

[Post-visit letter – special measures visits]

14 November 2005

Mrs H Hollick
Headteacher
Redbourn Infant and Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Hollick

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF REDBOURN INFANTS' AND NURSERY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 7 and 8 November 2005, 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 January 2005.

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 10 lessons, scrutinised a range of documents and met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, a number of staff, a group of pupils, the chair and the vice-chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last monitoring visit there have been several changes in staffing. The acting headteacher has taken up the substantive post. A new teacher for the nursery started in September 2005. An inclusion manager has been appointed and will take up her post in January 2006. Currently one teaching post is covered by a temporary teacher.

Achievement and standards

In 2005, the standards improved, with a higher proportion of pupils achieving the expected levels in writing and mathematics than in 2004. More pupils gained higher levels in all three subjects but in reading the results overall remained the same. Boys achieved better in mathematics while girls achieved better in writing. The school has carried out a detailed analysis of the 2005 results and identified areas of underachievement. Action is planned to improve boys' writing but has yet to impact fully on standards.

Standards in the lessons seen were average overall with pupils working at the expected levels for their age. Most pupils made satisfactory progress in all the lessons because the work is better matched to their needs than it was at the time of the last visit. However, although the provision for more able pupils has improved in some lessons, it is not yet consistent across the school. Several pupils reported that they would like harder work.

The curriculum has been refocused to enable the school to develop a more creative approach to learning. As a result pupils are more engaged and gain greater enjoyment from lessons. This is currently being implemented and its impact on pupils' achievement will be monitored and evaluated over the coming months.

Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities make good progress as a result of the focused support they receive from teachers and teaching assistants.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2005:

- raise standards of achievement generally and ensure that the needs of the gifted, talented and more capable pupils are met through a more creative approach to the curriculum – satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils are developing good attitudes to their learning. They are eager to learn and respond with great enthusiasm particularly when teachers use creative and imaginative teaching strategies, as seen in a history lesson when Year 2 pupils were asked to behave like detectives to find out information about the fire of London. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. They have good relationships with their teachers and are keen to please them. Provision for pupils' social and moral development is good. The use made of the school council and the new buddying system which pairs Year 2 pupils with those new to reception has enabled the pupils to take on additional responsibilities and so make a positive contribution to school life. Pupils are becoming aware of the importance of healthy eating and regular exercise through initiatives such as Health Week that promoted healthy lifestyles. Cultural development is enhanced by a range of activities planned around festivals and special events. Overall attendance is satisfactory.

Having taken parents' views into account, new induction arrangements for settling children into the reception class were recently introduced. Children visit the school several times before starting reception to meet the teacher, experience school lunches and meet their Year 2 buddy who also writes to them to welcome them to the school. The nursery environment is much improved. It is now more welcoming with stimulating activities and learning areas that are well planned and inviting. Children are purposefully engaged and receive good support from the nursery staff which enhances their opportunities for learning.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2005:

- reconsider arrangements for settling pupils into school and rectify the unwelcome nursery environment – good progress

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning ranges from good to satisfactory. Overall it is satisfactory. However, the variability in the quality of teaching limits the pupils' achievements overall, particularly the very able, who are not always challenged enough by their work

Lesson planning shows much improvement and the recently introduced planning system is used consistently across the school. Learning objectives are clear and pupils know what they are going to learn at the start of each lesson. Teachers are becoming more confident in their teaching and subject knowledge. Teachers' instructions and explanations are usually clear and helpful. In the best lessons there is a greater use of more open-ended questioning that allows pupils to expand and give reasons for their answers. The pace of lessons is brisker and learning is made interesting for pupils by the use of different strategies which motivate and enthuse. For example in several lessons teachers encouraged pupils to discuss their ideas with a partner before they answered questions or began their written work. Teaching assistants are used more effectively to support groups of pupils, particularly those with learning difficulties or disabilities. As a result of the improved teaching pupils are becoming more engaged in their lessons.

Teachers are beginning to evaluate the impact of their lessons on pupils' achievement by checking more regularly on the progress pupils are making and identifying what they need to learn next. However this assessment information is not yet used consistently across the school to match the pupils' work to their different needs, particularly for more able pupils. Teachers' marking shows improvement and comments indicate what pupils need to do to improve their work. Target-setting systems are in place and are now used to track pupils' progress but need to be developed further to ensure that action is taken to support all pupils to make the maximum progress possible.

The new curriculum plan ensures that all aspects of the National Curriculum are taught fully. It makes logical links between subjects and enables the basic skills of literacy and numeracy to be reinforced in other subjects. However this is still in the

early stages of implementation and has yet to make an impact on the quality of pupils' learning.

Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved. The introduction and use of interactive whiteboards in two classrooms has made lessons more stimulating and interesting. The ICT curriculum has been updated and improved to cover the development of pupils' ICT skills as well as supporting their learning in other areas of the curriculum.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2005:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning, particularly by raising expectations and making better use of the information the teachers gather on the pupils from the assessments they make - satisfactory progress
- address the shortcomings in ICT and in care and welfare in the Foundation Stage – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

There has been good progress in improving the leadership and management of the school. The acting headteacher took up the substantive post of headteacher in September 2005 and has worked effectively to drive through improvements to the curriculum, planning and quality of teaching and learning for all pupils. She provides committed and positive leadership with more rigorous focus on standards and achievement. She has accurately identified the school's most immediate priorities and is determined to accelerate the rate of progress towards eliminating areas of weakness. Under her guidance the role of deputy headteacher has been developed more fully. The headteacher is committed to developing the school's capacity to improve at all levels and understands that the school should be doing better to meet the needs and aspirations of all groups of pupils.

Systems for monitoring by the headteacher are in place and this has had a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The role of the subject leaders has yet to be developed fully. The governors are fully informed about the developments of the school and are becoming more involved in monitoring and evaluating its work. A programme of meetings between governors and subject leaders has been agreed.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2005:

- take action to rectify the significant weaknesses in the leadership and management of the headteacher and develop the role of the deputy headteacher - good progress

External support

The local authority has provided a considerable amount of good quality support to the school. It has facilitated support from a range of advisory teachers and provided a programme of training sessions for staff. The attached school's education adviser has worked effectively in partnership with the headteacher which has resulted in a number of improvements in lesson planning and teaching and learning.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures– satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed

Priorities for further improvement

The priorities remain those identified in the inspection of January 2005.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Pupils, Schools and Families for Hertfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Juliet Winstanley
H M Inspector