appropriately to the usual sanctions and rewards. Pupils in the school council speak positively about the school's approach to behaviour and bullying. They feel that if there is any bullying it is dealt with swiftly.

The school meets the statutory requirement to have a daily act of collective worship. Weekly themes, such as individual and collective responsibility, are referred to in lessons throughout the week re-enforcing the messages given in assemblies.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2003:

- introduce an effective whole school policy to address inappropriate behaviour and bullying—good progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved since the last monitoring visit. Over half of the lessons were good or outstanding and most of the remainder were satisfactory. In a few lessons the pupils did not make as much progress as they might because of the slow pace of teaching and work that was not matched well enough to their different learning needs. Consequently, some pupils lost interest and did not achieve as well as they could. Occasionally teachers did not manage the pupils' behaviour effectively enough and allowed interruptions to impede the progress made.

The teaching was of a similar quality in Key Stages 2 and 3, with good teaching in each. This is an improvement since the last monitoring visit. The teaching and learning in the design and technology department is exemplary, providing the school with an example of extremely successful practice.

During the term the headteacher has undertaken an extensive amount of useful monitoring. He has developed a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching which has been shared with staff. However, the very good practice that exists has not been shared sufficiently in order to ensure that all teaching is at least satisfactory. The policy for teaching and learning has been revised and is providing staff with useful guidance. An agreed outline for monitoring and support is now in place.

In the most successful lessons teachers had high expectations of the pupils' behaviour and of their achievement. Lessons were interesting, brisk, lively and very effectively organised. Teaching captured the pupils' interest because it included a variety of strategies, presented challenging work in an interesting way, and ensured that all pupils were fully involved in the learning tasks. Planning was very clear. Teachers ensured that pupils understood the learning objectives and they referred to them during the lesson. This ensured that the pupils had a very clear understanding of what they were doing and consequently they worked hard and achieved well. Teachers asked searching questions which developed the pupils' understanding effectively. Pupils evaluated their own work and that of their peers and recognised what they needed to do to improve further. In many lessons opportunities were used well to promote speaking skills. Very effective class management ensured that all pupils were fully involved and were eager to achieve their best.

The quality of learning was closely matched to the quality of teaching. In the most effective lessons the pupils made significant gains in their learning, because they understood exactly what they needed to do to improve. The use of assessment is an area that the school is developing. The quality of marking varies. In some classes written comments helped the pupils to understand what they needed to do to improve. In weaker lessons, however, such informative comments were rare.

The curriculum is satisfactory. It meets statutory requirements and is suitably enhanced by visits, visitors and residential experiences. The school has identified the need to develop their links with the wider community and industry. A good range of interesting clubs and activities, including sports, take place during lunchtime and after school. Residential visits in Years 5, 7 and 8 strengthen the pupils' knowledge and understanding in many areas of the curriculum in addition to developing their social skills. The school is developing links across the curriculum effectively in order to enhance the pupils' learning. In a physical education lesson information and communication technology (ICT) was used effectively, through the use of video, to capture and replay an activity so that the pupils were able to analyse their moves and improve their performance. In design and technology pupils honed their mathematical skills through careful measuring and they developed respect for, and improved their understanding of, others when designing and making candle holders which reflected a different culture to their own.

Generally there is a good level of mutual respect between staff and pupils. Pupils feel safe and know who to approach if they are experiencing any difficulties. The arrangements and procedures for child protection are secure. Health and safety routines and risk assessments are in place. There are clear procedures in place to follow up absence and lateness. The school works effectively with outside agencies to ensure that the pupils receive suitable additional support. Most pupils are aware of the levels at which they are working and what they need to do to improve, although this is not consistent in every class. Support for pupils with learning difficulties is effective.

The school encourages pupils to develop a healthy lifestyle by taking exercise and eating healthily. School meals always include a healthy salad option and fruit. However, on some occasions pupils are rewarded with a sweet which does not promote healthy eating.

