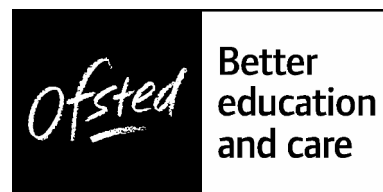


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Mrs Joy Powell
The Headteacher
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25 May 2006

Dear Mrs Powell

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HURST HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Mr Braithwaite and Mr Mason, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 17 and 18 May 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 November 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 headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Absences by staff have resulted in some pupils being taught by a series of temporary teachers. This has particularly affected provision at the end of Key Stage 2. During the monitoring visit, staff and pupils in Year 6 were on a

residential visit, along with key members of the senior leadership team. A new assistant headteacher joined the school three weeks ago.

Achievement and standards

The children's attainment on entry to the school is average. The children make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2. Standards by the end of Key Stage 1 are broadly average. The results in mathematics are slightly better than those in reading and writing. Despite this sound start, the pupils make inadequate progress during Key Stage 2. Standards are well below average by the end of the key stage.

In the lessons seen the pupils' progress varied from inadequate to good and was inadequate overall. The rate at which pupils learnt 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.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils are well behaved and compliant. When teaching is effective, they enjoy their lessons and are keen to achieve. The school has sound procedures for considering pupils' views. The school council meets regularly and members are proud of how their actions have contributed to changes within the school. Relationships in all classrooms are generally positive and older pupils in particular cooperate well with each other. The school ensures that pupils stay safe and healthy. This is reflected in the large number of pupils who participate in the wide variety of after school sporting clubs. 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. This is particularly evident in the whole-class discussions with targeted support for individual children to enable them to develop their social skills. Most pupils feel safe and secure and fully understand what they should do in the event of bullying. However, older pupils in Years 5 and 6 expressed disquiet about some incidents of bullying and racial comments both in school and in the playground. 'I do my best to ignore it,' remarked one girl.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching remains inadequate overall. Planning for the needs of individual pupils is inconsistent. This was particularly the case for the higher attaining pupils. As a result, the pace of learning was slow and pupils were not given challenging enough work to promote rapid gains. Importantly, the considerable length of some lessons does not help and causes an imbalance in the curriculum. The gap between what the pupils should be attaining and what they are actually achieving remains too wide. Consequently, standards are not rising quickly enough and the pupils are making insufficient progress.

Where teaching was satisfactory or better, the teachers had a sound knowledge of what the pupils already knew and made effective use of timings to maintain pace. They used interactive whiteboards and other technologies to engage pupils' interest and had warm relationships with their pupils. As a result, pupils made progress that was at least satisfactory.

The new systems for tracking the pupils' progress and for identifying quickly any underachievement are at early stages of development. Teachers have begun to use assessment information to identify pupils who are making insufficient progress. However, assessment information is not used consistently in the teachers' planning and action to improve underachievement is not taken quickly enough.

The teachers now discuss with the pupils what they are going to learn in the lessons and how the pupils will know when they have succeeded. Pupils are beginning to evaluate their own learning. The literacy and numeracy targets have been set but their use is inconsistent across the school. There is little linkage between these targets and the learning objectives identified for future lessons and, crucially, there is insufficient impact on the pupils' progress either in lessons or over time. Marking rarely refers explicitly to pupils' targets and generally does not indicate what the pupils need to do to improve.

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

- involve the children more in assessing their own work and setting targets for improvement – satisfactory
- improve the management systems for tracking the progress of the children as they move through the school and ensure that decisive action is taken where progress is not good enough – satisfactory
- raise standards in English, mathematics and science throughout the school, but particularly at the end of Key Stage 2 by improving all aspects of assessment to ensure the teachers plan lessons that provide work at the right level for children of all abilities – inadequate.

Leadership and management

There are still marked weaknesses in the school's leadership. The school is not sufficiently focused on improving pupils' learning and the leadership team lacks strategic guidance. The school has started to monitor the quality of teaching and learning on a more formal basis but this is not sufficiently rigorous and the evaluations are imprecise. The outcomes from lesson observations lack detail and teachers do not have clear enough guidance to enable them to improve. Furthermore, a detailed policy setting out clear expectations of teaching and learning is at an early stage of development and this is hampering improvement. As a result, there remain inconsistencies in the teaching and quality of planning across and within year groups.

The school's action plan is satisfactory and contains specific and relevant actions against a realistic timescale. Nevertheless, the plan has some weaknesses. Appropriate success criteria are not provided for some of the areas requiring improvement. The plan fails to specify what will happen if progress on each issue is limited, especially with regard to improvements in the quality of teaching and the pupils' progress. This requires further refinement and will be reviewed as part of the second monitoring inspection.

The governors' strategic overview of the school and ability to hold the school to account are improving. The chair of governors shows commitment to the school and understands the need for the governing body to play a greater part in evaluating the school's effectiveness.

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

- improve the overall quality of teaching by setting clear expectations of what the school wants to see happening in classrooms and establish robust systems to check that all staff are following guide lines – inadequate.

External support

The LA's statement of action makes clear the expected timescale for improvement and the level of additional resources allocated to the school. It is linked effectively to the school's action plan and gives details of action, funding and evaluation. However, the monitoring arrangements are too far apart to secure decisive intervention where progress is not good enough. Consequently, some opportunities to hasten the school's improvement have been missed. Moreover, the school currently lacks the capacity to make best use of some of the support offered. The school would benefit from a greater focus on providing a strategic lead.

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

- Implement a whole-school teaching and learning policy to improve the consistency and quality of teaching across the school.
- Improve assessment in order to plan effectively to ensure pupil progress.
- Improve the consistency and rigour of monitoring so that teachers are clear about areas for development.

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

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
H M Inspector