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14th November 2005

Mrs G Vernau
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Vernau

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HIBALDSTOW PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Anne Wallis, Additional Inspector, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was found to have serious weaknesses in May 2005.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the deputy chair of the governing body, a representative from the Local Authority (LA) and key members of staff.

Context

There have been several important changes to the school since the last inspection in May 2005. With the permission of the Secretary of State for Education, the LA has used its powers to disband the governing body and appoint an Interim Executive Board to govern the school for about two years. The LA has not withdrawn financial delegation but works closely with the school on budgeting. The substantive headteacher resigned very recently and an experienced interim headteacher

appointed by the LA has been leading the school since September 2005. The teaching staff has changed significantly with three of the seven teachers being new to the school. Several teachers are in the early stages of their careers in education. The number of children has declined by 8 per cent from 141 to 129, but appears to be steady.

Achievement and standards

Since the last inspection there has been little identifiable change in the overall standards throughout the school. This is not unexpected in the timescale. The standards attained by the children remain too low overall, with many children capable of attaining higher standards. National test results for both Year 2 and Year 6 are well below the national and local figures. Although there have been some improvements in assessment, there is little reliable data currently available on the progress children are making.

Children begin school in the reception year, with most having had some pre-school experience in either school or private nurseries or play groups. Overall, when they enter the reception year their knowledge and skills are not quite as well developed as is expected for children of their age. However, within this overall picture there are considerable differences between individual children. A small number of children are above average for their age; they are confident with good skills in speaking, and good understanding of the early stages of mathematics, writing and the world around them. A slightly larger group need much more support to develop their understanding and skills, particularly speaking skills. In the reception year there is a good match between teachers' planning and what children at different stages of learning need in order to make the best progress. This match is not yet accurate enough in the remaining year groups.

The assessment information at the end of the 2004/5 reception year indicated almost all children reached the expectations for their age group, and over one in three children exceeded these. In the current reception year, although a change in staffing has taken place and it is early in the school year, it is clear that good care and teaching continue to ensure children learn quickly and make good progress. Many children are achieving what is expected for their age. This provides a sound basis for the school to work towards ensuring standards throughout the school reach national expectations, which the LA has identified as a target in its action plan to support the school.

Throughout the school, it is clear from lessons and children's books that the systematic planning of work in English and mathematics, and the higher expectations for the presentation of work, are leading to satisfactory progress for the majority of children. In addition, the results of the half termly tests suggest a few individual children have made good gains in writing. In information and communication technology (ICT) standards are improving slowly but remain below average overall. The school has had some difficulties with the new resources which have resulted in not all aspects of the ICT curriculum having suitable provision.

However, where that provision is available, such as in word processing, both standards and progress are satisfactory.

The most capable children make good progress in their first year but this is not maintained consistently throughout the school. The least competent children generally have good support from teaching assistants and their progress is usually satisfactory. Recent improvements in identifying the differences between children with special educational needs and those who are underachieving have resulted in a more accurate view of the range of children's capabilities in each year group. However, with the limited effectiveness of the school's current assessment systems, planning for the progress of different groups of children is not yet effective enough to ensure suitably high standards.

Overall, the indications that children are making better progress in several subjects are encouraging, but are not yet well enough established to have an impact on overall standards. The pace of children's progress needs to accelerate if standards are to improve sufficiently to meet the challenging targets that have been set.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- raise standards and achievement further in English, mathematics, science and information communication technology - inadequate progress.

Personal development and well-being

Children's personal development is satisfactory and they retain their positive attitudes to school. The most significant improvement is in children's behaviour which is now good overall. Almost without exception they are ready to learn and are now in an environment where this can happen. They enjoy most aspects of school life, particularly practical and creative activities, and meeting and working with their friends. When they are well taught this improved behaviour usually translates into good progress. However, children's involvement in their own learning is an almost unexplored area in most lessons and now needs to be considered, especially as the range of academic competence in each year group is wide. The low standards in English and mathematics remain a concern for children's future economic well being

Relationships with staff are good, and children are gaining confidence that the staff's response to behaviour will be consistent. There have been no exclusions this term, which is indicative of a substantial improvement in the behaviour of a small number of individuals. Almost all children attend regularly although overall attendance remains a little below the national figures. However, teachers report examples of individual children, who had caused concern, now bringing increased enthusiasm to their work as they recognise their own progress. Improved procedures for checking attendance contribute well to the children's safety and enable more accurate identification of those who need additional encouragement to avoid absence.

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

- improve attendance – satisfactory progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall with occasional examples of good teaching. The staff work well together and, with support from the interim headteacher and the LEA, have succeeded in providing the children with attractive and well organised classrooms, together with clear expectations for behaviour. Although the planning of what is to be taught and the preparation for the children's activities are satisfactory, there is rarely sufficient detail about what they are expected to learn. This inhibits staff from making accurate assessments of how well individual children have succeeded. Without this information, the planning of the next steps in their learning is often not a good match to their needs. As a result, some children receive teaching and work which are either too easy or too difficult, and they do not make as much progress as they could. In the best lessons, attention is given to identifying what individual children know and can do, what support they need, and what gains they are expected to make. This works particularly well with the youngest pupils where activities capture children's interest and are also firmly based on improving their skills and understanding; such as using their fingers to write the letters they were learning in chocolate sauce on white plates.

