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Mrs Jane Aldridge
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Dear Mrs Aldridge

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF LANGLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 16 and 17 November 2005, accompanied by Carol Parkinson and Krishan Sharma, additional inspectors, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2003.

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

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, other key staff, the chair of the governing body, the school council and a representative of the local authority.

Context

At the beginning of this term a new headteacher took up post. The governors appointed a new chair, formerly the vice chair, to lead the governing body.

Achievement and standards

Standards reached in the 2005 Key Stage 2 national tests were below average, but have risen in English and science this year. In English, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected Level 4 increased and the school met its target. However, too few pupils reached the higher Level 5 and the school's target was not achieved. There was a significant difference between the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level in reading and writing. Scores in mathematics showed little change on 2004, with only just over half the pupils reaching the level expected for their age. The school missed its target by a significant margin. The test results in science rose substantially to a level that is broadly in line with the national average. Overall, girls performed better than boys, although too few reached the higher level in mathematics. Pupils made satisfactory progress in reading but their progress in writing and mathematics was inadequate. Assessments completed by teachers last half term reflect the national test results. When compared with national expectations pupils have the most ground to gain in writing and mathematics.

Standards reached in the Key Stage 1 national tests were below average. Scores in writing and mathematics improved but the percentage of pupils reaching the expected Level 2 in reading fell. In relation to their attainment at the end of the Foundation Stage, pupils made satisfactory progress in writing. The progress of pupils with average and above average scores at the end of the Foundation Stage in mathematics and reading was inadequate. However, lower attaining pupils made satisfactory progress.

The school's monitoring indicates that standards in religious education are below average. The new agreed syllabus includes guidance on the expected levels in pupils' work and the school has sound plans to introduce termly assessments based on these. The subject skills to be developed year on year have been mapped and timetables have been adjusted to ensure that sufficient time is allocated to the subject.

A number of the key processes introduced last year to help raise standards have been revisited this term in order to embed them into the school's practice. The system for tracking pupils' progress regularly has been refined with the introduction of criteria to improve the accuracy of assessments. Helpfully, further work is planned to ensure that teachers' evaluations of the pupils' progress are secure. The setting of curriculum targets in English and mathematics has been reintroduced recently, but it has yet to have a marked impact on learning.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2003:

- raise standards in English, mathematics, science, ICT (information and communication technology) and religious education – satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour in and around the school continues to be good overall. Teachers use good strategies for managing the pupils' behaviour and, as a result, very few incidents of unacceptable conduct are now reported. In lessons pupils invariably display positive attitudes towards their work despite the pedestrian teaching in some lessons. They enjoy coming to school and feel safe with the secure knowledge that they can approach adults in the school with their concerns and that they are listened to sympathetically. Pupils are enthusiastic about the school council and willingly contribute to discussions. They are confident enough to suggest that some of their lessons could be more fun. Pupils willingly take on a range of responsibilities such as being monitors for tasks in the classrooms. They are aware of the need to eat healthy food and to be physically active. Attendance is gradually improving and this term is broadly in line with the national figure.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2003:

- improve pupils' behaviour – good progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has deteriorated since the last monitoring inspection, when all lessons visited were at least satisfactory. Of the 23 lessons observed during this inspection, teaching was good in nine, satisfactory in ten and unsatisfactory in four. The rate of pupils' progress generally reflected the quality of teaching. However, some pupils have unsatisfactory learning habits resulting from previous inadequate practice and in some good lessons this reduced the pace of learning.

In the best lessons teachers ensured that pupils of all capabilities were challenged well. Teachers made lessons interesting and checked pupils' understanding well through recapping previous knowledge and good questioning. The correct use of technical terms was modelled well and lessons enlivened with practical activities and demonstrations. Very effective use was made of interactive whiteboards. In a Year 5 science lesson, for example, pupils were able to watch the action of a heart and, by slowing down the sequence, follow the flow of blood in the circulatory system.

In satisfactory lessons pupils responded to the teachers' clear lesson objectives and explanations with some enthusiasm. However, their concentration varied when the pace of teaching slowed and the work set did not reflect accurately the level of their knowledge and understanding. Occasionally lessons started late.

