



13 July 2006

The Headteacher
The Bishop William Ward Church of England Primary School
Coach Road
Great Horkesley
Colchester
Essex
CO6 4AT

Dear Mrs Walder

UNDERACHIEVING SCHOOLS: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BISHOP WILLIAM WARD CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 26 and 27 June, 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 identified as underachieving in July 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 the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The school is going through a period of significant changes to staffing. Two of the five teachers have resigned from the end of this term and two more, including the deputy headteacher, are to teach part-time from September. The deputy headteacher is to relinquish her post. The school has advertised to fill this post but no suitable candidate was found. The LA is to second a senior teacher to the school for the next term and the school has appointed permanent staff to fill the other two vacant posts.

There are 115 pupils on roll. The proportion entitled to free school meals is below the national average, as is the proportion identified with learning difficulties. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds and all have English as their first language. Pupil mobility varies from year to year but is average overall.

Achievement and standards

Test results at the end of Year 2 were close to the national average in 2005, although they were not as strong in writing, where no pupil reached Level 3. The results in 2006 are below the 2005 national average, with few pupils attaining Level 3. Results in 2005 at the end of Year 6 were below average, particularly in science. Progress had been satisfactory overall since Year 2, and good in English, but it was slow in science. In 2006, there is a higher proportion than nationally in 2005 working at Level 5 in English and mathematics but a lower proportion reaching the expected level 4. Standards in writing and science are still too low and the pupils do not have sufficient experience of scientific enquiry. While they can carry out their own tests and draw some basic conclusions, their ability to explain their findings is lower than expected. Writing is not promoted sufficiently across the curriculum. The work of the pupils in Year 6 overall is untidy and careless; much is completed slowly and most of their work is in pencil.

Progress through the whole school has been, and is, patchy through classes and subjects. The school's own tracking shows that, while some pupils make good progress, many in the same class do not do well enough. In some lessons, the more able, and particularly the older more able pupils in the mixed-age classes, are not challenged sufficiently and therefore their progress slows. In other instances, the less able are only enabled to complete their work because they have support. Consequently, there is a legacy of underachievement, and although progress is adequate, it has not been good enough to make up for an initial slow start.

The children enter school in Reception Year with attainment that is generally higher than is usual for their age, particularly in language and knowledge and understanding of the world. They have made insufficient progress for some years in building on this advantage. As a result, standards overall have been similar to others of their age when they entered Year 1, as will be the case for the present cohort on current evidence. Recent changes in staffing have led to better academic progress but the children's personal, social and emotional development still lags behind other areas. While the children have reasonably secure language and mathematical skills, they lack independence and their ability to share and take turns is lower than expected.

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

- Raise standards, particularly in personal, social and emotional development in the Reception Year and in writing and science in Years 1 to 6, and make greater use of writing to support learning in other subjects : - inadequate progress overall, although there has been some recent improvement.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils continue to form good relationships with adults and each other. They mostly enjoy school and their lessons, although some say that the work is too easy for them. Behaviour is usually good, in lessons and the playground. However, when the pace of the lesson drops they sometimes become restless and fussy. Most work together well, listening to others and sharing ideas. They concentrate fully when the work interests and challenges them. Pupils take responsibility well if given the opportunity. Attendance remains above average and there have been no recent exclusions.

Quality of provision

Teaching was satisfactory overall in all lessons observed but there are, to a greater or lesser degree, elements of unsatisfactory teaching in all classes. Classrooms are reasonably calm, productive places where the pupils are mostly engaged with their work. Discipline is secure and pupils mainly settle to their work sensibly. With the considerable support of the LA, the school is developing the range and quality of the teaching techniques used. This is particularly the case with the range of assessments the school now keeps, so that teachers are now much more adept at judging pupils' attainment and the progress they have made over time. Targets are set and displayed clearly for the range of attainment in the class and the pupils know broadly what these mean. Targets are displayed in their books, although these are not always checked for completion. When they are, the assessment rarely shows the date of completion.

Teaching techniques are improving and some skills are taught more precisely. Learning objectives are mainly clear but these are not always what the pupils are to learn, sometimes referring rather to what they will do. These objectives are shared with the pupils and sometimes referred to at the end of the lesson, occasionally giving the pupils an opportunity to reflect on their own success. There is some sound use of paired discussion but the use of questioning to provoke thought or to assess learning at the pupils' own level is under-developed. Marking in English, mathematics and science has improved considerably recently, helping pupils to see how well they have

done and what they need to do to improve. In some lessons the pupils are encouraged to assess one another's work and to check whether the objectives have been reached.

