



5 July 2006

Mrs Shanthi Ravi Varma
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Ravi Varma

FRESH START: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SPRINGFIELD COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 21 and 22 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 opened in September 2005.

This letter will be published 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

HMI observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, nominated members of staff, the chair of governors and a representative from the Hackney Learning Trust.

Context

Information about the context of the school since its opening as a Fresh Start school in September 2005 was included in the previous monitoring letter, when it was noted that a building programme is planned in order to provide improved accommodation. This work has not yet begun and the school does not anticipate that it will do so until spring 2007, with completion during 2008. Much of the present accommodation is unwelcoming, despite the efforts of several members of the staff to brighten it; that for pupils in the Foundation Stage is limited in space and tired in appearance.

Achievement and standards

The 2006 statutory assessment results at Key Stages 1 and 2 will be the first for the new school. On the basis of current assessment information, the school anticipates that its Key Stage 2 targets will be met but that attainment at the higher Level 5 will be stronger in English and science than in mathematics. At Key Stage 1, the school also predicts that standards in the statutory assessments will be higher in mathematics than in reading and writing, with attainment in reading stronger than in writing.

Across the school, standards are below or well below national expectations in literacy, oracy and numeracy. There are good tracking systems in place, however, which enable the staff to monitor carefully the progress of individuals and of groups of pupils. The school is well aware, for example, that attainment in the present Year 5 is particularly low overall. While a minority of this very small year group achieve at levels above those for their age, this is not typical of the class as a whole and there is an appropriate focus upon strategies to raise attainment before the pupils take national tests in the summer of 2007. Where practice is most effective, there are examples of well planned interventions to raise standards in identified areas of weakness. In the Foundation Stage, for instance, where teachers are focused in their efforts to raise attainment in oracy, the pupils' speaking skills are generally closer to age-related expectations than those of the older pupils.

The pupils' progress was at least satisfactory in seven of eight lessons seen and good in three. Where it was best, the work was suitably challenging and matched to the pupils' differing abilities. Many pupils have limited learning skills and in the best lessons, attention had been given at the planning stage to learning styles which were best suited to their individual needs. The ratio of adults to pupils is favourable across the school and where teaching assistants were proactive, pupils with learning difficulties made at least satisfactory progress. In two instances, however, teaching assistants made little contribution to the pupils' learning during whole class oral work. In a number of lesson plans there was less attention to the needs of the more able, who would sometimes have benefited from more challenging resources, tasks and deadlines for completion of their work. The pupils have individual targets; most of those who were asked were able to talk about them but this was not consistently the case.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' behaviour around the site is satisfactory, although there is some occasional boisterousness. In two of the eight lessons seen, behaviour was satisfactory, in four it was good and in one class it was outstanding.

Attendance has improved this term to 94% overall. The pupils were generally confident, welcoming and polite in conversations with the visitor; some were reluctant to volunteer to speak but were willing enough to talk about their work when prompted. The school council is active and there are channels through which the outcomes of its meetings are relayed to the rest of the school.

The extent to which the pupils enjoy their work is variable; some find difficulty in sustaining concentration and have limited ability to persevere with tasks they find challenging. However, the teachers are usually consistent in their implementation of the school's behaviour policy, intervening promptly when distraction occurs and using rewards to encourage positive attitudes and effort. In Foundation Stage, pupils showed considerable curiosity in their learning; they became engrossed in activities and were reluctant to bring them to a close. The school emphasises to pupils the importance of a healthy diet and of taking part in physical exercise. Pupils who spoke to the visitor were aware that these are key factors in good health. Adults adopt a caring and kindly approach in their dealings with pupils and relationships are generally friendly and positive.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in March 2006:

- develop the teachers' skills in behaviour management in order to eliminate the distracting behaviour in lessons of a few individuals. Work remains to be done on this issue but there has been good progress overall since the last monitoring visit.