In unsatisfactory lessons tasks were not challenging or structured enough for pupils to learn at a good rate. Teachers' subject knowledge was insecure at

times and this was reflected in weak questioning and unclear explanations. Pupils spent too much time sitting on the carpet instead of being actively engaged in their tasks.

The school has not established fully a common understanding of the use of assessment to plan day to day learning to stretch and consolidate the knowledge and understanding of all groups of pupils. This is hindering progress in improving the quality of teaching. The school does not have a clear approach to provision for its gifted and talented pupils.

The school's provision for the pupils for whom English is an additional language is improving. Overall, these pupils make similar progress to their peers. As a result of its detailed analysis of performance by ethnicity, the school is well placed to plan more effectively to meet the needs of pupils whose first language is not English. However, the teachers' skills in supporting those pupils who are becoming advanced bilingual learners are underdeveloped.

Provision for the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. The Nursery provides good teaching and care so children make a solid and secure start to their school life. Adults know the children very well and make teaching and learning lively and fun. They give children clear boundaries, modelling and demanding very high standards of behaviour and care. The curriculum is well planned and suited to the children's level of interest. It prepares them well for the early stages of the National Curriculum. Assessment procedures are proving cumbersome and time consuming for staff so are under review. Existing systems produce an effective baseline for planning teaching and are used well to measure and analyse pupils' progress over time. The Nursery is very well presented and is a cheerful and orderly setting in which children love to learn.

In Reception unsatisfactory teaching was observed and provision is less effective than in the Nursery. There were some weaknesses in short term planning because assessment information was not used well enough to cater for children's different levels of attainment. As a result activities were not sufficiently structured and challenging and children did not make fast enough progress. The children's attitude to learning suffered and they found it hard to concentrate. Relationships between staff and children were satisfactory but children were not always sure what they had to do or what they had learned. Children were keen to learn but sometimes teaching lacked pace and content. Visual aids were not always clear and attractive and so did not convey information as well as they should.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2003:

- improve the quality of teaching – inadequate progress
- ensure that the needs of all children are met including those with English as an additional language – satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The new headteacher is providing a strong lead and clear sense of direction for the school. As a consequence staff morale has improved. Rapidly she has gained a realistic overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses. She has identified areas where well considered systems, such as those for assessment and target setting, are not fully established despite considerable guidance and help for teachers last year. Further training and support on a number of such issues has been provided for staff as a matter of urgency. Their understanding and commitment to these has increased as a consequence. The literacy and numeracy coordinators have successfully relaunched the use of curriculum targets to improve assessment and learning. Developments in middle leadership which began last year have faltered. Systems for the regular monitoring of subject standards and quality by coordinators have not resumed fully this year.

The new improvement plan addresses the school's priorities with clarity and coherence. The desired outcomes, both for teachers and pupils, are specified. The role of staff and governors in monitoring and reporting progress on these is detailed. Helpfully, responsibility for leading priorities is distributed amongst a number of staff to extend participation in the school's leadership. The headteacher is working hard to embed a sense of corporate responsibility for the school's progress.

The new chair of governors has a thorough grasp of the school's situation and is prepared to ask challenging questions about its performance. She is providing a dynamic lead for the governing body, which continues to monitor and guide the school's progress diligently. Effective use is being made of the expertise of a number of governors, for example, in monitoring health and safety.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2003:

- improve the leadership, management and governance of the school – satisfactory progress.

External support

The local authority continues to make a significant, positive contribution to the school's improvement through a range of well targeted support. This includes the work of consultants, advanced skills teachers, and the school's adviser. Regular evaluations of the impact of interventions such as coaching and training are realistic and lead to refocusing as required. A good range of data has been provided to enhance the school's understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the accuracy of assessments and the use made of them in planning for learning.
- Improve the quality of teaching overall and particularly in mathematics and writing
- Improve the quality of provision in Reception.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Executive Director of Education and Lifelong Learning for Sandwell.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Jane Austin
H M Inspector