

16 April 2007

Mrs Ann Davies
The Headteacher
Woodlands School
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Dear Mrs Davies

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WOODLANDS SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 27 and 28 March 2007, 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 March 2006.

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

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the two associate headteachers, the chair of governors, groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The previous associate headteacher left in December 2006 and was replaced with two new associate headteachers in January 2007. In order to increase staff expertise, the headteacher has initiated redundancies of teaching assistants, which are not due for completion until July 2007, and appointed two temporary teachers. Staff attendance has improved from 60% to 92% and middle managers are now in place for all subjects. However, the school

continues to rely on temporary staff to deliver key aspects of the curriculum with plans to do so until the LA reorganisation of special schools has been completed.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' attainment on entry is low, due to the complexity and severity of pupils' learning difficulties. Pupils now make satisfactory progress towards their individual targets and in nearly all lessons seen their progress was good. This is mainly due to much improved teaching and a more creative delivery of the curriculum in lessons which motivates pupils to learn and succeed. For example in a French lesson, pupils played *Bingo* as the teacher called out the numbers in French, in order to consolidate their learning of new French numbers. All teachers are now in place to deliver the full curriculum and have been effectively trained and supported by an associate headteacher to make lessons more interesting and enjoyable.

The school has further improved its use of assessment data. A baseline assessment of pupils' abilities on entry is now established from which achievement can be measured. The school is building up more accurate information on prior attainment so that realistic and challenging targets for pupils' future performance can be set. Staff have been trained in assessment approaches using 'PIVATS' and this has been incorporated into planning and recording of pupils' progress. Small steps in pupils' learning are now recorded and rewarded. All teachers are using assessment information to plan learning opportunities that are better matched to individual pupils' needs. The proportion of underachievement has reduced with pupils' improved attendance, although the low levels of attendance of a few pupils remains a barrier to their achievement.

Personal development and well-being

The good improvement in attendance since the last visit has been achieved because of more effective monitoring and promotion of attendance. Last term, 40% of pupils attended for 100% of the time and now this has increased substantially so that 60% of pupils attend for 100% of the time. This reflects pupils' greater enjoyment of learning. Pupils say lessons are more interesting and they like all their subjects. The rate of exclusions has increased slightly as a result of improved attendance because some of the more difficult pupils who were previously non attendees returned to school but did not respond well enough to the school's ethos and code of conduct. The school does not have clear enough protocols to determine which pupils should be admitted and whether or not a pupil should be excluded or an emergency review held for placement in more appropriate provision.

Pupils' spiritual moral social and cultural development has also improved. Cultural development is now good and is effectively promoted through the

teaching of world religions, the celebration of festivals and events such as world book day and the use of drama. There are more opportunities for collaborative learning and group work in lessons, which effectively promotes pupils' social development. Pupils have good relationship with staff and one another. The schools systems for managing and improving behaviour are effective as pupils' behaviour is now generally good, in lessons and around the school. As a result pupils are now engaged in their learning.

A programme for encouraging healthy lifestyles, which includes healthy choices at lunchtime, freely available drinking water and regular physical exercise, ensure pupils are healthy. The personal, social, health, education curriculum contributes satisfactorily to pupils' safety as they learn about the dangers of alcohol, smoking and drugs.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- Reduce the number of exclusions by taking more effective steps to manage and improve pupils' behaviour – satisfactory progress

Quality of provision

There has been good improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since the last monitoring visit. The school has met its target of 50% good or better teaching. Teaching is now at least satisfactory and is often good. However, there are limited opportunities for teachers to use ICT to make learning more interesting. Although teachers' planning is now good, some inconsistencies remain. For example, teachers do not always identify appropriate opportunities to extend pupils' learning. Pupils are well motivated. They are interested in and enjoy learning because teachers use more creative methods in teaching and learning tasks are matched more closely to pupils' individual needs. Teachers usually have high expectations of pupils' learning. The consultant headteachers have organised systems for supporting the development of teaching. One consultant has facilitated the development of fortnightly *learning to learn* meetings where teachers share ideas on good practice in order to improve teaching and learning. The other consultant has worked in classrooms to model creative approaches to learning, especially through the use of drama so that pupils enjoy learning.