Nevertheless, while these systems are developing, this has been at a slow rate until recently and there are still weaknesses that hamper rapid progress. In particular, expectations remain too low, particularly for the older, more able pupils in the class. Teachers do not use their ongoing assessment sufficiently in lessons to gauge progress and potential, and adjust their teaching. Consequently the more able are often rehearsing skills they have already acquired or completing tasks that are little different in quality from those for the average pupils. The pace of lessons is often not brisk enough. In other lessons, there are too many activities, so that the pupils do not have sufficient time to consolidate their learning. On occasion, the tasks are not related well enough to the objective, or pupils are allowed too much time to complete them. While marking is secure in the core subjects, this practice has had little impact in other subjects. There is some over-use of praise so that pupils are not given critical guidance on their work. Teaching assistants give sound support to the pupils they work with, although their time is often not used productively at the beginning and end of lessons.

The curriculum remains in need of further development. While the full range is taught, and there is careful planning of the topics to avoid repetition, teachers have too little guidance on the skills to be taught to each age-group in these mixed-age classes. Timetables do not make efficient use of the time available, so that the pupils at Key Stage 2 are taught for a shorter time than recommended. Some English and mathematics lessons are particularly lengthy and thus the time for other subjects is restricted. The school has already recognised that this is an issue but is at an early stage in planning for improvement.

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

- Improve teaching and pupils' achievement by raising expectations, increasing the pace and challenge of lessons and by using assessment information consistently to plan work that reflects pupils' different needs, especially those of the more able: - satisfactory systems have been implemented but there has been inadequate progress.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are unsatisfactory overall. The headteacher, with the considerable support of the LA, has a reasonable understanding of the school's shortcomings and the key issues for improvement. She has developed her ability to monitor and evaluate, and has tackled some areas of concern in a thorough way. However, while most other staff are supportive and eager to improve, leadership and management at all other levels are at a very early stage. Teachers take advice and are willing to carry it out, but do not take responsibility for standards in their subjects or initiate change. Although the school has built a secure bank of tracking data, this has not been used adequately to identify that there was underachievement or its causes. There is not a clear picture of attainment on entry and therefore the school cannot judge how well it provides for its pupils. Throughout the school there has been too much reliance on the LA and development was slow until this term, so that there has been far less progress than could have been expected. The school's evaluation of itself and its effectiveness is over-generous and it is not yet evident that it has the capacity for improvement without the support of the LA.

The monitoring that has been carried out has identified some important areas for change, but has not been rigorous enough in evaluating the impact of teaching on learning. Although there is a programme of frequent lesson observations, and planning and work scrutinies, these are not planned for a specific purpose and consequently they are too random. Those monitoring do not always have sufficient training to carry it out thoroughly. The action plan prepared after the inspection is satisfactory. All areas for improvement are tackled in detail, although there is considerable repetition. Actions are detailed and appropriate but there is no lead responsibility or link to the budget. Monitoring arrangements are suitable but there is room for improvement on the evaluation systems, and more detail is needed on timings of actions and success criteria. Governors carry out their role satisfactorily: under the perceptive leadership of the chair, they are challenging and supporting the school appropriately.

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

- Use information collected from monitoring teaching, learning and attainment more rigorously in order to raise standards: - the school has made satisfactory progress in putting systems in place but these have not yet made enough impact.

External support

The LA has provided support to the school since 2002. Over the past year, the support has been good and has challenged and supported the school. Consequently, suitable systems have been put in place and there are signs that these are beginning to have a positive impact on the work of the school. However, because so much support was required, this impact has only been evident recently.

Main Judgements

The school has made inadequate progress in dealing with the causes of underachievement. This visit has raised serious concerns about the standard of education provided by the school, its leadership and management, the rate of progress and the significant changes about to take place and I am recommending a return visit.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve leadership and management throughout the school so that all take responsibility for raising standards, with rigorous monitoring and planning for improvement, with less reliance on the LA;
- Continue to develop assessment systems to raise expectations and to challenge all staff and pupils to do their best;
- Review the curriculum to give more guidance on planning for building on skills for the range of age and attainment, and using time to the best advantage.

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

Yours sincerely

Mrs Pat Cox