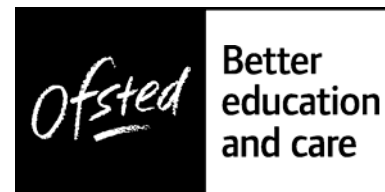


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21 July 2005

Mrs Z McCormick
Headteacher
Seven Fields Primary School
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SN2 5DE

Dear Mrs McCormick

Implementation of Seven Fields Primary School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Mr A Olive HMI and Mr P Way HMI to your school on 6 and 7 July 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings which are recorded in the attached note.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the school; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

The school has made good progress since the last monitoring inspection and reasonable progress overall since being subject to special measures.

The school is permitted to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Swindon. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF SEVEN FIELDS PRIMARY SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

Findings of the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures

During the visit 19 lessons or parts of lessons, three registration sessions and two assemblies were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the acting chair of governors, key members of staff and two representatives from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, assistant headteacher, a governor and two representatives from the LEA.

The LEA has given an assurance that the school will be rebuilt; a bid has been submitted to the Department for Education and Skills for targeted funding and should the bid be rejected, the rebuild will be a priority one status for capital funding. The health and safety issues of the building have been considered and the LEA continues to monitor the situation regularly. The LEA has increased the admission number for the reception class for September 2005 to reflect parental preference. The newly qualified teacher has successfully completed her probationary period. Two teachers were absent on the days of the inspection.

The results of the 2005 Key Stage 1 national tests in writing were a significant improvement from last year, though still below the national figure for 2004. In reading and mathematics results remained low. At Key Stage 2, the results in English, mathematics and science were much improved, exceeding the school's targets in English and science.

Standards in lessons have risen; they were at or close to the national average in 12 lessons and below average in seven. The pupils' confidence and ability to explain their thinking has grown; many answered the teachers' questions eloquently, using appropriate vocabulary. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) have increased significantly; in Key Stage 2 the pupils have made good progress and demonstrated skills at the nationally expected level.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 18 lessons including eight where it was good and one where it was very good. This is an improvement from the last inspection, with less unsatisfactory teaching and the proportion of good lessons much improved. Nevertheless, it was unsatisfactory in one lesson and in others there was a fine balance of strengths and weaknesses. The quality of teaching in the Foundation Stage is good overall.

The teaching was most effective when the planning identified specific learning objectives that were explained clearly to the pupils and referred to throughout the lessons. The activities were well chosen to motivate and interest the pupils, actively involving them in the lessons and catering for the range of ability successfully. Key vocabulary was highlighted and consolidated during the lessons. There were opportunities for the pupils to develop their thinking and improve their speaking and listening skills through good open questioning and interactive strategies. The lessons were well organised; instructions were clear and precise and the pace was brisk. ICT was used effectively to enhance the teaching and the learning. Relationships were supportive and encouraging and additional adults made a good contribution to the pupils' learning.

The unsatisfactory lesson, and some that were satisfactory overall but which contained weaknesses, shared a number of features. The pupils did not fully understand the purpose of the lesson. The teachers' expectations of what the pupils could achieve were too low, particularly for the higher attaining pupils, with the result that tasks did not match the different needs of pupils and they underachieved. The pace of the pupils' learning was inconsistent; at key times during the lesson not enough was demanded of the pupils, their interest waned and their rate of learning declined. The teachers' feedback to the pupils did not consistently help them make progress; even where there was good on-going assessment of the pupils' learning, the oral feedback often focused on the activity rather than the learning. In a small number of lessons, the pupils' behaviour was insufficiently well managed by the teachers; consequently, instructions were not understood which left the pupils unsure of what to do and increased restlessness.

The quality of learning was linked closely to the quality of the teaching. It was satisfactory or better in 18 lessons and good in eight.

An appropriate long-term curriculum plan has been developed for the next school year. Detailed, medium-term plans have been written for many units of work, though some subjects remain to be completed. The curriculum has been tailored specifically to the needs of the pupils and is a move towards the school's aim of a skills-based approach. The school has started to develop effective cross-curricular links; lessons were seen that made meaningful links between literacy, ICT and history and between literacy and geography. Personal and social education is well-embedded in the different subjects, as reflected by the school's recent Healthy Schools Award.

The school has further refined several of its assessment procedures and they are beginning to provide better information about the pupils' progress. Regular moderation has enabled the teachers to become more secure in judging levels of attainment. Assessment data is stored in two main software programmes, one

providing a more complete picture of attainment and the other for class-based information. The data has been more effectively analysed by the senior management team and used to identify key areas of underperformance. Targets for the pupils' progress are set on the basis of this data; in most classes the pupils know their targets, though few pupils know what they need to do to improve. The marking of the pupils' work has started to focus on areas for improvement, though this is not consistent across the school. There were some examples of pupils being more purposefully involved in assessing their own and each other's work.

The management of the provision for the pupils who have special educational needs is more effective. The pupils' individual education plans are reviewed regularly and the targets used to plan appropriate activities. The support staff are receiving relevant training; the deployment of teaching assistants in the lessons has been revised and benefits the pupils. There is closer liaison with external agencies; for example, the specific needs of a small number of vulnerable Year 6 pupils are being suitably met prior to their transfer to secondary schools with help from the Children's Fund. The school is more diligent in applying for funding to ensure the pupils who have special educational needs are appropriately supported.

The attitudes and behaviour of the pupils in the lessons were never less than satisfactory and were good in eight lessons. This is an improvement from the last monitoring visit. Though a minority of the pupils presented challenging behaviour in class, this is usually well managed by staff and disruption to the other pupils was mostly kept to a minimum level. In most lessons the pupils applied themselves conscientiously when working independently or in co-operative groups.

The pupils' behaviour around the school was generally good; they were polite and well mannered. All the staff reinforced and praised good behaviour; the social development of the pupils is rightly considered a high priority. The rewards and sanctions system, however, was not applied consistently across the school. On occasions it was ineffective because the pupils were confused by the seemingly indiscriminate awarding and withdrawal of points. Supervision was good at playtimes and lunchtime. The assemblies made a positive contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral and social education.

Attendance for the year until the end of May 2005, at 94.1 per cent, is in line with the national figure. This is a significant improvement from 2003-04 when attendance was very low in comparison with other schools and reflects the more rigorous monitoring systems in place and the productive work with parents.

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school that is communicated very effectively to staff, governors and pupils. Her high expectations and enthusiasm have inspired the school community and brought about an impressive level of

commitment and unity of purpose; consequently, the pace of improvement has accelerated. She is well supported by an effective senior team, the members of which have taken greater responsibility in the monitoring and evaluation of provision in their particular areas. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses throughout the school and the actions necessary to continue improvement. The priorities in the draft school improvement plan are pertinent to the needs of the school. The school is starting to develop the capacity to manage its own improvement.

The headteacher has worked hard to overcome the significant budget deficit. As a result of a reduction in the over-staffing and other savings, such as the in-house management of cleaning, the school accumulated a small surplus by the end of last financial year. A break-even budget has been agreed for the current financial year and is being carefully monitored by the headteacher and the financial committee of the governing body.

Governance has improved. Appropriate training provided by the LEA has developed the governors' awareness of their roles and responsibilities. The new acting chair of governors recognises the need for the governing body to monitor the school's work more closely. The LEA has worked hard to recruit three new governors with expertise in financial and school management which has contributed towards the greater level of challenge and support. The governors have agreed a suitable policy and record form for their visits to the school; the initial visits have increased the individual governors' knowledge and understanding of the school and provided useful reports. The governors have wisely secured the services of an LEA clerk from the start of the next school year. The governors are led by an acting chair following the sudden death of the chair of governors.

The link adviser continues to have a secure understanding of the school's progress and offers a good level of support and challenge. The LEA's work in developing the quality of teaching and learning has been effective, particularly in literacy.

Action taken to address the key issues

Key Issue 1: improve the leadership and management of the headteacher, key staff and governing body

As described above, the headteacher has continued to drive improvements forward effectively. The senior team have developed their skills in carrying out their responsibilities and are having a greater impact on the provision. Governance has improved.

Progress is good.

Key Issue 2: ensure that all pupils in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 achieve the standards of which they are capable

There is still underachievement and standards remain below the expected levels; however, there has been an improvement in the number of lessons in which the pupils made good progress.

Progress is reasonable.

Key Issue 3: improve standards at the end of both key stages in English, mathematics, science, religious education and information and communication technology

The end-of-key-stage results have improved significantly at Key Stage 2, though remain below and well-below average overall. Standards in ICT have improved.

Progress is reasonable.

Key Issue 4: improve the quality of teaching throughout Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2

Progress is good.

Key Issue 5: ensure that there is better breadth and balance in the curriculum for Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 pupils

Progress on this area is reasonable.

Key issue 6: improve the use made of assessment, and the school's systems for tracking pupils' progress and attainment

Progress on this area is reasonable.

Key Issue 7: improve the levels of whole-school attendance

Progress on this key issue is good and there will be no further reports unless concerns arise.