The systematic monitoring of teaching through lesson observations and teacher's planning has helped to identify strengths and areas for further improvement. Staff relationships with pupils are very good and they manage pupils' behaviour well. Support assistants make a good contribution to both pupils' learning and behaviour management in lessons. Teaching provides

good opportunities for pupils to listen to and respect one another's views and to develop their communication and literacy skills.

There has been satisfactory improvement in assessment. Assessment systems are more secure and progress is now recorded using 'P Levels'. These are recorded in individual education plans (IEPs). Individual targets in IEPs have improved but remain at an early stage of development. Pupils are not yet always involved in setting their own targets or reviewing their progress at the end of lessons. Pupils' work is now marked so that they nearly always have an idea of how well they are doing. The school is reviewing its marking policy to ensure greater consistency across the school.

The school continues to improve its curriculum with good use of available resources and the development of more creative learning activities within subjects. For example, improved use of practical learning resources and varied learning activities were seen in religious education, French and science lessons. Although the information and communication technology (ICT) suite is used effectively to promote learning of ICT, its use in lessons to support learning in other subjects is not sufficiently developed because of limited computer facilities, such as interactive whiteboards, to further stimulate learning. Effective links with the local academy have been consolidated for the teaching of design and technology and science.

The school's provision of care, guidance and support is good. There are secure arrangements for child protection and risk assessments are carried out regularly. Teaching assistants are now providing good support in lessons, which is an improvement since the last visit. Appropriate steps are taken to ensure that pupils are safeguarded and protected. As a result, they feel safe and secure in school. An effective personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme, careers education and guidance and work related learning are making a good contribution towards pupils' future economic well-being.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to make sure that pupils' work is matched to their differing learning needs and that they make faster progress – good progress
- To ensure the curriculum meets requirements – good progress

Leadership and management

The headteacher's leadership and management of the school is effective and has improved effectively since the last monitoring visit. She is now confident

in moving the school forward and has taken some very difficult staffing decisions in managing redundancies to secure greater expertise among the teaching staff. The headteacher regularly observes lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching, and staff have been set targets closely linked to their performance management objectives. The deputy headteacher also models good teaching and checks teachers' planning every half term. External support from the associate headteachers is effective in improving leadership and the quality of teaching. Although the headteacher, deputy headteacher and chair of governors evaluate the school's work effectively to accurately identify its strengths and areas for improvement, middle managers and other governors are not sufficiently involved in this process, so that the capacity for sustained improvement is not yet fully secure.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- Improve the leadership and management at all levels, especially strategic planning, the monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the school's work and the use of information to plan for improvement – satisfactory progress

External support

The LA has provided very good support since the last monitoring visit by allocating two associate headteachers to strengthen leadership and to develop teaching and learning. They have worked closely with the headteacher and staff to improve the quality of teaching and learning through effective staff development and coaching. This has led to more rigorous monitoring and support of teaching and the delivery of the curriculum by the headteacher and deputy headteacher. As a result teaching and learning and the quality of curriculum have effectively improved.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- To ensure teachers use ICT in lessons to further stimulate pupils' learning in all subjects
- To further improve assessment, particularly in the development of smarter IEP targets and pupils' involvement in their own assessment for learning

- To ensure that middle managers and governors are more involved in monitoring the school's work to sustain improvements
- To establish clear criteria and protocols for admission, exclusion and emergency reviews so that only those pupils who respond appropriately to the ethos and code of conduct remain in the school

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State to the chair of governors and the Corporate Director for Children's Services.

Yours sincerely

Declan McCarthy

Additional Inspector