Quality of provision

In seven of the eight lessons seen, the teaching was at least satisfactory; in two it was good and in one case it was outstanding. The teachers' planning is more consistent in quality than at the time of the last monitoring visit. Most plans identify clear learning objectives and teachers make them explicit to the pupils. There was some effective management of classroom talk. In the best lessons, staff modelled technical vocabulary well and provided opportunities for structured talk among pupils. In lessons in which practical activities were well organised there was ready access to resources for pupils, encouraging them to be independent and confident in their learning. The consistency of behaviour management has improved and in the best lessons, relationships were of high quality within a purposeful climate for learning. In some rooms, members of staff have made the best use of the space available by creating bright and useful displays. There are examples of effective support for pupils who have learning difficulties but there is limited use in lesson planning of their personal targets.

As at the time of the last monitoring visit, there are some weaknesses in the teaching. Most teachers managed the pupils' behaviour well but this is not consistently the case. Pupils who became distracted were not always noticed promptly by the staff. Occasionally pupils called out answers and staff did not insist that they took turns to speak and listened attentively to others. The pace of learning could usefully be stepped up in some classes, particularly for higher attainers, who were allowed to coast at times. The teachers' planning did not always address the learning needs of the pupils for whom English is an additional language. The quality of marking was uneven. At best, it was encouraging and offered clear guidance to pupils on how to improve their work but in some books it was cursory and ineffective, particularly in raising attainment in literacy. The models of written language provided for pupils were not always accurate in their use of punctuation.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in March 2006:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning so that more is good or outstanding
 - explore ways of improving the pupils' listening and learning skills and ensure that the teachers' planning focuses more consistently upon how the pupils will learn as well as upon the intended activities
- The proportion of good or better teaching has risen since the last monitoring visit and progress against both areas for improvement is good.

Leadership and management

As at the time of the last monitoring inspection, the headteacher and deputy headteacher share a clear view of the school's future direction and work cohesively together to overcome obstacles to its progress. Senior managers and the chair of the governing body know well the areas of weakness which remain to be addressed. They have rightly identified the importance of addressing the priorities for school improvement, rather than attempting to implement simultaneously an unmanageable number of initiatives. While the school is at present fully staffed, there are two vacancies to be filled for the beginning of the autumn term. The role of co-ordinators for subjects and aspects of the school's work has developed satisfactorily since the last monitoring visit. At best middle leaders are incisive in their evaluations of the progress made in their areas and understand well how it contributes to whole school improvement but work remains to be done to ensure that the effectiveness of middle leadership is consistently good.

There is systematic monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school by means of an appropriate range of methods. School self-evaluation is well established. The Self Evaluation Form (SEF) is thorough and detailed but does not always specify the impact of measures taken upon the quality of the provision and the pupils' progress. In places, actions are described but their impact is not clear. Nevertheless, the developments which have taken place during the first year of the school's life indicate that it has the capacity to make further improvements.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in March 2006:

- develop the management skills and role of the subject co-ordinators - satisfactory progress overall.

External support

The staff have valued the broad range of advice and guidance provided by the Hackney Learning Trust, in subject specific areas and in aspects of leadership and management. It was noted at the time of the last monitoring visit that the school had received no external support for the teaching of science but this is no longer the situation. Teachers report that they have appreciated the level and quality of advisory input in the subject. The school is developing links with partner schools, including those in which there are exemplars of good practice on which to draw. The work of the Education Welfare Service has also been effective in supporting the school's drive to raise attendance levels.

Main Judgements

Overall, while there is much work still to be done, the school's progress has been good.

Priorities for further improvement

The school has made significant progress in addressing the issues identified at the last monitoring visit. However, work remains to be done on each of them in order to raise standards and the quality of the provision:

- continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning so that a still higher proportion is good or outstanding
- improve the pupils' concentration and their skills in listening and learning; ensure that the teachers' planning focuses more consistently upon how the pupils will learn as well as upon the intended activities

- develop further the management skills and role of the subject co-ordinators, particularly in the monitoring and evaluation of the work in their areas.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Learning & Standards for Hackney.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Bolton
H M Inspector