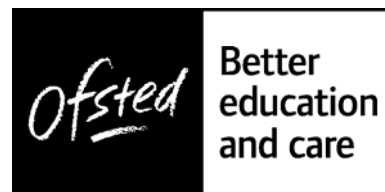


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Mrs Linda Morris
The Headteacher
Castledown Community Primary and Nursery School
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TN34 3QT
20 April 2006

Dear Mrs Morris

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CASTLEDOWN COMMUNITY PRIMARY AND NURSERY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with David Curtis and Kathryn Taylor, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 29 and 30 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

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised a range of documents, and had discussions with a range of staff, pupils, the consultant headteacher, representatives from the governing body, including the chair, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last inspection the governors have restructured their committees and have appointed a new chair. The acting headteacher has now taken up the substantive post.

Achievement and standards

There has been no significant change in achievement and standards since the last inspection. By the end of the Foundation Stage most children meet the goals they are expected to achieve and progress is good. Children make particularly good progress in their personal, social and emotional development.

In Year 2, standards are exceptionally low in reading, writing and mathematics and there is a downward trend. The achievement of pupils is unsatisfactory with too many making insufficient progress. Weaknesses in the teaching of key skills contribute to underachievement.

Standards in Year 6 continue to be exceptionally low in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' achievement remains unsatisfactory. However, there are encouraging signs of standards slowly improving in Years 3, 4 and 5. For example, in Year 4 pupils showed good skills in editing a story for punctuation and spelling. A weakness remains in that there is inconsistent progress between each of the two classes in Years 3, 4, 5 and 6.

The discernable trend of improvement is linked to the newly implemented assessment procedures. The school is now successfully tracking and monitoring pupils' progress on a termly basis. This information is beginning to be used effectively to identify those pupils who are not making sufficient progress and to provide additional support for them. Teachers have a much stronger understanding of gaps in pupils' prior learning. In addition, pupils now have and understand clear targets for their work in literacy and numeracy which are having a noticeable impact on improving standards. For pupils in the current Year 6 there are too many significant gaps in their previous learning for them to be able to catch up in order to reach the expected standards.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' attitudes to school continue to be good overall. In the nineteen lessons or parts of lessons seen, attitudes and behaviour were outstanding in two, good in eight, satisfactory in eight and inadequate in one. In the Nursery and Reception classes, children's personal development is consistently good or better. Children here respond very well to opportunities to work independently and collaboratively. Pupils throughout the school are polite, helpful and friendly and, in most instances, they try hard with their work. In lessons in which pupils' attention was weakest or behaviour slipped, this was usually because of weaknesses in teaching or because pupils were expected to sit and listen for too long. In the dining hall and playground most pupils behave well. Pupils say that there are now fewer incidents of fighting and bullying and that better playtime facilities are helping to make lunchtimes more enjoyable. They now have more opportunities to take responsibility and to contribute their views on how the school is run and is developing.

Representatives of the school council, for example, say that pupils like the improvements that are being made. Opportunities for pupils to develop independence can be increased further still. For example, in the dining hall Reception and Key Stage 1 pupils do not take responsibility for cutting up their own food and clearing away their plates. Pupils are learning about safe practices and healthy lifestyles. Many enjoy fruit at break times but healthy choices are not always evident in the food brought in packed lunchboxes. Attendance is still too low and punctuality is still an issue for some families.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning were good in eight lessons, satisfactory in seven and inadequate in four. Most of the inadequate teaching is in Years 1 and 2 and this has a negative impact on achievement and standards. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is good. In Years 3 to 6 it is satisfactory which represents improvement since the last inspection.

Where teaching is good, lesson objectives are shared with pupils and there is a very strong focus on linking these to pupils' current targets in literacy and numeracy. As a result, pupils have a much greater understanding of what they are learning and why. Teachers' subject knowledge is good. Lessons are planned carefully with activities matched closely to the pupils' different learning needs. Assessment of previous learning, especially through marking, is used effectively to amend lesson plans on a daily basis and address gaps identified in pupils' learning. A good example of this was seen in Year 3 where it was identified that pupils needed to do much more work on improving their story writing.

In the inadequate lessons there was too little teaching of key skills in literacy and numeracy either to the whole class or specific groups. Too much time was spent on monitoring the pupils' activities rather than focusing on teaching new skills, knowledge and understanding. These weaknesses are crucial reasons for the inadequate achievement in Years 1 and 2.

Assessment has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. The school has a good system in place to assess and monitor pupils' progress by gender, ability and ethnicity. The staff now identify progress on a termly basis and know whether pupils make good, satisfactory or inadequate progress. Teachers use this information to amend their lesson plans to address weaknesses in pupils' prior learning although this is not consistent in all classes. Teachers now set for pupils detailed targets in literacy and numeracy which are contributing to the slow improvement in standards in Years 3 to 6.

The curriculum for the youngest children in Nursery and Reception is a strength. Children enjoy a rich, varied curriculum that incorporates all areas of learning. The school has started to make curricular improvements in Years 1 to 6 by introducing learning journeys whereby pupils study a topic which links

work in several subjects. Pupils say how much they enjoy these topics which also provide them with increased opportunities for creativity and to work in teams. Staff recognise that there is still much to be done in developing the overall curriculum to ensure it reflects pupils' interests and further developments are therefore scheduled for next term. Timetabling of lessons should also be reviewed as there are weaknesses. Some lessons are much too long and others are too short.

Staff help pupils to stay safe and they develop good relationships with them. Weaknesses in academic guidance are being addressed and better assessments are now in place. As yet these are too new to ensure that all pupils' progress is closely monitored. Pupils in some classes, however, show a secure knowledge of what they need to do to improve. Similarly, teachers' marking of work provides better guidance to pupils than was previously the case. The identification of pupils with additional learning, behavioural or social needs requires improvement as staff are not yet always clear about individuals' precise needs. Furthermore the school cannot readily distinguish whether underperformance results from pupils' additional needs or from weaknesses in provision.

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

- ensure that accurate assessment information is used effectively to plan pupils' next learning steps, making sure that expectations are high enough—satisfactory progress
- improve the quality of teaching so that work is precisely matched to needs and all pupils progress well—satisfactory progress
- improve the whole school curriculum so that pupils' skills are developed more thoroughly and better opportunities are provided for problem solving, creativity and teamwork—satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

Monitoring of teaching has been undertaken by the headteacher and this has been effectively extended across the management team. These observations are beginning to form a secure evidence base for the school to assess accurately the quality of teaching and learning.

The school's self-evaluation of its work is leading to more emphasis on using data to evaluate performance and at all levels and the academic and pastoral managers are increasing their understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement. The school recognises that there is still more to do as the rigour in tackling the priorities varies across classes in the same year group.

The new school improvement plan is comprehensive and clearly identifies the key priorities and lines of responsibility. Managers and leaders use the plan regularly to monitor effectively their progress in meeting targets and to consider the next steps. The school is now well placed to improve the quality

of its provision due to the increased strengths of senior leadership and management.

The reconstituted governing body has made a sound contribution to improvements. Governors are beginning to ask more pertinent questions, have an increased understanding of the school's procedures, and are better placed to judge its progress.

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

- strengthen the leadership, management and governance so that there is greater capacity to raise standards urgently—good progress.

External support

The quality and impact of the external support provided by the local authority are good. Particularly effective help has been given by the consultant headteacher and the joint chairs of the sub-committees.

Main Judgements

The school has made satisfactory progress since being subject to special measures

The quality of the local authority's statement of action is good.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

The school should:

- identify more clearly those pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for East Sussex

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector