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Mrs J Sparling
The Headteacher
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24 July 2006

Dear Mrs Sparling

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF FAIRFORD C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Charlotte Roberson and Roger Sadler, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 12 and 13 July, 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 February 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 headteacher, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, a representative from the local authority (LA), and key members of staff.

Context

The original head of Key Stage 2 moved to another school in January 2006 and she was replaced by a teacher at the school. A temporary teacher was appointed until the end of the summer term to teach in Year 6. The governing

body does not have a full complement and a number of new governors have been appointed recently. The current chair of governors retires at the end of the summer term.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards remain inadequate. The school has been slow to address underachievement in writing and mathematics. A recent focus on improving writing in Year 6 has not yet had a clear impact. Although Year 6 pupils are set to attain broadly average standards and exceed the targets set by the school for them, they have made inadequate progress since Year 2. Too few Year 6 pupils attained the higher levels in recent national tests in English and mathematics. In Year 5, because teaching is exciting and demanding, pupils are making good progress and many pupils are exceeding age related expectations. Standards in Years 4, 3 and 2 are satisfactory but should be better given attainment on entry. Progress in Year 1 is inadequate. In Reception children build soundly on their above average attainment on entry and by the end of the year many of them exceed what is normally expected of children of this age. Children in Reception listen well, often for extended periods, and some are very confident and articulate speakers. Most know letter sounds and can blend letters together to form words and many can read simple words. Children show above average ability in reading.

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

- make sure that all pupils achieve as well as they should in Years 3 to 6 – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development continues to be good. Pupils are well mannered, articulate and friendly towards visitors. Relationships are positive, routines are well established, and pupils feel safe and settled at school. Newcomers, including those for whom English is an additional language, say they are welcomed and soon make new friends.

Pupils generally enjoy the activities they get involved in especially the after school clubs. Pupils in a Year 5 English lesson were very enthusiastic and eagerly completed the tasks set for them, working very well in pairs. Pupils of all ages say they like a challenge in their lessons. Younger pupils sometimes grow restless when expected to sit on the carpet for long periods of time. Pupils know it is important to eat healthily and to drink plenty of water in hot weather. They say they like the responsibility of having extra 'jobs' and peer mediators in Year 6 behave sensibly while helping on the infant playground. Pupils enjoy growing their own vegetables and the 'gardeners' look after them well. Pupils understand about the dangers of drugs and smoking.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development also remains good. Attendance levels have dropped a little this year and are now very similar to other primary schools. There have been no exclusions.

Quality of provision

Teachers have worked hard to improve the quality of teaching but it is not yet consistently good enough to ensure that pupils make good progress throughout the school. The best teaching is characterised by fast pace and exciting content and methods that stimulate pupils to enjoy learning, concentrate hard and do their best. However, pupils often spend too long listening to the teacher and are not given sufficient time to work on appropriately challenging tasks and to consolidate learning.

A programme of lesson observations has recently been implemented by the school but, since the last inspection, insufficient priority has been given to monitoring and evaluating the quality of learning and teaching by senior staff and subject leaders. As a consequence, despite good support from the LA, improvements in pupil learning and progress remain limited. However, teachers' planning is now more consistently effective and staff are much more aware of the need to raise their expectations and provide suitably stretching work for all pupils, especially the more able. The school has very recently begun some useful work on setting targets for groups of pupils to help them see where and how to improve their written work. When these targets are specific and expressed in language that pupils understand, they are helping pupils to learn.

The curriculum continues to cover all the required subjects and to meet all pupils' needs effectively.

The quality of care and support given to all pupils remains satisfactory overall and pupils say they feel well cared for at school. There are satisfactory arrangements in place to ensure that pupils are safe and protected in school. Governors have worked hard to ensure that the school meets requirements in relation to health and safety, but currently no governor oversees child protection or provision for those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Some of the criticisms made in the previous inspection about the way the school fails to assess, monitor and track pupil progress adequately have not been addressed effectively. However, the staff now have a much better understanding of what they need to do and how they are going to do this. For example, target setting is used well in some classes to raise standards and promote learning but not yet consistently across the school. Teachers' skills at analysing data and then using that information to guide pupils, to drive improvements, and to raise standards are still at a very early stage of development.

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

- raise teachers' expectations for the higher attaining pupils – satisfactory
- implement rigorous procedures to monitor the effectiveness of teaching and track pupils' learning – inadequate.

Leadership and management

School leadership and management remain inadequate. Although there are some indications that the school, with good external support, is beginning to address its weaknesses, the actions taken to secure change have been delayed and therefore not had sufficient time to make a significant impact. Leadership has been supported well by the local authority and, as a consequence, the school has been guided effectively in developing more rigorous approaches to self-evaluation. However, school leaders need to use this support effectively to develop further their capacity for self sustained improvement.

The school responded slowly to the previous inspection and, as a consequence, improved systems for checking on the school's effectiveness and planning for improvement are only partly in place and not yet rigorous enough to secure the necessary improvements in pupil achievement. For instance, there has not yet been a systematic review and analysis of pupils' books so that important inconsistencies in the quality of marking go unrecognised. Similarly, the new procedures for monitoring the effectiveness of teaching and tracking pupils' learning have not had sufficient time to demonstrate significant impact in achieving clear and sustained progress. Subject leaders and other managers in the school have only just started to monitor and evaluate developments in their areas. As a consequence, new procedures and practices are not yet being implemented consistently across the school.

The governing body has also been slow to respond to the inspection report and has not yet found the right balance between support and challenge that the school needs to improve further. There has been good support for the governing body from the LA but few have taken the opportunity to be trained appropriately and fully understand their roles and responsibilities.

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

- improve systems to check on the school's effectiveness and planning for improvements – satisfactory.

External support

The school values highly the contribution of the LA consultants and link adviser. The LA has provided substantial support for the school since the inspection and this is being managed satisfactorily by the school. The LA

support plan sets out clearly how the necessary improvements can be made and what resources are available to the school to secure these.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Quality of local authority's statement of action – good.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed at present.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the proportion of pupils who meet and exceed the age related expectations in writing and mathematics.
- Implement, monitor and evaluate systems to check on the school's effectiveness.
- Ensure all teachers have appropriately high expectations of pupils' learning and achievement.
- Ensure all governors fully understand their roles and meet their responsibilities.
- Use local authority support to develop further leadership capacity for self sustained improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Limm
H M Inspector