

Suite 22 West Lancashire Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale WN8 9TG

T 01695 556930
F 01695 729320
www.ofsted.gov.uk
Ofsted Helpline: 0845 640 4045

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Mr A Blakeley
The Headteacher
Hopton Primary School
Woodend Road
Lower Hopton
Mirfield
West Yorkshire
WF14 8PR

Dear Mr Blakeley

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HOPTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Lawrence Denholm, Additional Inspector, to your school on 12 and 13 January, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2004.

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, the deputy headteacher, the three key stage managers, the leader for mathematics, members of the school council, three pupils from Year 6, support staff and two representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

Following the resignation of a classteacher, the deputy headteacher is teaching the class of pupils in Year 4. The headteacher has taken on the responsibility for leading science. In addition to the four year old pupils who joined the nursery in January, seven pupils who are three years old have been given places.

Achievement and standards

In lessons and in their work, the pupils are generally performing as expected for their age. There is still some underachievement in religious education and in the foundation subjects, especially art and design. Gaps in the teachers' knowledge of how to develop the pupils' skills often result in a low level of challenge and the teachers' acceptance of mediocre work. Nevertheless, improvements in aspects of teaching have strengthened the pupils' achievement in writing, mathematics, science and music. Although not universal across the school, there are signs that the weekly 'big writing day' is having a beneficial impact. It has raised the profile of writing and the pupils are applying what they have learnt with an increase in the quantity and quality of their work. There were many good examples of pupils using phrases, adverbs and adjectives to enrich their poems and stories. Higher attaining pupils often achieved well. Year 2 pupils, for example, included speech and extended sentences in their tales about a beanstalk. The teachers' marking remains variable in quality, especially in mathematics. The best provides pupils with a clear picture of how well they have done and where they can improve. There was little to show, however, that the teachers referred to these points in subsequent marking.

Compared with previous monitoring visits, the pupils were more confident in solving mathematical problems and in predicting, posing hypotheses and asking questions in science. This improvement in skill acquisition and application is also evident in music and in information and communication technology (ICT). The spiders, created by the reception year pupils on the computer, were more typical of the work of older pupils.

The pupils in the nursery and Reception years make good progress in all six areas of learning. The Reception Year pupils used their knowledge of sounds to identify and spell words. They also showed a sound grasp of counting.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2004:

- Improve pupils' achievement and standards in English, science, ICT and religious education – good progress (satisfactory progress in religious education)

Personal development and well-being

The increased emphasis on involving the pupils in school affairs and on helping them to review their learning has strengthened the provision for personal development. In the Foundation unit the pupils commented confidently on what they had seen, heard and done. Year 6 pupils knew what they had to do to improve the quality of their writing. A common feature in writing lessons throughout the school was the pupils' interest in writing. They had lots of ideas, were keen to get started and got on quietly. Year 4 pupils, having their first experience of the 'big writing day',

enjoyed having music playing and one commented that she did not want to stop because, 'I were into my writing'. School councillors were pleased with the positive outcome of their project to zone and supervise the activities in the playground. The pupils generally played well together and older pupils and staff quickly stepped in when there was a short altercation between younger boys. The funds raised by pupils before Christmas enabled the school to buy donkeys, goats and fruit trees for others in less developed countries.

Quality of provision

Much has been done since the last monitoring inspection that has had a positive impact. The quality of teaching has improved markedly. It was good in eight of the 17 lessons, outstanding in two and satisfactory in the other seven. The three key stage leaders and the deputy headteacher provided strong models of teaching. Although there were inconsistencies across the school, there were many good points in most lessons, not least the teachers' enthusiasm and the pupils' enjoyment. There was a much stronger focus than seen previously on fostering the pupils' learning and encouraging the pupils to 'stretch your brain!'. A key development was the clear, purposeful way in which the teachers explained and demonstrated what the pupils had to do. In the most effective lessons, as the teachers modelled and reviewed the strategies and steps in the process, they highlighted clearly what the pupils needed to do to do well. As a result, the pupils were geared up to learn and confident to have a go. The use of 'think, pair, share' in some lessons gave pupils a chance to try out their ideas and to be involved in the discussion. In many lessons, the teachers took confident risks in their activities to challenge the pupils; the learning was fun and productive. This is a good step forward and a positive indication of how well the staff have acted on the advice of consultants from the LA. There is much scope for the school to share effective practice.

