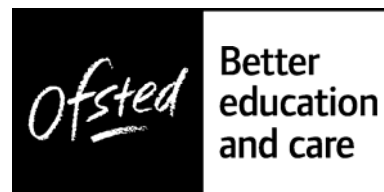


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Mrs L Banks
The Acting Headteacher
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26 June 2006

Dear Mrs Banks

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF REDHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Rodney Braithwaite, Additional Inspector, to your school on 14 and 15 June 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 January 2006.

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, senior staff, groups of pupils, the chair and vice chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA). They also looked at pupils' work and considered the views of parents.

Context

This is a large school but the number of pupils has declined recently. It has a very high proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals and who

have learning needs or disabilities. There are low numbers of pupils who are in the early stages of learning English. Staffing remains unsettled. The school has experienced continuing difficulties improving standards since 1999 and was found to have serious weaknesses in 2003. The headteacher is currently on sickness absence and the deputy headteacher took over as acting headteacher in February 2006 following her return from maternity leave. Since then there have been further changes in staffing including the resignation of some staff and a complete reorganisation of class structures.

Achievement and standards

Redhill School is now discovering a sense of purpose in raising the standards that pupils achieve but is aware that there is much to be done. For some time standards have remained low overall with occasional signs of improvement that are not sustained. This is directly as a result of the variable quality of teaching and planning and a lack of systematic monitoring of pupil progress. This has left the school unable to raise performance consistently.

Standards in school remain well below average, especially so in English and mathematics. The results of national tests in 2005 were very low and the school expects this to be the case in 2006, especially for pupils aged 11. Similarly, the progress made by these pupils is amongst the lowest nationally. The performance of boys remains a cause for concern as does the performance of more able pupils.

However, there are also encouraging signs. The number of pupils working at a higher level in mathematics and English is rising and the standard of written work, although low, is improving. In some classes a focus on basic number skills is helping to raise standards in numeracy and there is evidence of improved progress in the pupils' vocabulary.

Standards in English are very low. The presentation of written work is sometimes poor and many pupils do not yet show a complete understanding of basic grammar and sentence construction. Spelling is variable and few pupils can use spelling strategies to help if they do not know a particular word. There are signs of improvement in some classes however. For example, Year 6 pupils were encouraged to use adverbs and adjectives to improve their writing. They were able to do so with confidence but the range of vocabulary remains limited. In one very useful lesson in Year 4 the pupils were encouraged to write dictionary definitions of everyday objects.

The limited range of pupils' vocabulary is partly a consequence of few opportunities for extended linguistic response to questions and lessons where teachers dominate the discussions, especially for the youngest pupils. The pupils' restricted vocabulary means writing and explanations are often mundane rather than exciting or imaginative. Despite this the pupils are keen to share ideas and talk about their experiences. The standard of reading

amongst the oldest pupils has improved recently but remains low and some struggle to read their own text with fluency and expression.

In mathematics many pupils have a fragile grasp of basic number work. The youngest pupils can count and identify simple shapes. They are sometimes asked to use measures that are inappropriate and, as a result, their understanding is left insecure. Older pupils can use simple arithmetic but do not use investigative or problem solving strategies with confidence. They can sort data and understand block graphs, fractions and decimals. Where there are problems this is usually where the pupils are asked to apply their mathematical knowledge to solve problems. Some of this is because of poor literacy skills and an insecure understanding of concepts.

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

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science by ensuring that boys do as well as girls and speaking and writing are developed well in all subjects – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour is usually good, both in classrooms and the playground. Pupils are lively but respectful towards adults and try to listen carefully to each other. However, a small number of boys are disruptive and spoil learning for other pupils. Pupils are pleased to serve on the school council and younger councillors are particularly positive in describing their contribution to helping the school improve. Pupils are confident that they are safe and secure in school and that when bullying occasionally occurs it is dealt with firmly and fairly by staff. They expressed interest in having more 'practical' work in their learning and one girl said she would like the school to start a drama club. Pupils are very appreciative of visits, especially as recently to an art gallery, and enjoy having educational visitors to the school, but feel that there could be more. They are also very clear that lessons could be more challenging.

Pupils enjoy coming to school, with art and swimming being particularly popular. Their art work is celebrated in displays throughout the school which create a colourful and welcoming environment. Younger pupils, especially, take pleasure from the house points competition which gives them a good incentive to improve their work and contributions to the school community. Pupils have a sound understanding of healthy eating and, in discussion, are clear on what foods are good for them and the importance of regular exercise.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is slowly improving but remains inadequate. This is largely due to a lack of consistency. Teachers have many skills and strategies to improve pupils' learning but too many lessons are

unsatisfactory. The school's recent monitoring and evaluation of learning through classroom observation has reached similar conclusions. The best learning takes place when teachers have secure subject knowledge, enable pupils to understand the objectives of their learning, as seen in a lesson on famous people in Year 6, and use questions which encourage more than one word answers. Learning is also better when teachers develop good relationships with their pupils and when the pupils know exactly what they are expected to learn. Most teachers are working effectively with their classroom assistants who are making a sound contribution to pupils' learning.

Unsatisfactory teaching in the school is characterised by lack of a clear purpose and poor management of pupils' behaviour. Often the pace of learning is very slow and too much talking by the teachers restricts progress, especially in the main part of each lesson. Although improving pupils' speaking and listening skills has been identified as a priority some teachers do not reflect this in their lessons, particularly the need for pupils to listen to each other and speak clearly and accurately in complete sentences. Not all teachers have high enough expectations of their pupils, so there is long term evidence of underachievement, especially amongst the more able pupils. Interestingly, the pupils, even the youngest, acknowledge this.

The procedures for assessment and the availability of relevant data have improved under the leadership of the acting deputy headteacher. The school now has a much clearer picture of individual pupil progress over time. The school acknowledges that teachers need to become familiar with, and understand, the information they have in order for standards and achievement to improve at a quicker pace than at present. The marking of pupils' work remains inconsistent. Although teachers encourage and praise they still do not always indicate what pupils need to do to improve. Too many comments merely tell the pupil what they have just done. There has been some improvement in target setting and some pupils, but not all, can name their targets. Targets for individual pupils with special educational needs are clear and helpful, but other pupils still tend to have generalised group or class targets.

There is evidence in all classrooms of the provision of a broadly based curriculum, which pupils enjoy. Extra-curricular provision has increased slightly but is still less than that found in most schools.

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

- improve the quality of learning through raising expectations of what pupils are able to do, ensuring challenging activities are matched to their needs and improving the pace of learning – inadequate.

Leadership and management

Leadership in school was judged to be inadequate in the last inspection and this remains the case. However, recent improvements in leadership and the current emphasis on raising standards have started to enhance the rigour of monitoring. The leadership of the school has gone through significant changes since February 2006 and is now improving. Currently, however, the roles are temporary and those in post are relatively new to their jobs. Despite this, the school leadership team has taken decisive and prompt action and has an appropriate sense of urgency in making changes. It is similarly determined to secure the improvements required. This is a welcome development.

The current acting headteacher has a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. For example, she has an accurate view of the relative strengths in teaching and is well supported by an experienced acting deputy headteacher who also has an increasingly detailed view of pupil attainment. This rigour has helped to sharpen the view of what actions are required and is starting to establish a new vision and ethos for the school where pupil progress is all important. The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher have produced a range of appropriate plans for the future and form a strong team.

The senior management team's roles are currently under developed. At present the team consists of the acting headteacher and the acting deputy with additional staff who join this team on occasions. The meetings are informal and there are not yet any formalised agenda or records kept. Despite this the team are developing a clear vision and are increasingly effective in holding teachers to account for pupil performance. Monitoring of teaching and planning is increasingly effective but the evidence gained from the monitoring is not yet used effectively.

There are also significant variations in how effective the subject leaders are in monitoring their subjects and contributing to the various school plans. This too has been through recent changes and the results of these changes have not yet had the desired impact.

Governors continue to support the school well. They are increasingly effective in holding the school to account and have responded to the inspection with a sense of urgency. They are fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses in school and manage statutory requirements efficiently. The new committee structures make a positive contribution to monitoring the school's performance.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2006

- strengthen the leadership of the school by improving existing monitoring and evaluation systems so that the information gained is used rigorously

to raise standards – although the acting headteacher, with the support of the acting deputy headteacher, has made satisfactory progress in improving some aspects of leadership, progress overall remains inadequate.

External support

The local authority has produced a satisfactory action plan in support of the school. However, some of the actions planned lack detailed success criteria. Similarly it emphasises monitoring at the expense of evaluation but the level of additional resources and guidance is good. Overall support is satisfactory and welcomed by the school.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed at present.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Priorities for further improvement

- Plan a timetable of monitoring to help improve the quality of teaching.
- Increase the use of assessment data in teachers' planning.
- Develop the use of literacy across the curriculum to encourage better speaking and listening skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Ceri Morgan
H M Inspector