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Mr S Sagar
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Plant Street
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27 January 2006

Dear Mr Sagar

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CORNGREAVES JUNIOR AND INFANT SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Mrs Morris-King HMI to your school on 25 and 26 January 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 documents, and met with the acting headteacher, new headteacher, consultants working in school, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The number of pupils attending the school has fallen. The current management team consists of an acting headteacher supported by a consultant headteacher for two days per week. The consultant headteacher will become the acting headteacher for two terms in early February 2006.

Achievement and standards

The children's attainment on entry to the school is below average. Children in the Foundation Stage make unsatisfactory progress. Despite some improvements in results over the last three years standards by the end of Key Stage 1 remain significantly below average. Writing results are particularly weak. Although the pupils make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 2 this is not sufficient to make up for previous shortcomings and standards remain well below average by the end of the key stage. Standards in mathematics and English are particularly low.

Progress in the lessons seen varied from inadequate to good and was directly related to the quality of teaching from both the teachers and the teaching assistants. The introduction of targets for all pupils is an important step forward in improving progress and raising standards although this action is too new to have had any noticeable impact.

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

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science throughout the school, but particularly at the end of Year 2—inadequate progress
- ensure that all groups and individual pupils make at least satisfactory progress—inadequate progress.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils are well behaved and compliant. When they are well taught they enjoy their lessons and are keen to achieve. The school has sound procedures for taking pupils' views into account. The school council meets regularly and members are proud of how their actions have contributed to getting the school toilets refurbished and developing the outdoor multi-sports area which is used well by all pupils as part of the school's 'being healthy and active' initiative. Relationships in all classrooms are generally positive and older pupils, in particular, cooperate well with each other. The programme for pupils' personal development provides a firm foundation for pupils to develop a sense of self and what it means to be part of a community. The pupils feel safe and secure because of effective procedures and policies for dealing with racism and bullying. They feel confident that there are adults they could turn to if they needed help.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is inadequate. During the monitoring visit over half the teaching observed was inadequate. Although the consultant headteacher has developed clear guidance for staff on planning, with a few exceptions, the lessons observed had little and sometimes no planning for the range of pupils' needs. Curriculum plans showing what will be covered over each term are equally weak. Lessons did not build well enough on what the pupils already knew and did not take sufficient account of individual learning needs. In particular the higher attaining pupils' needs were not met. As a result the pace of learning was slow especially in

English where children were not given enough challenging work to promote rapid gains.

The best practice was observed in Years 1 and 3. Where the teaching was satisfactory or better the teachers had sound knowledge of what the pupils already knew and lessons were well planned to meet their needs. These lesson plans were translated into appropriate activities for the pupils. Consequently pupils made progress that was at least satisfactory and enjoyed their learning.

Where staff have received and accepted support and guidance from the leadership team and local authority personnel improvement is evident. For example, good planning and organisation for guided reading sessions in Year 3 led to a good lesson in which pupils were highly motivated and made good progress.

Even though the curriculum meets basic statutory requirements there is considerable imbalance between subjects. In too many classes literacy and numeracy lessons dominate the timetable leaving insufficient time for the foundation subjects. For example, Year 6 has eight hours of literacy activities each week.

The new systems for tracking the pupils' progress and for identifying quickly any underachievement are at an early stage of development. There is a greater amount of assessment information which the leadership team is using to plot the levels which pupils have achieved. Literacy and numeracy targets have been set for groups of pupils and these are displayed on the pupils' tables. However, there is little linkage between these targets and the learning objectives identified for future lessons. Planning fails to distinguish clearly enough the precise level of work which individuals or small groups require to ensure they make adequate progress.

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

- improve the overall quality of teaching by ensuring that lesson activities are matched to the needs of all pupils, so that they do as well as they should—inadequate progress
- continue to develop the use of data from assessment to track pupils' progress and set challenging targets for pupils of all abilities—satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The consultant headteacher and the acting headteacher have gained an accurate picture of the school's situation and have begun to take some appropriate actions to lead the school forward. However, not all staff are willing to follow their lead. This is seriously undermining the school's ability to make progress and in particular is hampering the work of other staff. The consultant headteacher has sensibly tried to establish the school's priorities by monitoring teaching, planning and the pupils' books. This increased emphasis on scrutinising the school's work is valid but its impact is not sufficiently apparent in all classrooms. Clear guidelines produced for planning have resulted in significant improvement in two classes and this has had an impact on the quality of provision. However, in most classes little change is evident. The response of staff to the support and guidance which are continually offered has

been unduly variable. Leadership of literacy and numeracy remains unsatisfactory. There has been some progress in establishing whole-school priorities for these areas but, despite extensive support, the coordinators do not have a clear understanding of the issues. They are, therefore, unable to take responsibility for their roles in raising standards or evaluating the impact of their work.

Although job descriptions for some staff exist they have not been agreed and are unclear. Importantly, there has been no performance management in the school for several years.

The governing body is supportive and the chair is highly committed to the school. She has an accurate understanding of the seriousness of the challenges faced by the school and is prepared to take necessarily rigorous and robust actions. Governors have begun to challenge the school as their knowledge has increased.

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

- establish and develop the management roles of all staff so that they have a more accurate knowledge of the school—inadequate progress.

External support

The LA has allocated considerable funding to underpin its extensive range of support. It has maintained its commitment to a demanding timescale of regular monitoring. Its statement of action is focused with the school's key issues having been drawn into a coherent set of priorities. However, the evaluation arrangements lack clarity and are not well enough defined to help the LA fully evaluate the school's progress. Moreover the school currently lacks the capacity to make best use of the range of support offered. The school would benefit from a greater focus on basic aspects of lesson structures and planning. The impact of much of the good quality support provided by the LA is being diluted by the response of some of the staff.

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

- Establish with all staff minimum expectations for each lesson and ensure that these are met.
- Clearly define each member of staff's roles and responsibilities to ensure accountability.
- Sharpen the use of assessment to plan exactly what pupils need to learn in each lesson to move towards the next level of attainment.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Chief Education Officer for Sandwell.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline K Wordsworth
HM Inspector