Progress in the area for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2003:

- monitor rigorously and improve the quality of teaching and learning—satisfactory progress
- meet statutory requirements the school needs to provide a daily act of collective worship, ensure that citizenship is planned for and taught and ensure that all subjects make a planned contribution to the development of information and communication technology (ICT) skills—satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

In the short time that he has been in post, the headteacher has reviewed the school's financial management and curriculum processes and procedures effectively. He has correctly identified those aspects that require immediate attention, such as the lack of performance management procedures and the considerable overspend predicted for this year's budget. These findings provide a sound basis for a new school improvement plan. He is aware that the current self-evaluation form is too descriptive and too generous in its evaluation of many aspects of the school's activities. Rightly, it is planned to review this important document after suitable training for staff. The headteacher has a good understanding of the range of factors that have inhibited progress and he is aware of the need to define a clear vision for Catshill Middle School. From his observations of lessons throughout the school, the headteacher has a clear view of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. He is keenly aware of the need to consolidate the good practice that exists in some subjects. In a joint observation, HMI concurred with the headteacher's assessment of a Year 8 literacy lesson.

Under the open management now evident in the school, the senior managers are developing into a strong and cohesive team who are acquiring a sound understanding of the issues, they have the potential to move the school forward. There is greater clarity in internal communications and it is reported that meetings are more productive and that agendas are more clearly focused on agreed priorities. This is a positive step in developing a more reflective professional community. The roles of all managers have been reviewed and the members of the senior management team report that the new job descriptions have provided a clearer understanding of their responsibilities and their accountability. They recognise the need to further develop their understanding of the contextual value added data presented in the new PANDA.

Members of staff have been encouraged to take advantage of appropriate training opportunities, such as that for contributing to the school's self-evaluation and some subject managers have worked effectively with advisory staff to develop the databases for their subjects. Middle managers are positive about the new demands required of them. It is apparent from discussion with the staff that there is a wide range of experience and ability among managers. However, a positive attitude pervades the whole school. With the planned management training at senior and middle levels, and with the clear and effective steer provided by the headteacher, the school has the capacity to improve.

The leaders of the core subjects have begun to use the Pupil Achievement Tracker to analyse test results to develop an understanding of what areas of the curriculum have been understood and mastered by pupils and which areas need further work. These departments are beginning to analyse data to indicate which groups of students are achieving well, and planning where

further effort must be expended to improve progress. The school has identified the need to develop a manageable and refined system to track individual pupil progress enabling class teachers to be alerted to those who are not doing well enough.

The governing body continues to be supportive of the school. Over time, training from the local authority has increased the governors' knowledge about the range of their role. The headteacher is providing the governing body with a suitable range of information. However, there remains much work to be undertaken before the governing body has sufficient information to hold the school to account suitably for the progress that the pupils are making. Governors are now aware that this is the case.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2003:

- take steps to ensure that the headteacher and key staff provide effective leadership and management of the school by more rigorously evaluating the school's strengths and weaknesses and carefully planning in the medium and long term to drive up standards—good progress
- ensure that the governing body plays a stronger role in shaping the direction of the school and holds the school to account—satisfactory progress
- make better use of performance data to monitor pupils' progress and take early steps to redress underachievement—satisfactory progress.

External support

The local authority has supported the school by facilitating the seconding of an experienced headteacher for a two year period and by interventions from consultants. They have also offered some training in the use of the Pupil Achievement Tracker programme. The link inspector recognises that there has been improvement in teaching and learning but is waiting to take the lead from the new headteacher in terms of other areas of concern and the support required to meet them. For this reason there is no current plan of action from the local authority which is a missed opportunity for them to support the school in the strategic management of improvement.

Main Judgements

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

The progress since the previous monitoring inspection is good.

Priorities for further improvement

- Maintain the momentum of the improvements in management structures and leadership and ensure that they become embedded
- develop the use and understanding of data to raise pupil achievement
- celebrate and share the good practice in teaching within the school so that all teaching becomes effective.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Educational Services for Worcestershire.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Munt
H M Inspector