

The School's 2009 Ofsted Inspection and Parents' Meeting

A The Report

The report on Ofsted's inspection of the school (17th-18th June 2009) was received on July 17th and published to parents on July 20th. These were the main points:-

1. Early Years Foundation Stage - Grade 2 (Good)

Through 'good leadership and management in this part of the school', the Reception class was judged strong on induction; full of imaginative and exciting activities; and effective at developing learning, creative and physical skills; while care and welfare is also a real strength..

2. Achievements and standards - Grade 3 (Satisfactory)

Having made allowance for varying levels of pupils' abilities, the inspectors were satisfied with their progress and standards overall at the end of Keystages 1 and 2.

3. Personal Development and Wellbeing - Grade 3 (Satisfactory)

After consulting with pupils, the inspectors reported a good awareness of healthy lifestyles, although their choices at lunchtime were 'not always' of the healthiest! They work well together, appreciate the after-school clubs and the newly developed wild area ('an exciting achievement') and have an effective School Council. Their skills for future 'economic well-being' are adequate. Spiritual awareness is aided by links with the church, but knowledge of others' beliefs and traditions needs advancing.

4. Teaching and Learning - Grade 3 (Satisfactory)

Despite some inconsistency in practice across the school, the inspectors were satisfied with the overall standard of teachers' planning and delivery.

5. Curriculum and other activities - Grade 3 (Satisfactory)

The inspectors wanted to see more links between subjects, and welcomed the high profile given to sport and art. They approved of the children's opportunities in gardening, but suggested greater emphasis on music and drama.

6. Care, Guidance and Support - Grade 3 (Satisfactory)

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities get satisfactory support and appropriate individual plans are in place. The school's safety and wellbeing procedures are in place. Some improvement is needed in target-setting and monitoring for pupils. However, the Wraparound Care Club provision is 'outstanding', with thorough attention to children's wellbeing and an excellent range of activities.

7 Leadership and Management - Grade 4 (Inadequate)

Because the leadership and management of the school was graded as inadequate, the inspectors are obliged to judge the school overall as 'Inadequate' and it has been served with a 'Notice to Improve'. The inspectors referred to a number of areas in which there was a lack of clear direction, a weakness of strategy, and an absence of rigour and focus in monitoring of teaching. Performance has not improved since the inspection in 2006. "Discussions and responses to the parent questionnaire indicate that many parents, some governors and a few staff have serious concerns about the leadership of the headteacher". Although governors know the school well and sought support from the local authority, the weakness was not swiftly and effectively tackled. The inspectors concluded that the school's leadership did not demonstrate the capacity to improve.

B. The Parents' Meeting

Two days after the publication of the Report, a meeting was held at the school on 22nd July 2009.. It was attended by about 50 parents and most of the school staff and governors. From the local authority there was Alexa Bradford (Senior Advisor for Primary and Middle Schools), Jan Adams (our school's Improvement Advisor), and Steve John (Schools Improvement Officer for Sedgemoor area).

Alexa Bradford outlined the concern about the school's leadership which had been growing over recent months. The positive aspects of the Ofsted report were overshadowed by this and, having acted in conjunction with the governors, the Local Authority was now able to report that:-

1. The current headteacher, Hugh Taunton, had reached agreement with the local authority that he would not be returning to the school.
2. Mr Jerry Weedon, Deputy Head of Danesfield Middle School in Williton, will take up the headship for one year in the first instance, with the objective of moving the school forward out of the 'Notice to Improve' category.
3. There would be a vigorous action plan to tackle the issues highlighted in the report. This would be prepared in consultation with staff and governors, to engage immediately on the reopening of the school on September 2nd.
4. An HM Inspector would visit the school in 6 months to monitor progress.
5. Another Ofsted inspection would be made in 12-15 months, by which time Nether Stowey School will be thriving.
6. In the meantime, extensive structured support would be provided from County, with consultancy visits, aid on leadership and management issues, and targeted training. Regular half-termly meetings of a Core Group would rigorously monitor progress in a challenging (Ofsted-like) fashion.

Jerry Weedon thanked everyone for the opportunity to lead the move forward. Doing the best for the children will be the main focus. In answer to questions, he outlined his recent involvement as acting headteacher in helping another school to improve. He had also joined Danesfield after a period of decline - its latest Ofsted inspection had now reported 'Outstanding' in 4 of the 6 sections, and 'Good' in the others. He intended to

make himself available to parents to deal openly with issues before they could escalate into problems.

In answer to a question about restoring children's enthusiasm for school, he promised that improvement in the general morale at the school would have a knock-on effect on the children and their learning. The staff were full of creative ideas to enhance children's learning, and the new Primary Strategy had eased schools from the constraints of the National Curriculum. For example, he would plan to encourage greater use of the school's local natural resource, the Quantock Hills, for outdoor education. He emphasised that everyone needed to work together in raising morale. This included parents. If parents are happy in the playground, then children will be happy coming to school.

Craig Marshall, gave the governors' perspective, welcoming Jerry Weedon and thanking Alexa Bradford for all the support she had given the school in recent weeks. He paid tribute to the loyalty and industry of the staff during a most difficult year. Governors were united with them and the parents in having at heart the best interests and education of the children in Nether Stowey's community school.

Heather Good, a parent, expressed how much she was encouraged by the outcome of the Ofsted inspection, because it meant that her child's school would receive the extra resources and attention needed to turn it round. Herself a headteacher, she was currently leading another school out of special measures. There, the benefits of the local authority input had been enormous. Within 10 weeks the school had advanced from 'Inadequate' to 'Good'.

Dennis Harkness, from the chair, mentioned another factor which will enhance the capability of the school's leadership. In September there will be elected a proposed new Chair of Governors, Dean Gill, a parent governor, currently chair of the Business Committee and experienced in management. In addition, there would be three new governors, two of them parents, and each bringing particular talents to contribute. He felt huge confidence that the coming year will be one of exciting progress for everyone involved in the school.

Questions from the floor followed. Several of these involved concern that lessons should be learnt from past experience, regarding recruitment and induction, quicker reaction to parental concerns, restoring children's enjoyment of school, and counteracting the decline in pupil numbers.

Looking to the future, parents wanted to know what would happen after the year of intensive support. **Alexa Bradford** indicated that within that year the school would be out of the 'Cause for Concern' category and would have an exit strategy to ensure that improvements were firmly embedded to ensure sustained improvement. Additional support would be in place for a further period. If a good leader was at the top then other aspects of improvement would fall into place. Regarding the search for a new permanent headteacher for September 2010, she stressed that since 2006 the process for recruiting headteachers had been made much more rigorous. Parents could be assured that governors would have clear guidance in making the appointment.

The meeting ended with a strong feeling that the adverse Ofsted Report will prove enormously beneficial to the future of our school. In the words of **Jan Adams**, who had got to know the staff well over recent months, with the right leadership and management this school has the potential to move forward and 'fly'!

C. Extra Meeting with the Staff

Prior to the parents' meeting reported above, the Local Authority officers took the time to brief staff, along with governors, on the the week's developments. Much of the information was as recorded above, but there was one important extra issue.

Staff and governors alike have been saddened by the personal impact the situation has had on Hugh Taunton and his family. All at the school know how committed and hard-working Hugh has been as headteacher; and how extremely stressful the last few months have been for him. All were therefore pleased to learn from Alexa Bradford that the County, as part of their duty of care, will be providing support for him in finding a new role.
