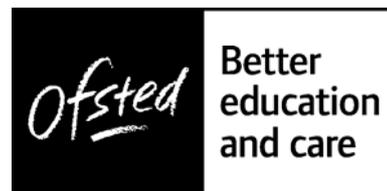


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Mr Ian Nurser
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28 March 2006

Dear Mr Nurser

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF RADBROOK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 14 and 15 March 2006, 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 became subject to special measures in October 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 acting headteacher and I carried out joint observations of the teaching in each class. I observed other aspects of the school's work, scrutinised documents, and had formal discussions with the acting headteacher, the chair of the governing body's standards committee and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The headteacher in post at the time of the section 5 inspection in October took early retirement in February. The LA seconded an acting headteacher from a large primary school in the north of the county. He had been in post for three weeks when this monitoring visit took place.

Achievement and standards

Standards on entry to the Reception class continue to be at least above average and the children make good progress in this year. The latest figures from the end of year profile for this age group show that attainment is high. In reading, for example, all the children achieved the level expected for their age and a third reached the highest levels meaning they were already well launched on the National Curriculum before entering mainstream schooling. Attainment at Key Stage 1, however, has been falling over the last three years, although it remains broadly above average. There is a significant variation between the standards achieved in reading and writing with few pupils gaining the higher Level 3 in writing despite the good start many have made in this aspect of literacy in the Reception class.

Ofsted's performance and assessment analysis (PANDA) for the 2005 national test results had not been published when the school was inspected in October. It shows that the pupils' overall progress at Key Stage 2, when adjusted for contextual factors, was below average and had improved only slightly on the previous year's position. The pupils' progress in science had improved significantly but was still below average and, like mathematics, lagged behind the progress pupils made in English. Overall, the boys underachieved significantly with nearly a third of them making poor progress from the levels they reached at the end of Year 2. Only three quarters of the higher attaining boys and girls who reached Level 3 in Year 2 converted this into the higher Level 5 four years later. Despite these issues, standards were above average reflecting the high proportion of able pupils in the year group.

The school has set very ambitious targets for this academic year. If achieved, they would place the school in the highest 25% of schools for progress made by the pupils. This is appropriate as a longer term ambition but may be overly ambitious in the short space of time left before this year's tests. Barely 50% of the pupils are on track to reach the targets at this moment and the pupils' progress in lessons remains slow. In the first instance, the school needs to ensure that all pupils are making satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Attendance is well above average and the pupils are exceptionally well behaved. They are mature, confident and responsible. They work extremely well with each other and cooperate happily with adults. They discuss their work with understanding and are very articulate. The youngest children showed high levels of independence and confidence when concentrating for long periods on a range of self chosen activities in the Reception class. Pupils in Year 6 showed similar strengths in a science lesson when planning investigations but were not allowed to take on as much responsibility as they might have in developing their ideas.

Throughout much of the school opportunities are missed in lessons to build on the positive qualities the pupils bring. In contrast a registration session of high quality gave the pupils an excellent start to the day. The teacher had established a clear routine of pupils practising spellings and multiplication tables while waiting for the register to be taken. The ethos was relaxed but purposeful. The register was taken in French and then the pupils did a few minutes of physical activity linked to exercising the different sides of the brain and accompanied by music.

Quality of provision

The acting headteacher's observations of lessons indicate that the quality of teaching is similar to that which was reported by the inspection team in October 2005. The joint observations carried out during the monitoring visit confirm this profile. There is too little teaching which is good and too much which is inadequate. The acting headteacher reports that the teachers are keen to improve their practice and have worked hard to act on some of the points for improvement he has identified. The classrooms are tidier, resources are more accessible, lessons are generally structured around learning objectives, and teachers are trying hard to inject more pace into their work. However, although lessons proceed smoothly and the teachers have good relationships with their pupils, the pace of learning is unnecessarily slow. The pupils' overwhelmingly positive attitudes to school mean that lessons remain on course even when the teaching is muddled, laboured or unimaginative. There were only two lessons when the teaching really challenged most pupils and provoked an enthusiastic response. In the three inadequate lessons, the planning lacked clarity, the introductory explanations were pitched too low, and the expectations of what was to be achieved by most pupils were unambitious. The teachers' efforts to provide harder work for the most able pupils were evident in all lessons but the real issue is that nearly every pupil is capable of more.

