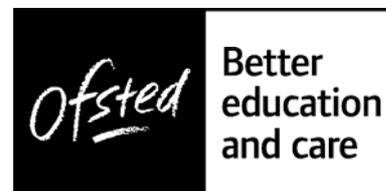


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26 September 2005

Mr A Cole
The acting teacher-in-charge
Culver Education Centre (pupil support)
Daiglen Drive Road
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Dear Mr Cole

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THE CULVER EDUCATION CENTRE

Introduction

Following my visit with Mrs J Wordsworth HMI to your school on 21 and 22 September, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was found to have serious weaknesses in March 2005.

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

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting teacher-in-charge, nominated staff, the chair of governors and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last inspection there have been significant changes in the provision planned for pupils at the centre: Key Stage 4 pupils have been relocated and there are plans to move the remainder of the secondary-age pupils to the authority's other pupil referral unit (PRU) by April 2006; it is further proposed to attach the Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 provision to a local primary school. The identified school will work with the LA to develop suitable curriculum provision and implement the action plan. Although not finalised, the principles behind these plans are sound. The centre continues to face staffing difficulties and has struggled to appoint suitably qualified teachers. There have been several staff changes since the last inspection; the substantive teacher-in-charge has been on long-term absence since before the last inspection.

Achievement and standards

Although the numbers of pupils within the cohort are small, the centre's data indicates that pupils are doing well against age-related expectations in reading, mathematics and science; in writing they are below national expectations. Given their starting points the pupils generally make satisfactory and often good progress in lessons and over time. However, where there were weaknesses in teaching, notably in the primary phase, the pupils did not make clear gains.

Steps have been taken to improve the science curriculum and to ensure that the pupils' learning is properly sequenced.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2005:

- Raise achievement in science throughout the centre and in mathematics in Years 7 to 9 – satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

The centre has a positive and inclusive ethos, and relationships at all levels are very good. All staff adopt a consistent and proactive approach to managing the pupils' behaviour, even when it is challenging, and this has a strong impact on the way the pupils relate to each other and to adults.

Provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Most staff provide good role models for social and moral development, and the curriculum for personal, social and health education is comprehensive and soundly focused on helping the pupils to make the right choices. The centre pays due attention to the pupils' safety, health and general well being. There is greater consistency in the implementation of the behaviour policy, and all the staff take responsibility for the actions of the pupils. However, the procedures for taking the pupils' views into account have not been sufficiently developed; the school council has not yet met and plans have not been made to include the younger pupils from the outset.

Attendance is satisfactory. There have been two fixed-term exclusions this term.

Service Level Agreements with schools are now in place for new admissions to the centre. The LA has drafted an amended protocol for 'hard to place' pupils in order to facilitate their reintegration and placement into mainstream schools. However, this has yet to be agreed by local headteachers.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2005:

- Improving the re-integration and placement of pupils into mainstream schools – satisfactory progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is mixed: it is satisfactory overall, with significant strengths but some residual weaknesses. In general the lessons were suitably planned with clear objectives. There was a reasonable range of activities and consideration of the pupils' individual needs, including strategies for supporting the development of literacy and numeracy. Work was carefully explained and well-directed. Occasional incidents of challenging behaviour were skilfully managed. In the best lessons the pupils really enjoyed their learning because the work was carefully planned so that it was challenging and interesting. This was not the case in the two lessons that were inadequate: in these sessions the pupils were not given suitable work, but were simply kept busy with unimaginative or unsuitable tasks.

The school has taken suitable steps to improve the curriculum, notably in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. A primary consultant has worked closely with teachers in the primary section in order to adapt and strengthen this

provision, and teachers have worked hard to implement this advice. Provision better meets the needs of all pupils in several respects: for example there is a lively programme of off-site activities, library access has been improved and several schemes of work have been re-written. However, assessment remains a weakness: teachers are not sufficiently clear about how much progress the pupils make over time.

Plans are in place to provide outdoor play for younger pupils and to refurbish some specialist accommodation. Nonetheless, much of the learning environment is inadequate for younger pupils and does too little to promote a positive climate for learning.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2005:

- Work in partnership with the local authority to improve the quantity and quality of the accommodation for science, physical education, art and design throughout the centre and an outdoor play and a quiet area in the primary department – inadequate progress.

Leadership and management

The acting teacher-in-charge, staff and governors are fully committed to ensuring that all pupils are able to learn in an inclusive community. They achieve success in maintaining and developing a settled and positive ethos. Senior managers at the centre have a broad understanding of the areas in need of improvement, but the progress made has been slow in too many areas. Although the action plan has been appropriately developed, it lacks clarity and detail and it is not properly monitored. Changes in staff have delayed the progress on some issues. The necessary changes or improvements in systems for performance management, workforce reform, budget allocation and monitoring and evaluation have not been made.

The acting teacher-in-charge provides good day-to-day supervision for the centre and manages the pupils with considerable skill. He is keen to improve provision and has been creative in addressing some of the curriculum difficulties identified previously. However, he lacks experience in leadership and management and has not demonstrated the capacity to guide and manage the centre's recovery by implementing the necessary changes quickly or effectively. An intensive programme of personal support and training has

been implemented since September, but it is too early to evaluate the impact of this. The guidance and coaching provided by the consultant headteacher has been excellent; it has re-energised the acting teacher-in-charge and given him a greater understanding of his role. However, the teacher-in-charge does not have a clear strategy for improvement and lacks confidence to fulfil his evaluation responsibilities. School self-evaluation is weak; systems for monitoring the work of the centre are underdeveloped and senior managers do not analyse rigorously or report analytically the impact of planned actions. The centre is too reliant on external evaluation.

There has been good consultancy support for the management and leadership of the primary department. There are opportunities for the manager of Key Stage 1 and 2 to check on the quality of planning and teaching in some subjects, for example in English, but they are not rigorously monitored. Teaching and learning have not been monitored by either the teacher-in-charge or the key stage manager.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2005:

- Improving the leadership and management of the primary department - inadequate progress.
- Improve leadership and management and governance - inadequate progress.

External support

The LA's statement of action is satisfactory, but does not link closely enough with the centre's action plan. Since the last inspection the LA has worked with the centre and also with the other PRU to develop a complementary service. It has provided very good consultancy support for the centre. However, the acting teacher-in-charge is not always sufficiently consulted or informed about plans and the necessary support for his leadership has been implemented too slowly.

Main Judgements

The school has made inadequate progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses. This visit has raised serious concerns about the standard of education provided by the centre and I am recommending a return visit.

Priorities for further improvement

- Strengthen the leadership and management of the acting teacher-in-charge and senior managers;
- improve self-evaluation by establishing rigorous systems for monitoring the work of the centre;
- further strengthen the quality of teaching and learning in the primary section.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
H M Inspector