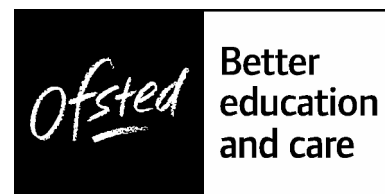


Cambridge Education
Demeter House
Station Road
Cambridge
CB1 2RS

T 01223 578500
F 01223 578501
Inspections_2@camb-ed.com

Ofsted helpline
0845 640 4045



21 July 2006

Ms A Hennell James
Headteacher
Halifax Primary School
Prince of Wales Drive
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP2 8PY

Dear Ms Hennell James

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HALIFAX PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Jackie Cousins and John Messer, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 12 and 13 July 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 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, nominated teachers, groups of children, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The school organisation has changed since the last monitoring visit. Following the resignation of the previous headteacher, an acting headteacher was appointed from 2 May 2006. This appointment is initially until April 2007 but may be extended to cover the entire academic year. The temporary arrangements put in place to cover the secondment of the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) remain the

same. The SENCO, who is currently on secondment, is expected to return to the school in September. An experienced senior teacher continues to work in the school during the afternoons to strengthen the leadership team and assist staff with managing children's behaviour. The deputy headteacher has secured a post in another school and leaves at the end of the summer term. An advanced skills teacher has been appointed to lead improvements in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. She will join the school in September and will assume the role of acting deputy headteacher until the vacancy is filled.

Achievement and standards

An analysis of 2006 teacher assessments shows that standards are well below average by the end of the Reception year. Standards are particularly weak in writing, calculation and knowledge and understanding of the world. The school's judgement that children enter the school with levels of knowledge and understanding that are well below average can not be substantiated satisfactorily. This is mainly because no clear system for recording these assessments was in place last September. A system for recording children's attainment on entry to the Reception class will be in place for September 2006.

Standards remain well below average by the end of Year 2. The 2006 teacher assessments indicate that they are similar to last year. Standards are particularly low in writing and reading. Results in the 2006 Year 6 tests are an improvement on last year, continuing the upward trend. This is partly because standards in English have improved well and are broadly average. Results in mathematics and science are not as good and remain well below expected levels. Although this year group has a significant proportion of children who have joined the school part way through the key stage, the children who have been in the school from Years 3 to 6 have not made satisfactory progress; their attainment was broadly average when they were in Year 2. Progress is inconsistent in both key stages because of weaknesses in teaching.

Satisfactory progress has been made with establishing a suitable tracking system to monitor children's achievements in reading, writing and mathematics. All teachers have a record of the progress children are making towards reaching the expected levels by the end of each year. The school has begun to analyse these records to identify the children who are making insufficient progress and require additional support. Further improvements are planned to ensure the leadership team are able to monitor achievement from year to year.

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

- To use assessment data to regularly monitor progress – satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

Satisfactory progress has been made since the last visit with managing children's behaviour. Teachers are applying the agreed strategies more consistently. Most children are responding to the application of rewards and sanctions and say that these are making things better. Behaviour in lessons is usually satisfactory. However, in a minority of lessons unsatisfactory behaviour continues to interrupt teaching and slows down the pace of learning. Behaviour in the playground and around the school has improved and is now satisfactory. Higher expectations and better supervision by staff have helped secure the improvements. During the inspection, children in Years 3 to 6 were keen to do well in sports day races but they settled down quickly and listened to the teacher effectively. The number of permanent and fixed term exclusions has increased; this is because the school has adopted a very firm stand on inappropriate and dangerous behaviour. Children who have emotional needs continue to receive suitable support. The nurture groups run by the SENCO, and the support from a seconded senior teacher during the afternoons, have helped bring about the overall improvements.

The school council has started to work together to discuss ways in which the school could be improved. Councillors were involved with the decision to purchase more footballs for the playground, but other than this, they have had a limited effect so far. Older children are given few opportunities to take responsibility and support school activities. The promotion of adopting a healthy lifestyle has a higher profile. Healthy eating is now encouraged and children who bring packed lunches have more suitable conditions in which to eat them.

Attendance remains below the national average and children's punctuality requires improvement. The school has not yet monitored how these affect standards. There are, however, suitable systems in place to monitor attendance and support those children who are persistently absent from school.

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

- Secure consistency in the management of pupil behaviour – satisfactory progress

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning remain inadequate. The proportion of good teaching observed during the inspection fell considerably short of the school's target of 60%. There are some recent improvements in teachers' planning. All teachers now have a planning file that includes daily lesson plans and individual education plans that describe the needs of children with learning difficulties; although targets in individual education plans are sometimes too vague. The plans for lessons in English and mathematics are sufficiently detailed but are not always used effectively to lead to adequate learning. In a few classes this is because learning is disrupted by poor behaviour, and in others, teachers have not used the plans as a basis for

creating interesting lessons. At the beginning of lessons, teachers usually explain what will be taught but it is rare for them to explain why children are being asked to complete tasks or what will happen to the work produced. Consequently lessons are not sufficiently meaningful and children are not working with any particular purpose in mind. The school is devising plans to tackle this issue and make the curriculum more exciting.

Although the majority of lessons observed were satisfactory, a small proportion was better than this. In one excellent ICT lesson for children in Year 6, the pace was brisk and expectations of children's behaviour and performance were high. Children were challenged to produce a piece of good quality work within a given time. There was urgency about the learning and children worked on computers with great concentration. They rose to the challenge and were proud of their achievements.

In other lessons the tasks that children were asked to complete did not interest them enough. In some classes uninspiring teaching failed to capture children's imagination so they became restless and behaviour deteriorated. Although the newly introduced strategies for managing behaviour were used in all classes, the reason for much of the poor behaviour, uninspiring teaching, has not been tackled effectively. In some cases, there was insufficient challenge for faster learners. Teachers' expectations of their performance were often too low so they achieved too little.

Children have learning targets in English and mathematics that help them to understand what they should do to reach the next stages in their learning. The school has introduced a good system for marking children's work. However, marking remains inconsistent. In some classes work is marked carefully and children have a clear understanding of what they need to do to produce better work. In others, there is a lack of guidance on what children should do to improve. Teaching assistants often make a good contribution to the quality of teaching. They support the learners with additional needs and assist with managing behaviour. There are times, particularly during the introductions of lessons, when teaching assistants are not actively engaged.

Timetables have been adjusted to achieve a more balanced curriculum. However, the amount of time spent teaching the National Curriculum in Years 3 to 6 falls short of the recommended minimum. The afternoon session is short, and apart from reading and an assembly, only one lesson is taught in most classes. There is still a lack of urgency about the use of time and some lessons start late. There are plans to redesign the curriculum to meet the interests of children more closely. Although the plans are suitable, they are yet to be tried and tested so it is not possible to determine their impact on the quality of provision.

Supervision around the school has improved. This has contributed to an improvement in behaviour. Arrangements for ensuring that children in the reception classes are passed safely to their parents or carers at the end of the day are now much more secure.

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

- To improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that all lessons are well planned and sufficiently challenging to raise standards – inadequate progress
- To use time more effectively and improve the balance of the curriculum - inadequate progress

Leadership and management

Leadership and management were judged to be inadequate when the school was placed in special measures. They remained so at the time of the first monitoring visit. Following the appointment of an acting headteacher, leadership and management have improved. A number of changes have been introduced to secure immediate improvements in children's behaviour and some aspects of teaching and learning. Staff and children reported positively on the changes introduced. Some long standing issues are also being tackled, such as, improving the layout of the building to produce more discrete teaching spaces and better learning conditions.

A leadership team now meets regularly to discuss improvements and undertake monitoring activities. The team will be strengthened further with the appointment of an advanced skills teacher who will act as deputy headteacher and Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 coordinator. The acting headteacher has very quickly established a view of the quality of teaching and learning by undertaking a number of lesson observations and completing a series of professional dialogue meetings. A policy for monitoring teaching and learning has been drafted along with a suitable specification and timetable for subject leader monitoring throughout the next academic year. There is a proposal to introduce a teaching and learning policy and this is urgently needed to help teachers to improve the quality of their lessons. There is a clear and detailed plan for the deployment of teachers and support staff for next year. This includes defined responsibilities and job descriptions for all staff, revised class groupings and the organisation of intervention and support groups.

There is however still a great deal to do, such as tackling the weaknesses in teaching and learning, improving the overall learning environment, updating the self evaluation form and revising the school improvement plan. Some of the key milestones in the post Ofsted action plan have not been met and the plan requires an urgent review and rewrite. For many of the changes and proposals there is, as yet, little evidence of impact. Success will depend on ensuring all staff are committed and contribute to the improvements and on sustaining the pace at which they are introduced and secured.

Monitoring has continued in English and mathematics with the subject leaders completing an analysis of the end of year assessments. This has been aided in English through the support from a LA literacy consultant. No time has been available for lesson observations this term. The mathematics subject leader has

undertaken an assessment analysis to identify weaknesses in children's mathematical understanding. This was presented clearly in a summary document with a list of actions to be taken to improve outcomes for children. The handover of English subject leader responsibilities is being managed effectively. Monitoring in other subjects has not yet started. The SENCO has also undertaken some useful data analysis to identify and prepare suitable learning programmes for children who need to catch-up or require specialist support. She has a good understanding of the needs of children with learning difficulties and she is monitoring the impact of her nurture group work on children's personal development.

Governance continues to improve slowly. The parent governor vacancies have been filled but there remain three vacancies for LA governors. A steering group now meets to monitor progress on the inspection issues and more formal governor visits are now taking place; the outcomes of these are recorded and stored on file. However, records reveal that only one governor has managed to meet the target of making at least one visit in each term, and several have not completed a formal visit. There are governors nominated to link with core subject leaders and other key staff but meetings have not yet begun. Several recent changes in the membership of the governing body and its committees have prompted the need for governors to undertake chairperson training. This will help to distribute leadership responsibilities more widely across the governing body. Currently the governing body is not adequately fulfilling its challenge and support role.

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

- To improve the quality of leadership and management through the use of rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures – satisfactory progress

External support

The support provided by the LA continues to be satisfactory. In some respects it is good, for example, through the guidance given to the subject leader for English to help establish a better understanding of effective monitoring and to improve the collection and analysis of assessment data. In contrast, support expected by the mathematics subject leader was not received. Regular advice from an early year's consultant has helped the Reception staff develop a more appropriate Foundation Stage curriculum, particularly for learning outdoors. However, changes suggested in Year 1 were not as helpful and left staff confused. Newly qualified teachers have been given insufficient guidance in their induction year and staff are critical of the support received from the psychological and speech therapy services.

The deployment, during the afternoons, of a deputy headteacher from another school has helped improve children's behaviour; this support is valued by the acting headteacher and staff. Next term, additional support from a second advanced skills teacher is planned for Key Stage 2 for one day each week. The appointment of an experienced acting headteacher to lead the school for two terms in the first instance has helped turn the school in the right direction. An acceleration in progress towards

removal from special measures has begun but many improvements are still required for the school to meet the LA target of 'no longer requiring special measures' by the autumn term 2007.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since the last monitoring visit – satisfactory

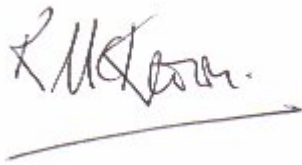
Newly qualified teachers may be appointed

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve attendance and punctuality

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob McKeown', with a horizontal line underneath it that ends in an arrowhead pointing to the right.

Rob McKeown
H M Inspector