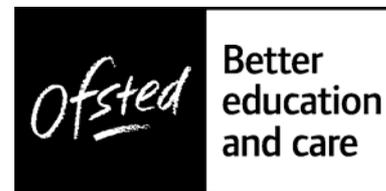


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19 July 2005

Mrs J Paul
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Paul

Implementation of Willesborough Infant School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 6 and 7 July with my colleague Carmen Rodney HMI, I write to confirm the findings and to notify you of the outcomes.

As you know, the inspection was part of a policy involving a broader series of visits by HMI and Additional Inspectors to check on the development and improvement of schools where the section 10 inspection indicated that the school was underachieving. You will recall that the aims of the visit were to assess the progress made in addressing and eliminating underachievement and meeting the targets given in the action plan. We also evaluated standards of achievement and the quality of education, especially in relation to areas of underachievement.

During the visit we inspected 14 part lessons; attended two registration periods and two assemblies; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions with yourself, nominated staff, the school improvement partner and the chair and vice chair of governors on the causes and areas of underachievement. We also examined a range of the pupils' work and spoke informally with other staff and pupils.

On the basis of the evidence gathered during the visit, we made the following observations to you, the deputy headteacher, the chair and vice chair of governors and a representative of the LEA.

The school's action plan is satisfactory and has good features. It contains appropriate strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to raise standards. Timescales are explicit and the resource implications are specified. There are clear arrangements for monitoring the plan's implementation and for evaluating its impact. Each key issue is prefaced by a number of success criteria, and further success criteria are shown for each piece of action. This means that

there are numerous success criteria which involve much work to check. In addition, quantifiable success criteria are embedded within the detail of the plan, rather than being stated clearly in the overarching criteria for each key issue. This approach is replicated in the school's improvement plan; a reduction in the number of success criteria and a clearer focus on exactly what is aimed for would sharpen the plan.

Since the school's inspection in April 2004, the school has published one set of national test results. The unvalidated results for 2005 were also available. The 2004 results in reading, writing and mathematics reversed a downward trend; they were in line with or above those of all schools, and in line with or above the results of schools with a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. The pupils performed particularly well in reading and the proportion that achieved a higher Level 3 was well above that of similar schools. The 2005 results have, overall, maintained this position, but the school has fallen slightly short of its targets in writing and mathematics. If the 2004 PANDA is used as a comparison, the school's results remain above the figure for similar schools in reading and in line with the figures for writing and mathematics. Although the proportion of pupils who achieved a higher level in writing was similar to that of the previous year, there was a drop of seven percentage points in the proportion of pupils achieving Level 2 or above. The school was disappointed with this outcome, particularly in the light of the work done to try to raise attainment in writing.

The 2004 test results were analysed and strengths and areas for development were identified. This information, along with the findings from the regular scrutiny of samples of work, has been used to tailor what is taught in order to tackle areas of weakness. The school now has a clear focus on learning and attainment, and there is an obvious commitment to making the best use of assessment information in the drive to raise standards.

In lessons, the pupils worked at levels which are appropriate for their ages. Most of the pupils in the reception classes have achieved or exceeded many of the goals expected for their learning by the end of the year, particularly in speaking and listening and in the personal and social development.

At Key Stage 1, there were particular strengths in the pupils' skills in speaking and listening; for example, when they took part in whole class question and answer sessions. Most spoke at length, and the more able occasionally intervened to express a point of view. The teachers emphasised the development of specific learning skills for writing, reading and speaking, which helped the pupils make satisfactory or good progress in lessons. The pupils discussed their ideas before writing. The teachers planned tasks which were carefully matched to the pupils' needs and the more able were given opportunities to develop their ideas independently. However, while the pupils often organised their ideas logically and used the correct grammatical structure in their sentences, they did not always choose words for their effect and common words were often incorrectly spelled.

In spite of the positive steps that have been taken so far to improve the quality of the pupils' writing, the impact is not yet fully evident in Year 2. However, the work has been more effective in the Foundation Stage and Year 1. Further work is planned for the coming academic year.

In Key Stage 1, the pupils achieved sound standards in mathematics lessons and in Year 2 some were confident and quick in their recall of multiplication tables and related division facts. They counted accurately in twos, threes and fives. Others quickly grasped the idea of plotting positions on a grid by using co-ordinates, and were learning to use the correct vocabulary.

The pupils had consistently positive attitudes to learning. Their attitudes and behaviour were good or very good in 12 of the lessons. They settled quickly, listened well to their teacher and set to work willingly. They were interested in the topics they were studying and keen to talk about their work. They used their time well when working independently or in pairs. In one lesson, however, they found co-operating as part of a larger group quite difficult, and the end result was not quite what the teacher had intended. The pupils were very well behaved. They were friendly, relaxed and warm in their relationships with one another and with adults. They were supportive of one another and even the youngest pupils were able to sort out disagreements amicably. Towards the end of the first day of this inspection, some pupils began to become restless but they quickly came to order when asked to do so by the teacher. The teachers managed the pupils' behaviour effectively and unobtrusively.

Levels of attendance have been above the national figure for the past four years. This year's overall figure is lower, as attendance fell during a spell of very bad weather during the winter months when other schools in the area were closed. During this inspection, attendance was good. Nearly all of the pupils arrived punctually at the start of the school day.

