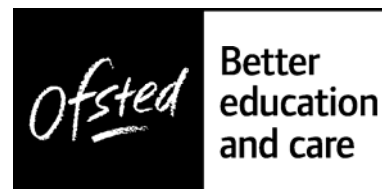


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11 January 2006

Mr Martin Roughley
Headteacher
Beulah Junior School
Beulah Road
Thornton Heath
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Dear Mr Roughley

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BEULAH JUNIOR SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Peter Thrussell, Additional Inspector, to your school on 13 and 14 December 2005, 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 May 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

The inspection team observed the school at work, including 13 lessons, two assemblies, and scrutinised a range of documents. Inspectors met with pupils from each year group, the headteacher, deputy headteacher and nominated staff, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

There have been no significant changes since the last inspection.

Achievement and standards

In 2005 pupils achieved broadly average standards in the national tests in Year 6, reflecting satisfactory progress given their average starting point in Year 3. This shows significant improvement on the previous year's results. Good teaching in Year

6 enabled pupils to make up considerable ground and reach this level of achievement.

The level of progress made throughout the school is inconsistent. Many pupils at the lower end of the school, where teaching is not always as strong, have been underachieving, particularly in mathematics. The school has adopted the Intensive Support Programme, which is helping to move learning forward and improve the quality of teaching.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- Pupils in every class make the progress that they are capable of – good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Provision for the pupils' personal development is good. The pupils enjoy positive relationships with one another and with the school's staff. The recently launched school council has begun to have an impact on a number of environmental issues, and the pupils talked enthusiastically of their plans for establishing buddy stops at the start of next term. Pupils reported that they feel safe and always confident that a member of staff will follow up any concerns. They spoke persuasively about how isolated incidents of bullying have been successfully addressed by pupils and teachers working together. However, the school has not yet harnessed the pupils' voice as fully as it might. Assemblies celebrate achievement and provide occasion for thoughtful reflection and prayer. In the Year 3 and Year 4 assembly observed, the pupils' listening skills were variable. The end of term music concert, well supported by families, provided a splendid opportunity for pupils to perform and share their musical talents.

Behaviour around the school is generally good and, in a crowded playground, pupils respect each other's spaces and play harmoniously, skilfully supervised by staff. In lessons, while attitudes to learning are consistently good, some pupils' excitement strays into over-exuberant and noisy behaviour.

The school continues to monitor attendance and punctuality with appropriate rigour and focus on the small minority of pupils whose attendance rate is unacceptable. The picture is an improving one: attendance to date this term is 94.7%, in line with the national average for primary schools; on the first day of the monitoring visit, the pupils' attendance was 95.8%. The pupils' punctuality to school in the morning remains variable.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- Pupils attend regularly – satisfactory progress.

Quality of provision

The inspection team observed the majority of teachers in the school. The teaching is consistently satisfactory or better, with some outstanding practice. Inspectors agree with the school's own judgements that the quality of teaching and learning is improving steadily, and that the action plan's targets for improvement have been met. Particularly effective teaching is rooted in teachers' strong subject knowledge and their enthusiasm to convey this to pupils with pace, energy and a consistent level of challenge for pupils of all abilities and aptitudes. Imaginative tasks with a clear sense of purpose motivate all pupils to achieve even better than they themselves think they can achieve, both orally and in writing. Probing, inclusive questioning which allows pupils to offer extended answers is a distinctive feature, underpinned by high expectations of both attitudes and behaviour. Time is skilfully orchestrated, and the teachers give pupils appropriate encouragement and due praise.

Where teaching meets more modest success the teachers' planning and use of resources do not meet the needs of all abilities, and some of the higher attaining pupils complete tasks with ease. Teachers have worked hard to develop structured group activities which enthuse the pupils, although at times groups are too large to be consistently productive. In some otherwise satisfactory lessons, a minority of boys wanders off task with silly behaviour that slows the progress of all pupils and disturbs an otherwise purposeful climate for learning. Independent learning skills are underdeveloped with many pupils. Standards of presentation in too many pupils' books are not high enough and not as robustly challenged by teachers as they should be.

The pupils themselves are skilled at describing and reflecting on which lessons provide them with greatest stimulation and in which they make particularly strong progress. One Year 6 boy talked engagingly about his current literacy work on the Narnia stories: 'We really learn from our enthusiastic teacher who puts things in a child's words, but seriously'.

There are improved assessment procedures, which have led to the careful monitoring of pupils' progress and the setting of challenging targets. Teachers are planning more carefully the next steps in pupils' learning, so that at least satisfactory progress is being maintained. Where teaching is better, planning takes fuller account of this assessment so that all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and those at early stages of learning English, make good progress. Year 6 pupils are on track to meet the challenging end-of-year targets set for them, which would sustain the improving trend.

Pupils in all years are appreciative of marking and aware of their group targets, which they are keen to achieve. The best marking is constructive, refers to learning intentions, and comments on how well pupils have done and how they could improve further. One pupil said, 'We know where we are going.' Where planned support is given for those with learning difficulties or those who have English as an

additional language, good progress is made in meeting the specific targets set for them.

The environment is broadly satisfactory, although the staff and pupils have rightly identified a number of ways in which classrooms, corridors, common spaces and the external areas should be improved. There is not enough display of pupils' high quality work across the curriculum. The library is drab and does not give pupils positive messages about the importance of books and wider reading habits. The information and communication technology room, well supported by the technician, is used purposefully by pupils.

The curriculum is broadly satisfactory but lacks excitement; the school has identified the need to review its suitability to meet the needs and aspirations of all pupils. Literacy skills are planned appropriately across the foundation subjects, although numeracy skills are underdeveloped. The range of extra curricular activities, focused currently on sports and music, is gradually growing and pupils spoke enthusiastically about visits and school trips.

Leadership and management

The school's action plan in response to the weaknesses identified in the May 2005 inspection is fit for purpose, suitably identifying timelines, success criteria and procedures for monitoring and evaluation. Progress has been charted accurately by the school and constructively supported by the local authority. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have worked effectively together to implement necessary change and challenge long-standing inadequacies. They enjoy the full confidence of the staff and governors and have judged thoughtfully how to challenge and support colleagues, particularly to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Their analysis of where satisfactory and good teaching takes place in the school is trenchant, and they are aware of the critical next steps that are to be taken to improve its overall quality. New leadership of literacy and numeracy has begun to have a positive impact on monitoring the quality of written work, marking and assessment.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- Senior managers and subject leaders have a greater impact on developing teaching so as to improve pupils' learning and raise standards – good progress.

External support

The chair of governors has a very good understanding of the school's current position and standards within it. The school improvement group of governors is increasingly well placed to hold to account the leadership team. The local authority's statement of action is good and has led to focused support valued by teachers. The contribution of the school improvement consultant has been of high quality.

All parties recognise that the actions taken to date to improve the school have been the right ones, and staff have worked hard to implement them. Equally, there is a shared recognition that the pace of improvement has now to be accelerated. The school rightly aspires to provide a good quality of education and the positive progress in recent months demonstrates that it has the capacity to achieve this goal.

Main Judgements

The school has made good progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses.

Priorities for further improvement

In line with its action plan, the school should

- increase the amount of good teaching and learning
- ensure all teachers make the fullest use of assessment information to plan work for all abilities
- strengthen the pupils' independent learning habits
- enhance the environment for learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Roy Blatchford
H M Inspector