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Mrs Naomi Walsh
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Walsh

Collaborative Restart: Monitoring Inspection of Finlay Community School

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 20 and 21 October, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) to confirm the inspection findings.

This visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school opened in January 2009.

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 and Key Stage 2 leader, three members of the governing body, and a group of staff. I talked with pupils in lessons and break times and looked at samples of their work.

Context

The school opened under the New School Competition process and is supported by the Learning Community Partnership comprising the University of Gloucestershire, GL Communities, and a number of churches in the Gloucester City Deanery. The school's context is largely unchanged since first monitoring visit in June 2010. The number of pupils on roll is 175. Two teachers are on maternity leave and a third has been seconded to work in another school. The school runs a breakfast club and shares its site with a children's centre that was not inspected as part of this visit. A community resource centre, including

family learning, is expected to open in spring 2011 in another building on the site.

Achievement and standards

The work to raise attainment has continued. Its impact is clearly visible in improved outcomes. Staff and governors work with tremendous clarity of purpose, employing very effective strategies with much success to develop pupils' skills, both academic and personal. Aspirations are high.

Results in the 2010 end of Year 6 tests improved from 2009 when they were broadly in line with national averages, although few pupils in 2009 attained above expected levels. The proportion of pupils attaining above expected levels in English and mathematics went up markedly in 2010. Results were much better in reading than in writing, however. The progress, over Years 3 to 6, of the pupils leaving the school in 2010 was a little higher than in the previous year when it was already outstanding. Results in the end of Year 2 tests improved from those in 2009 in writing and mathematics but went down for reading. Staff ensure that pupils' reading skills are checked often and closely so that swift action can be taken where necessary to maintain at least good rates of progress in reading in Years 1 and 2. The 2010 test outcomes pay tribute to successful work in overcoming the various barriers to learning that many pupils experience. They also show the school's success in speeding up the progress of more able pupils.

There is still work to be done to boost the progress of some pupils whose skills are relatively weak or who have gaps in their knowledge, in mathematics for example. Learning in mathematics is still not firmly enough rooted in real-life, relevant contexts. Current work shows that writing skills are being developed well, often through the engaging topics being studied. Handwriting is improving; there are some examples of very well presented work but also much unevenness in this. The progress of children in the Reception class was not examined fully. Brief visits to this class showed that provision continues to be of high quality.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development is fostered exceptionally well thus underpinning their success in learning. Pupils feel extremely secure because expectations of how they are to behave are so high, systems of rewards and sanctions are applied consistently by all staff, and because pupils trust staff to ensure their well-being. At all times, pupils are expected to be courteous and respectful to each other, staff and visitors; they are, with only a few gentle reminders. Behaviour continues to be very good and when it strays from being exemplary, staff are on hand to deal unobtrusively with any problems so that lessons are not disrupted. Teaching assistants are particularly effective in this respect as well as in their work to support pupils as they tackle the tasks set. Attendance continues to improve through the good work of school staff and the education

welfare officer. Pupils enjoy calm, well-ordered and sociable times in the breakfast club and when having lunch at delightfully laid tables. The school has just achieved Healthy School status.

Quality of provision

The positive comments about teaching made last June still apply. Moreover, provision for more able pupils has been enhanced. Teachers, through good questioning in most lessons, establish what pupils already know so as to push and extend their skills and understanding. Teaching is mostly good but, as before, not all teachers have good subject knowledge or teaching skills in mathematics and this impedes pupils' learning because errors are not spotted or gaps in knowledge not properly diagnosed. Teachers know what pupils can be expected to achieve. They help pupils understand targets and what they need to do to reach them.

The school is rightly proud of its curriculum because it supports so well pupils' development in all respects. At the end of the summer term, pupils were asked to choose a topic to study for the first few months of this academic year. They did so and arrived in September to classrooms bedecked with interesting resources reflecting their chosen theme. The themes have been used to cover learning in a wide range of subjects including English, history, geography but less so for mathematics. This themed approach is greatly enjoyed by pupils and allows for much creativity from them and staff. There are many fine displays of pupils' work. The interactions staff have with pupils throughout the school day exemplify successfully the school's vision and values of working together 'to create a happy, caring, inspiring and challenging environment'. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are outstanding.

Leadership and management

Leaders and managers have been successful in driving improvements. The headteacher is a highly effective leader. She communicates clearly her high expectations to staff and pupils and supports them assiduously in rising to them. Staff at all levels are encouraged to study and gain qualifications; many have done so and are proud of their achievements. Staff morale is high. The school understands the importance of strong partnerships with parents in raising pupils' attainment and much effort is given to nurturing them, through the valuable work of the children and family support worker and in other ways.

Governors have worked very well to establish a new school and have grown in strength and effectiveness. Good management structures and arrangements for governance already exist, and further enhancements are being put into place, such as governors' links with classes and the refinement of key performance indicators through which to keep the school under review. The headteacher and Chair of Governors praise the work of the finance officer and school secretary in the many contributions they make to the smooth running of the school. The school development plan is a succinct and well-focused

document but, in a few places, the intended improvements to outcomes for pupils are not clearly stated. The headteacher has a very good overview of the performance of staff and pupils. Data about pupils' attainment and progress are compiled well; a new system is being introduced with a view to speeding up analyses.

In view of the absence of three members of staff on maternity leave or secondment, governors have not yet finalised the decision about how to structure the senior leadership team. The headteacher is currently being supported by two acting senior leaders. While this temporary arrangement is working well, the school lacks an established senior team.

External support

The school continues to benefit greatly from the backing of its sponsors. It has many productive links with community organisations that enhance its work, particularly with families. The University of Gloucestershire and the school work together in mutual benefit. For example, students from the university run workshops for pupils and in doing so develop their own skills. As stated in June, the school values the work of officers and advisers from the local authority and the support of the Gloucestershire Schools Partnership.

Main Judgements

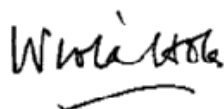
The school's overall progress is good.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve standards, particular in writing (including handwriting) and mathematics: increase the opportunities for pupils to use mathematics in real-life, relevant contexts; ensure that all teachers have good subject knowledge in mathematics.
- Complete the work on determining the structure of the senior leadership team and secure permanent appointments.
- Develop further the school's systems for assessment so that the progress of groups of pupils as well as of individuals can be easily determined.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children and Young People's Service for Gloucestershire.

Yours sincerely



Wiola Hola
Her Majesty's Inspector