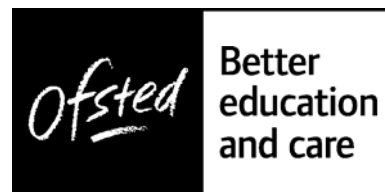


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Mrs Mary Hatherley
The Acting Headteacher
St Budeaux Foundation C of E (Aided) Junior School
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29 June 2006

Dear Mrs Hatherley

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST BUDEAUX FOUNDATION C OF E (AIDED) JUNIOR SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with John Collings, Additional Inspector, to your school on 20 and 21 June 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 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, subject leaders, the chair of governors and three groups of pupils.

Context

The school had severe difficulties in recruiting staff prior to this school year. Since the last monitoring visit, the school has successfully made appointments to fill all vacancies. A new headteacher and a new teacher start in September. Two teachers currently on fixed term contracts have been confirmed as permanent and one teacher has an extension for next year.

The school has faced considerable staffing issues since the last monitoring visit resulting in temporary teachers in three classes. The deputy headteacher has been absent since March 2005 and two Year 4 teachers have been absent for most of the summer term. The literacy coordinator had just gone on planned leave at the time of this visit.

Achievement and standards

From the outset, the acting headteacher has determinedly raised expectations of what the pupils should be achieving. The acting headteacher and staff have gathered data about standards regularly throughout this year. They have made good use of these assessments to check the pupils' progress against the challenging end-of-year targets set for them. The acting headteacher and literacy coordinator have incisively pinpointed specific weaknesses in achievement in the different year groups.

Recommended approaches to teaching literacy and mathematics have been used well in most classes. The teachers think carefully about the pupils' current knowledge and skills and plan ways to develop their understanding securely. The teachers and teaching assistants are working well as a team to combat underachievement.

More able pupils relish the increased challenge in lessons this year. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are benefiting from tailor-made, support programmes that are intensive for a short time and then reviewed to see their effect. In discussion with Her Majesty's Inspector, pupils spoke proudly of their achievements and felt they had made good progress this year.

In many of the lessons, progress was good. The pupils understood the learning points and applied these accurately and with confidence. The staff have set targets for groups of pupils and most check them frequently. These personal targets help the pupils to concentrate on mastering relevant key skills over time. The pupils are familiar with their targets.

Assessment data shows that pupils have made good progress in Year 3, although there are plans to build in extra support for lower attainers next year as their progress was slower than expected.

There was a legacy of underachievement in other year groups. Over the year, gaps in prior learning have become more evident. The acting headteacher has deployed staff thoughtfully to make best use of available expertise and speed up the pupils' progress.

The school's assessment data shows that Year 5 pupils have made good progress in writing this year and satisfactory progress in reading and mathematics. The Year 6 pupils have made satisfactory progress this year,

although there have been staffing issues to overcome. The Year 4 pupils have underachieved this year. Progress in writing was particularly weak in Year 4. The curriculum for information and communication technology (ICT) has been systematically evaluated and radically altered. The action plan for ICT is on track and this should ensure that National Curriculum requirements will be fully met. Pupils are making considerable progress in ICT but there is some shortfall in their ICT experiences over time.

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

- raise standards in English – good
- raise standards in mathematics – good
- raise standards in ICT – good.

Personal development and well-being

The school has a supportive ethos for learning underpinned by Christian values and beliefs. Pupils behave well, cooperate effectively in classes and respect each others' opinions during discussions. They have mature attitudes and are willing to take on responsibilities such as being prefects, mediators, school council members, and house captains. Pupils contribute to the local community through charities such as Little Bridge House Children's Hospice and the wider community by supporting children in Uganda.

The vast majority of pupils work hard and enjoy their education. Pupils get involved in lessons, ask questions and respond well to challenge. There are good relationships between pupils and teachers, and amongst pupils. Pupils feel secure to approach staff and pupil mediators with their concerns. Attendance is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

The hard work by the longer term staff is paying dividends in much improved experiences for the pupils. The staff have purposefully encouraged the pupils to ask questions and say when they are unsure. This approach has made learning a much more positive experience for many pupils.

The quality of teaching has improved significantly and there are evident strengths in many of the lessons. Lesson plans are informative and ensure that everyone's attention is efficiently focused on key learning points. Lessons are well structured, language is used carefully, and resources are stimulating.

The three absent members of staff have missed whole-school professional training and the programme of support planned for the summer term. There is no recent evaluation of the effectiveness of their teaching and planning.

As discussed above, assessment strategies are well reasoned and used effectively. This very good assessment programme has played a key role in the good progress made by the school.

The curriculum has been methodically reviewed. The staff have worked very hard to ensure that skills in literacy, mathematics and ICT are reinforced in all subjects. The curriculum is broad and balanced with all National Curriculum subjects taught regularly. There is an appropriate range of extra-curricular activities and sports events.

Pupils feel safe and well supported by the school community. They say that bullying is not a big issue and any incidents are dealt with quickly. The arrangements for child protection are robust and appropriate training has taken place for the staff responsible. There are improving relationships with parents as shown through very positive comments on parental questionnaires.

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

- improve the quality of teaching and learning of the pupils throughout the school – good
- use assessment data information to plan pupils next steps in learning – good
- improve the balance of the curriculum to allow for continuity of learning in those subjects identified in the report – good.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher's leadership has been outstanding. She has driven through wide ranging improvements based on a keen appraisal of the school's needs. Her tireless commitment to making learning better for the pupils has paid off. Achievement is improving, learning is more fun, and lessons are more effective. Given the continuing staffing issues, this is an impressive achievement.

The literacy coordinator has led developments in this area exceptionally well and pupils' progress in literacy is vastly improved. The ICT coordinators have accelerated developments in their subject and standards are rising significantly in ICT.

The governors have improved their effectiveness. They are visiting the school to follow up their responsibilities and are actively demonstrating their commitment to the pupils. The chair of governors involved pupils in the recruitment for the new headteacher and teachers. What the pupils wanted in their new headteacher was used in the advertisement and pupils interviewed the applicants. The governors reviewed their staff recruitment policy to ensure that this recruitment round was more successful.

Impressive steps forward have been achieved this school year under the leadership of the acting headteacher. Most staff have worked hard and have played a key part in these improvements.

The new school year brings change again, a new headteacher and the intended return of the deputy headteacher. Subject leader responsibilities will change. Sensibly, the transition of subject leader responsibilities is being phased.

As yet, given the substantial changes in leadership at all levels in September and the continuing staffing issues, the capacity to sustain improvements over time is not established sufficiently.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- improve the quality of leadership and management – good
- ensure that all health and safety requirements are met – good.

External support

The local authority (LA) has given good support to date. Officers have provided useful guidance and practical support, particularly in developing the provision for ICT. The LA's move to bring in the acting headteacher and literacy coordinator from the nearby infants' school has proved to be very productive as their contributions to improvements have been excellent.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good progress.

Progress since the previous monitoring visit – good progress.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that the school continues to build on improvements under the new leadership.
- Continue to focus effectively on strategies to raise achievement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Exeter and the Assistant Director of Lifelong Learning for Plymouth.

Yours sincerely

Brenda Cusdin
H M Inspector