The school identifies nearly a fifth of the pupils as having learning difficulties. Given the children's starting points and their achievements in the Reception class, this is a very high figure and includes pupils who would not be classified as such in many other schools. Some of the provision in lessons considerably underestimated the ability of the lowest attaining groups. It is likely that a significant proportion of these pupils may have additional needs rather than learning difficulties but the school has not established a coherent, well targeted programme of appropriate identification and support.

The use made of assessment in general is underdeveloped. The data showing which pupils are on track to achieve their targets has only just been analysed and is not influencing planning or teaching. Assessment within lessons varies widely and, even where the pupils have targets, marking often pays scant attention to them.

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

- raise teachers' expectations of more able pupils and establish rigorous assessment systems that provide teachers with the information they need to plan suitably challenging work for all pupils—inadequate progress.

Leadership and management

Work on implementing the school's action plan began after Christmas. The plan contained many relevant priorities but was not translated into a manageable set of initiatives. Too many separate developments were pursued before essential principles to do with teaching and learning were established. The acting headteacher quickly recognised that staff were unable to assimilate the range of ideas they were being exposed to and has correctly begun to identify a more effective way forward. His knowledgeable monitoring of the school's work has swiftly identified weaknesses in teaching, management systems and the pupils' achievement. It has enabled him to give the governing body a robust analysis of what needs to improve and how this might be accomplished. The governors and teachers have responded well to his strong leadership and clear direction. The school is well placed to improve rapidly. The acting headteacher has already noted positive developments, such as the teachers' acknowledgement of the need for change.

Members of the governing body state that the ethos, the level of teamwork, and the quality of communications in the school have improved recently. A new chair of governors is about to take up his post. He has played an important part in devising a new structure of committees designed to ensure that governors are in a better position to hold the school to account. He recognises that the governing body needs to be more assertive in checking the school's progress. The creation of a standards committee earlier in the term was an important step forward in providing the governors with a process for checking on the impact of the action plan.

The deputy headteacher, special educational needs coordinator and subject coordinators have not played a central role in initiating or sustaining developments. Their place in the school's management is only now beginning to be clarified. Job descriptions, for example, are being rewritten to include more specific direction about what is required. The acting headteacher is determined to delegate power to his senior staff but it is too early in the process to judge their effectiveness.

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

- sharpen the checks made on teaching and learning by clearly focusing on areas that require improvement, and take steps to ensure that teachers act to improve weaknesses—satisfactory progress

- improve teachers' understanding of their management roles and their individual and collective responsibility for whole school improvement—inadequate progress.

External support

The LA has provided good support through the work of the link adviser and a range of other advisory personnel. The link adviser identified weaknesses in the action plan and ensured that it was improved although its implementation proved to be largely unsuccessful. The governing body has benefited from the adviser's presence at its committee meetings. The LA's statement of action is satisfactory with some good features. It presents a clear picture of the situation and a coherent outline of the support it intends to provide. The various strands of work are well planned although, in following the school's action plan, they proved too numerous in practice. An extremely significant element of the LA's support has been the speedy identification of an experienced headteacher to take on the running of the school at short notice.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures—inadequate.

Quality of LA's statement of action—satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Secure greater consistency in the quality of teaching by ensuring that all teachers understand the features of good learning and are more ambitious in their expectations for pupils of all abilities.
- Use assessment more effectively in lessons and in identifying groups of pupils for specific support.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and Shropshire's Corporate Director of Education Services.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hubbleday
H M Inspector