The curriculum and environment have improved in quality and consistency. The staff have acted on points for development in previous reports and taken the initiative in dealing with others. The Foundation and Key Stage 1 staff are working together to strengthen links in their practice. Year 1 pupils were keen to play in 'Captain Cook's boat' and in their role play, Year 2 pupils drew on what they had seen and learnt in a visit to Shibden Hall. At Key Stage 2, reading has been given a higher profile through the introduction of reading areas in classrooms, the recent decoration and reorganisation of the library and the introduction of programmes, led by trained support staff, to boost some pupils' skills in reading. More time is being given to physical education, and the teaching of specialists, including a coach from a rugby team, adds to the pupils' experience. There is greater coherence to the pupils' work in practical mathematics and science. In music the deputy headteacher is ensuring that the pupils experience the full programmes of study. The school, however, is not yet sufficiently focused on evaluating the impact of these changes on the pupils' progress and standards attained.

The well-organised programme of themes for assemblies is part of the now sound structure for the provision for spiritual development. The school is increasing the pupils' voice and recognising their achievements. The clutter of the past has gone;

classrooms have attractive displays with targets and key information to support learning. In public areas, there are interesting displays, many related to the current theme of winter. It is not always as evident what the pupils had done for their work to be on open display. The school is developing its systems to track the pupils' progress. Good practice in the Foundation unit continues with regular observation of the pupils and discussion between the staff about indications of the pupils' achievements. While the teachers are attributing a level of attainment to the older pupils' writing, the pupils are still unsure of what this means.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2004:

- Improve the extent to which teaching and the curriculum meet the needs of pupils of differing abilities – satisfactory progress
- Improve the extent to which teaching and the curriculum support the pupils' attitudes to learning and their spiritual development - good progress

Leadership and management

Progress has accelerated because of the opening up of views and attitudes. People are working together and there is a burgeoning feel of a school seeking to improve. The headteacher has been quietly effective in biding his time until individuals were clear about what was expected of them. All three key stage managers are now taking a lead role in making decisions about practice. They are starting to use information from monitoring to identify where team and individual support is needed and how to build on the advice from consultants and advanced skills teachers. Subject leaders have benefited from opportunities to scrutinise pupils' work with a consultant and to discuss points for action. While the log kept by the deputy headteacher about English is very clear about what has been done, it does not evaluate consistently the impact on standards and the quality of provision. The headteacher is accurate in his judgements about the quality of teaching and learning and in his overview of the school's performance in his report to the governing body. The decision to place the deputy headteacher with the class of Year 4 was well judged, given the pupils' variable progress last term. She has a good understanding of how to accelerate their learning and develop their independence.

The headteacher has kept parents informed through regular newsletters. He has sought their views through the newly established parents' forum and a questionnaire and was quick to respond to the points raised about homework.

The regular meetings between the headteacher and chair of the governors ensure they have an up-to-date overview of the action taken. Other governors have increased their involvement in the school, meeting with subject leaders and seeing the pupils at work. The governing body is rightly monitoring the school's finances, given agreed changes in the management and staffing arrangements. The headteacher recognises the need to develop the lines of communication within the school; this is particularly important given the varied hours worked by support staff.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2004:

- Improve the leadership and management of the school so that key staff and governors have a better understanding of how to bring about school improvement – good progress

External support

The LA has responded to the points made in the last monitoring visits and provided a wide range of beneficial support and guidance. The staff have welcomed and gone on to try the practical ideas for teaching. This has been a key factor in improving the quality of learning. Staff have also benefited from thorough, constructive feedback after monitoring by the LA's contact officers. The recent involvement of the consultant for religious education has helped the school to identify several areas for improvement. As a result, the school is now well placed to make progress on all the areas for improvement.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Priorities for further improvement

- Sharing the good practice in teaching especially in modelling the task and making it clear what pupils have to do
- Rigour in marking to help the pupils improve
- The use of information from tracking the pupils' progress to inform decisions about teaching and learning
- Ensuring that support staff are fully conversant with the school's priorities and how they can play their part in achieving them.

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

Yours sincerely

Mrs Sonja Øyen
H M Inspector