Support from senior staff and LEA advisors is successfully helping less experienced staff to achieve greater consistency in awarding the correct level to children's work. However, teaching is unlikely to improve much further without better means of planning for the learning needs of children with different capabilities, using accurate assessment information.

At present, assessment data and its use remain unsatisfactory. However, there is clear improvement in the staff's awareness of what needs to be in place. Most staff have made efforts to develop their own systems, but the school does not yet have a consistent approach which links assessment judgements with the planning of children's learning. At present there is too little reliable data, although this should begin to be generated during the course of the current term as the results of new procedures and staff training emerge. The limitations in assessment are a major impediment to the accurate planning of brisk progress for children at different levels of attainment.

The children are well cared for and supported. They have confidence in the adults in school and their relationships with staff are positive. They are kept safe and further enhancement of safety procedures is planned. Guidance for children on how to improve their work is a weak aspect, with some good practice evident where staff work with individual children during the in lessons. This good practice is enabled by the small numbers of children in many classes and may not be sustainable if teaching groups become larger. The school needs to consider more systematic means of pointing the way for children to improve their progress, such as providing more information about their strengths and weaknesses than is currently evident in the marking of books.

Most parents have maintained their commitment to the school, although a few have moved their children elsewhere, and are becoming more involved in school life. The number of parents attending school events has increased, as has their informal contact with the school. They are now kept informed about school activities through regular newsletters and the school has a small number of adults who volunteer to help children with their learning. There is a pleasant, welcoming atmosphere within the school. However, given the fall in the school's roll, there remains a need to involve the community and parents more directly and consistently in their children's education, including through home/school work.

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

- improve the partnership and communication with parents - satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The school's leadership and management has taken a significant step forward with the appointment from the beginning of this term of an interim headteacher whose leadership in this short period has been outstanding. Staff welcome the consistent approach to whole school issues. They also recognise, with goodwill, that everyone needs to improve their practice further. The headteacher's confident approach to presenting an attractive, well organised, calm and welcoming environment for teaching and learning has quickly moved to the school to the point where the staff have confidence in the leadership and feel well supported. They demonstrated their teamwork in making sure that the changes to the location of classes were completed before the new term, so that older pupils had suitable accommodation.

Staff are included in decisions but the brisk pace of improvement has been generated mainly by the headteacher firmly setting the agenda and priorities for day-to-day improvement. The interim headteacher and the deputy headteacher know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. Recent observation of lessons and monitoring of pupils' work have given them valuable insights into what needs to be done to improve pupils standards and raise their achievement. A rigorous performance management system is now in place and staff are clear about their targets and how to reach them.

The role of the co-ordinators remains unsatisfactory. They do not yet have an understanding of the quality of teaching and learning and the progress made by children in their areas of responsibility. Work on this area for improvement is planned to begin later this term and continue into the spring term. This is a sensible decision as the co-ordinators need to have the support of an improved assessment system.

The new arrangements for governance are working well. The Interim Executive Board became involved quickly in the work of the school, before the beginning of the new school year. The tensions that interfered with the school's progress are no longer an issue. The relief for staff is clearly evident. The focus is now firmly on school issues. This is helped by the good quality of the school's action planning,

which has already led to improvements in the school's physical environment and children's behaviour, and a more consistent approach to daily routines. A more precise approach to the timescales for actions is now needed, particularly in relation to the planned action to improve assessment. There remains much work to be done, but the school has good capacity to improve further.

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

- improve the leadership and management of the school – outstanding progress;
- develop the role of coordinators so that they have a secure view of the standards achieved in their subjects – inadequate progress;
- as a matter of urgency, improve accommodation for Year 6 – outstanding progress.

External support

The LA has moved quickly and effectively to deal with complex personnel and finance issues. The LA's statement of action to support the school is working very well. The support for staff and pupils, and especially for the strategic management of the school, has been outstanding. Although there are some investigations still to be completed, these are no longer affecting the school. The exception is the need to ensure the strong leadership of the school is maintained at the end of the current interim headteacher's tenure. Budget constraints combined with falling rolls are likely to require the LA's further support in planning the organisation of the school and its senior management structure.

Main Judgements

The school has made satisfactory progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses. However, this visit has raised some concerns about the quality of education provided and the school's performance will be monitored.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop an assessment system which enables teachers to plan brisk progress for children with different capabilities; to guide children towards achieving this progress, and to check each is attaining suitably high standards;
- ensure the strategic leadership of the school continues to guide improvements at a good pace;
- build on the developing partnership with parents and the community to re-establish their confidence in the school's provision.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of the interim board of governors and the Director of Education for North Lincolnshire.

Yours sincerely
Jackie M Barnes (Additional Inspector)