

Tribal Education
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol BS2 8RR
T 0845 123 6001
F 0845 123 6002

Ofsted helpline
08456 404045
edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk



Mr Ian Nurser
The Acting Headteacher
Radbrook Primary School
Calveton Way
Shrewsbury
SY3 6DU

20 July 2006

Dear Mr Nurser

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF RADBROOK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school with Mrs A Johns, Additional Inspector, on 12 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, a group of pupils, the chair of governors, a representative from the local authority (LA) and the coordinators for English, mathematics and special educational needs.

Context

The school's context remains broadly the same. The coordinator for mathematics and Key Stage 2 left at Easter and was replaced on a permanent contract by an experienced postholder from another school. The deputy headteacher and the Reception teacher have resigned and will leave at the end of the term. The governors are hoping to recruit a substantive

headteacher and deputy headteacher for January 2007. In the meantime, the acting headteacher's contract has been extended.

Achievement and standards

The unvalidated results of the recent national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 are markedly better than those of previous years, especially at the higher level. Standards are well above average, indicating that the pupils have made at least satisfactory progress. The proportions of pupils reaching or exceeding the expected Level 4 or the higher Level 5 generally match some very challenging targets based on the expected performance of the top quarter of schools in the country. The results were better in English and science than in mathematics but even in mathematics the results are in line with the expected performance of similar schools. Boys have performed as well as girls at Level 5 in reading, mathematics and science, and unusually, have done better than the girls in writing.

At the end of Key Stage 1, the results have also improved but not as sharply. Standards are above average and the pupils' progress has quickened in recent months so that achievement for many is at least satisfactory. In each subject, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected Level 2b or better comfortably exceeds last year's national figures. However, given the high attainment which pupils start with in Year 1, the proportions achieving the higher Level 3 in writing and mathematics are disappointing and below last year's national figures. Boys did much better than girls in mathematics and science but underachieved in writing where only 33% gained Level 2a or better compared with 50% of the girls. The underachievement of higher attaining pupils was well illustrated in a mathematics lesson where they lacked the problem solving skills needed to tackle work of a suitable level.

A small sample of the most able pupils in Key Stage 2 told inspectors that they were generally given more challenging work to do than previously but that there were still lessons when they could be asked to do more. This comment mirrors the LA's analysis of the pupils' views. In nearly all the lessons observed by inspectors, groups of higher attaining pupils were making at least satisfactory progress. Similarly, lower attaining pupils were generally enabled to make the same progress as their peers because expectations about what they should attempt were appropriately pitched and there were good levels of support. This finding is an improvement from the last visit when teachers' expectations were often too low.

Personal development and well-being

These areas are significant strengths and relationships between adults and pupils are very good. The pupils enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes to their learning. Opportunities for them to be independent learners have increased. Very effective systems in Reception ensure that children quickly develop confidence and feel secure. Throughout the school, pupils are

very polite, extremely well behaved and speak confidently to visitors. They are pleased with the rich range of extra-curricular activities, including sporting ones, which have been reintroduced. Pupils work and play very well together. They make excellent use of the new playground equipment and their enjoyment is palpable. At lunchtime, the friendly atmosphere, high levels of well controlled activity, and ethos of care are outstanding. Assemblies are thoughtful and reflective occasions which also celebrate the pupils' achievements. Attendance, at 96%, remains well above the national average.

Quality of provision

The school's belief that its teaching has improved since the last visit is confirmed by the inspection. Professional development has focused on the elements of good teaching and learning and has led to more lessons that are well paced and stimulating. The proportion of teaching which is good has increased significantly and the school has met its target in this respect. However, there is still a small amount which does not come up to the mark and where pupils continue to underachieve. The acting headteacher and LA are tackling this issue vigorously. Teaching remains stronger at Key Stage 2 and in Reception than at Key Stage 1, but there have been improvements at Key Stage 1 and the teaching is satisfactory. What prevented it from being good was that the teachers' expectations were still not high enough, the pace was slower than it needed to be and, in one case, too little use was made of the final plenary session to reinforce learning.

The school has implemented a robust system for tracking the pupils' progress which has enabled it to identify pupils who are underachieving. This information has been used very effectively to help pupils make up ground through targeted programmes of work. A policy for marking work has been agreed and is beginning to provide detailed support to pupils but this is inconsistent. A new lesson planning format has been introduced which is helping teachers focus on the school's priorities, such as setting different objectives for groups of pupils at different stages of development. Planning for pupils with learning difficulties, however, is generally not sufficiently detailed. The school expects that its plans for boosting the professional development of its teaching assistants will improve the contribution they can make in this area.

The teachers have higher expectations about increasing the pupils' active participation in lessons. This feature was illustrated particularly well in a very good science lesson in Key Stage 2 where the pupils devised their own investigations into the permeability of rocks and carried out their tests with understanding and great commitment. Some of the mathematics teaching at Key Stage 2 also fostered high levels of involvement. An important strategy used in the best lessons was that teachers took pains to encourage pupils to evaluate their own progress.

The number of pupils on the register of special educational needs has been appropriately reduced from 42 to 30. The coordinator has benefited from support from the LA and a link with the acting headteacher's substantive school. She has taken a more proactive lead in defining levels of provision. Teachers are clearer about supporting pupils through setting work of differentiated difficulty, enabling a sharper focus of resources, primarily teaching assistants, on the small number of pupils with genuine learning difficulties.

The school knows that the wider curriculum is underdeveloped and it has plans to review schemes of work in the autumn. Currently, the pupils' experience of some subjects, such as art, music and design and technology, is inconsistent and often limited.

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

- raise teachers' expectations of more able pupils and establish rigorous assessment systems that provide teachers with the information they need to plan suitably challenging work for all pupils – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher provides leadership and management of outstanding quality. He has had a huge impact on the school's morale and its progress in a short space of time. During the visit, several adults and pupils told inspectors of the high regard in which they hold him and several letters from parents tell the same story. He has been helped by the staff's willingness to accept the need for higher expectations and new ways of working to raise achievement. The school's self-evaluation is sharp and accurate, with well defined priorities for development issuing from the careful weighing of evidence about the school's performance. A revised action plan has been speedily implemented to improve areas of weakness. It is underpinned by monitoring of teaching which is extremely well focused and effective in supporting improvement and bringing about greater consistency.

A major priority is to equip subject coordinators with the skills to maintain the momentum of improvement when a new senior leadership team is appointed. The coordinators understand what their roles require and have benefited from the school's emphasis on clarifying responsibilities, providing training and earmarking time for them to carry out tasks. Job descriptions have been produced. The coordinators for English and mathematics have begun to take a lead in setting targets for the pupils' attainment and in taking developments forward. They are still at an early stage of driving initiatives but have made a good start, for example in analysing pupils' work and developing assessment practice. The new coordinator for Key Stage 2 is quickly building a cohesive team and the deputy headteacher has worked effectively to a clear brief to oversee important developments in curriculum and marking.

The new chair of governors is aspirational in his vision for the school's future and confident in the governing body's ability to play its part. It is at full strength and its members bring a broad range of skills. There is a suitable structure of committees and meetings are beginning to use the issues in the self-evaluation form to guide governors' deliberations. Link governors for each subject are meeting the coordinators to foster insight into the school's work so that they are better placed to undertake formal monitoring of the school's progress. The governing body has undertaken training on self-evaluation and on the interpretation of data.

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

- sharpen the checks made on teaching and learning by clearly focusing on areas that require improvement, and take steps to ensure that teachers act to improve weaknesses – good
- improve teachers' understanding of their management roles and their individual and collective responsibility for whole-school improvement – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has provided good support through its consultants and advisers for special educational needs, assessment, English and mathematics. The link adviser continues to play an important role in coordinating support and advising the governors as well as in supporting the head and middle managers.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

The school should continue to pursue its current priorities, particularly to build capacity among senior staff to sustain and build on improvements in the school's performance.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and Shropshire's Corporate Director of Education Services.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hubbleday
H M Inspector