In all of the lessons but one, the pupils made at least satisfactory progress; in nine lessons, progress was good. This is an encouraging profile. The pupils' positive attitudes contributed to their progress, but there was also a strong correlation with the quality of teaching they received. Sharply focused teaching effectively fostered the pupils' learning and ensured good progress in lessons.

The quality of teaching has improved a good deal since the school was inspected last year. The teaching was satisfactory or better in all but one of the lessons and in two thirds of the lessons the teaching was good or very good. The efforts the school has put into improving teaching and learning have had an obvious impact; the school's monitoring records show a steady increase in the proportion of teaching that is good. The regular monitoring of teaching by senior staff and subject leaders has helped develop a culture of internal review and development and has improved the teachers' understanding of the importance of clear and explicit objectives for learning. The teachers' work is also guided by an excellent

policy on “teaching for learning” which sets out precisely what is expected of teachers, senior staff and governors.

Where the teaching was most effective, the teachers made sure that the pupils knew what they would be learning by explaining the objectives in language that they could understand. The lessons were well planned and resourced, progressed at a brisk pace and the tasks promoted the objectives well. The teachers had a secure understanding of how to build the learning progressively, by recapping on what had been learned before and introducing new ideas in a carefully staged fashion. Where the teaching was satisfactory, the pace was more leisurely and there was scope to introduce a higher degree of challenge for those pupils who grasped ideas quickly. The pupils consolidated what they already knew, rather than moving on to the next step. Where the teaching was unsatisfactory, there were weaknesses in the teacher’s subject knowledge which meant that she was not able to deal quickly and effectively with the pupils’ misconceptions, the objectives for the lesson were expressed in language the pupils did not understand and although some key vocabulary was explained briefly, it was not reinforced in writing so that the pupils could refer to it later.

The teaching assistants were well deployed and made a positive contribution to the pupils’ learning and progress. The pupils who have special educational needs, including those who have physical disabilities, were given effective support and included in whole-class parts of lessons as much as possible.

The year group leaders and subject co-ordinators have worked on the planning systems to ensure consistency in the coverage of learning objectives and the pupils’ experiences. The teachers are expected to adapt plans for the needs of their particular class, but are not all equally confident or skilled to do so. Further work is also needed to reinforce the teachers’ understanding of the difference between objectives and suitable tasks, so that the teachers have the scope to teach and promote the same objectives in a way which better suits the needs and learning styles of their class and their own preferred teaching strategies.

The school has reviewed its assessment policy and has made good progress in developing a system of regular assessment. The teachers have received appropriate training and support to help them develop good practice in using assessment information to improve teaching and learning. Although there are still some minor inconsistencies between classes, improvements to assessment practice is evident in the rich range of data used for tracking the pupils’ progress. Tracking records have been firmly established in the core subjects. Whole-school and individual targets have been established; the teachers’ and subject leaders’ accountability for attainment is also recognised. Assessment information is used quickly to pin point areas of underachievement in the pupils’ learning. This has enabled teachers to adjust their planning and records to take account of the weaknesses that need to be addressed. The teachers mark the pupils’ work regularly, but marking is variable in quality and the pupils are not always aware of

how to improve. The school is currently working on bringing about further improvements in the quality of marking.

There is now much greater rigour in the work of senior staff and subject leaders. The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide strong and effective leadership. Thorough systems and procedures have been developed to guide the school's work and there is an unequivocal focus on improving teaching and learning. There is no complacency about what has been achieved and the school routinely identifies what the next steps should be in every initiative.

The teachers' work in the classroom has been subject to regular checks and senior staff have a secure understanding of strengths and weaknesses. Feedback to the teachers has been helpful; lesson observation notes give pertinent details of what went well and what needs to be improved, along with an explicit judgement of the overall quality. The subject leaders' skills in observing and judging the quality of teaching and learning have developed well, and the policy of paired observations has helped to ensure consistency and accuracy in the judgements that have been made. As there is now a clear understanding of the quality of teaching, there is scope to target observations more specifically and to reduce classroom observations where the teaching is consistently good or better. The creation of the posts of year group leaders has also helped to ensure consistency in planning and approach across each year group; this is important as the school currently has five classes in each year group. Subject leaders have a secure grasp of standards in their subjects and clear plans for further improvement.

The headteacher is to retire at the end of this term. The school will be led by an acting headteacher until the recently appointed substantive headteacher takes up post in January next year. It will be important to maintain the systems and procedures which have been developed in order to sustain momentum until the school has its next full inspection.

There is greater rigour in the work of the governing body. The governors' steering group has kept a close watch on the implementation of the action plan and its success. They understand the need to see some supporting evidence, rather than taking information at face value. Training has helped governors understand more clearly the part they play both in supporting the school and in holding it to account for its performance. However, not all governors play an equal part in this process and there is still some way to go before all members of the governing body contribute equally.

The school has valued the support, guidance and feedback given by the school improvement partner. Her approach has been to foster development by asking pertinent questions to help the school arrive at its own solutions, which has been particularly helpful. She has had a significant impact on the school's capacity to evaluate its own performance, which has developed very well. Her regular reports on the school's progress have been detailed and accurate. The school's relationship with other LEA officers has not always been so productive, however.

Evaluation of Progress:

The school is making good progress towards raising pupils' attainment and eliminating underachievement.

In relation to the action plan and the impact of the actions taken, good progress has been made in addressing the key tasks which relate to the school's underachievement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of governors and the local education authority. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill

HM Inspector of Schools

cc chair of governors
LEA