



20 April 2006

Mr Sean Connor
Headteacher
Siskin Junior School
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Dear Mr Connor

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SISKIN JUNIOR SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Linda McGill HMI to your school on 27 and 28 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 September 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

Inspectors observed the school's work, including ten lessons, two registrations and two assemblies, scrutinised documents and met with a range of staff, representative groups of pupils, the chair of governors and the attached adviser from the local authority.

Context

As at the time of the last inspection there is an acting deputy headteacher in post. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed to start in September

2006. The governing body has undergone change. There is a new chairperson and vice chairperson, as well as three new governors.

Achievement and standards

The standards reached by pupils are too low, and well below those expected nationally. The percentage of pupils achieving the expected Level 4 in the 2005 Key Stage 2 tests was well below the national average in all three core subjects. This represents inadequate achievement for many pupils.

During this visit standards observed in lessons were well below age related expectations. The progress made by pupils in lessons was variable and closely related to the quality of teaching. Overall the progress made in too many lessons was inadequate. The school's tracking systems indicate that due to a legacy of underachievement standards in the 2006 national Key Stage 2 tests are not likely to rise significantly. There is, however, evidence that the progress made by pupils in some year groups is beginning to improve.

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

- Raise standards of achievement in all subjects with a specific focus on basic skills – inadequate progress

Personal development and well-being

Since the school was inspected, pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning have improved, although overall their personal development remains inadequate. There is a greater degree of consistency in how staff apply the school's agreed systems for rewarding good behaviour and dealing with unacceptable behaviour. However, the degree of success varies from class to class and not all teachers are consistently successful in creating a positive climate for learning in lessons. The pupils clearly understand what will happen if they misbehave and appreciate 'golden time' as a reward for good behaviour, but a minority appears not to care and will push the staff to the limit, disrupting the learning of others. The school's stance on behaviour and moral issues is reinforced well in assemblies.

The pupils' behaviour has improved at break and lunch times, and movement around the school is more orderly, because expectations have been emphasised to the pupils and levels of supervision at key times have increased. There is still a way to go, however, before the school offers a calm

and settled environment. Some of the pupils who spoke to inspectors mentioned bullying and bad behaviour as things they were worried about, although they said that the staff look after them well and keep them safe. At the moment, the pupils do not have the means to make their voices heard in a formalised way, for example, through participating in a school council.

Even when behaviour is acceptable, there is an undercurrent of low-level disruption which manifests itself in chatter and inattentiveness. The pupils are sometimes reluctant to participate or answer questions. However, when they are motivated by doing things they enjoy, such as drama or singing, they take part with enjoyment and enthusiasm.

Attendance levels have declined this academic year. An increase in exclusions has contributed to this trend, but does not account for all of it. Too many parents keep their children out of school for trivial reasons, leading to high levels of unauthorised absence. There have been some successes with individual pupils, but the strategy of focussing on those with the lowest attendance has not led to an overall increase.

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

- Improve the pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning – satisfactory progress
- Improve rates of attendance – inadequate progress

Quality of provision

There have been some improvements to the quality of teaching and learning although, overall, it is not secure enough to ensure that all pupils make adequate progress in lessons. Lesson planning has improved and is more rigorous in identifying what the pupils are to learn and how they can judge success. Thought is given to adapting tasks to meet the wide range of needs and abilities in each class. The skill of teachers in implementing their plans varies, however, and is tied to the effectiveness with which behaviour is managed.

Good first steps have been taken to assess and track the pupils' progress, and to set targets for groups of pupils in English and mathematics. However, these practices are not yet firmly embedded and the pupils, although aware of their targets, are not fully clear what they need to do to make progress towards them.

In the better lessons, interesting activities, high expectations and a crisp pace engaged pupils. In lessons which were broadly satisfactory that crisp edge was missing, activities were uninspiring and the pace was comfortable. Too many lessons were inadequate. This was mainly because the teachers' strategies for dealing with unacceptable behaviour were not successful, managing behaviour became the lesson's prime focus and the lesson became fragmented. In these cases, the unacceptable behaviour of a minority of pupils disrupted the learning of many and the pupils made little progress.

The school cares a great deal about the pupils' welfare, those who need additional support are quickly identified and appropriate steps are taken. The school works well with a range of agencies to help the pupils manage their circumstances and tackle the problems that face them. The school's last PANDA report shows that pupils in Year 6 who had additional needs made better progress than those who did not.

The weaknesses in care identified in the school's last inspection referred mainly to the risks arising from the pupils' unacceptable behaviour. The school has taken appropriate steps to address these, including increased supervision at key times and agreed procedures to ensure pupils move about the school safely. This has had a positive impact.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and the use of assessment procedures - satisfactory progress
- Improve the quality of care - satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The headteacher, who had only been in post for a few weeks at the time of the last inspection, has a sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. He has introduced sensible strategies in order to move the school forward. He is well supported in the day to day management of the school by the acting deputy headteacher. The leadership team will be strengthened in September 2006 with the arrival of a new substantive deputy headteacher. There is evidence of emerging good practice at middle leadership level although the overall quality is variable. The headteacher has rightly identified the need to clarify management structures and responsibilities in order to develop further this tier of leadership.

The school, with the support of the local authority, is regularly monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. Useful feedback and support are beginning to have an impact on quality but the systems need to be more robust in order to quicken the rate of improvement. The tracking of pupils' progress is at an early stage of development and as yet has not been effective in improving learning. However, the system is beginning to ensure that teachers are better informed about individual pupils' progress in relation to school targets.

The school has a detailed strategic plan which includes all areas for improvement identified at the last inspection and has success criteria that are focussed on improving pupils' progress. These clear and challenging success criteria are written into a termly raising attainment plan that details actions to be taken, costs and the person responsible for each of the actions.

There have been significant changes to the school's governing body with the appointment of a new chairperson and vice chairperson. The governing body is now better informed about the progress of the school and is monitoring the implementation of the school's strategic plan. The governing body is beginning to develop its role of challenging as well as supporting the leadership team.

Leadership and management have improved since the previous inspection; however, the overall capacity to raise standards and achievement significantly has still to be demonstrated.

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

- Strengthen and develop the roles and impact of senior and middle managers as well as that of governors - satisfactory progress
- Develop robust systems of self evaluation, which identify weaknesses and the necessary strategies to bring about improvement – satisfactory progress
- Ensure the success criteria are sharply focused on improving the rate of pupils' progress and raising standards – satisfactory progress

External support

The local authority's statement of action is good. It includes appropriate areas in need of improvement and time scales. Those responsible for ensuring that actions take place are identified along with clear success criteria and procedures for monitoring and evaluation. The local authority plan links well with the school's strategic plan.

The local authority plan confirms its confidence in the governing body and headteacher and identifies the target date for the school to be removed from special measures as autumn 2007. A wide range of good support has been provided to the school. A local authority strategy group has been set up to co-ordinate and monitor the impact of this support.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Quality of the local authority's statement of action -good

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson
H M Inspector