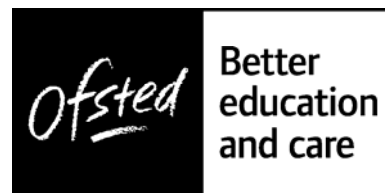


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Mr A Brooks
The Headteacher
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9 May 2006

Dear Mr Brooks

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF GLOUCESTER ROAD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with David Collard, Additional Inspector, to your school on 25 and 26 April 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 five lessons, attended an assembly, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher and staff. In addition, discussions were held with groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a recently appointed governor and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the inspection in November 2005, there have been no significant changes in staffing. With the help of the LA, an experienced temporary governor was appointed in February 2006 to provide additional support and expertise. At the time of the visit, the deputy headteacher and most of the

pupils in Years 5 and 6 were at a residential centre. Inspectors scrutinised some of these pupils' past work. All other classes were observed.

Achievement and standards

Over the past three years, standards in Year 6 have declined steadily. In 2005, test results were particularly low in English. In mathematics they were closer to national averages. Science results were higher and compared well to the national picture. In all three subjects, fewer pupils gained the higher Level 5 compared with national patterns. Standards in Year 2 generally compared well to the national picture except that fewer pupils reached higher levels. Past performance data from 2003 to 2005 indicates that pupils were generally achieving well enough by Year 6 in science, but not in English and mathematics.

Children in the Foundation Stage are generally making satisfactory progress in most areas of learning. Their language and literacy skills develop more slowly than other areas of learning. These skills are not promoted effectively as the teacher sometimes lacks a good range of resources to support activities.

The pupils in Years 1 and 2 are making satisfactory progress. Their writing and number skills are close to the level expected. However, in both classes, a significant minority of pupils do not express themselves confidently, particularly in front of other pupils. In the Year 3/4 class and Year 4/5 class, standards are still generally lower than expected. The school's assessment information indicates that pupils' achievement is much lower in writing than in other subjects.

Planning for Reception and Years 1 to 4 takes into account the needs of different ability groups more clearly than at the time of the last inspection, particularly for lower attaining pupils. The school's initiatives to help pupils in judging their own progress more regularly is slowly helping to improve their rate of progress. Pupils refer to simple targets that cover both academic and behavioural matters. They also make simple judgements about their progress in achieving them.

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

- raise standards and improve achievement by making sure that learners of all ages are given work to do that meets their needs and capabilities—satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

The satisfactory provision for pupils' well-being and personal development continues. Around the school and at playtimes the pupils behave well. With few exceptions, the pupils enjoy school and the activities provided. Relationships between pupils and staff are good. In two lessons and an

assembly, pupils behaved particularly well. In other lessons, teachers dealt with challenging behaviour firmly and quickly. In some lesson activities, pupils have too much direction or support which slows their ability to learn independently.

Pupils commented that they felt safe and they appreciated the increased importance given to the role of the school council. The newly completed outdoor area for the children in the Foundation Stage is a marked improvement. When fully open, it will support the development of children's learning through play.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching was satisfactory in all five lessons. In one lesson in the Foundation Stage the strengths and weaknesses were finely balanced. The natural enthusiasm of the youngest children was generally encouraged and directed appropriately. However, some lost interest in activities quite quickly and this was not always noticed or addressed.

The satisfactory teaching had several common features and some aspects were good. Good relationships between staff and pupils provided a secure and generally calm ethos for learning. In Reception and Years 1 to 4, the teachers' planning made suitable provision for pupils of different abilities including those with learning difficulties. Weaker aspects of teaching remain. Pupils often knew what they were expected to learn and could comment about their progress but some of the teaching was insufficiently challenging and did not extend their learning. Explanations at the beginning of some lessons were too long.

Teaching assistants were generally well deployed to support groups of pupils or individuals. New procedures for tracking pupils' progress are helping to identify weak areas of learning and the information provided is being increasingly used to hold staff to account for the progress that their pupils make.

The curriculum is broad and balanced. The focus on improving planning for literacy and mathematics is helping teachers to set specific targets to support different groups of pupils. This is having a positive effect, particularly in mathematics but less so in literacy. Improvements to the provision in the Foundation Stage are complete and have the potential to broaden the children's experiences.

The care, guidance and welfare of pupils have improved and are satisfactory. The school has addressed the health and safety issues highlighted by the previous inspection, particularly the way in which pupils exit the building at home time. The governors are taking steps to implement the policies that were not in place at the time of the last inspection. New assessment procedures and a system for tracking the pupils' progress are enabling staff to

identify groups of pupils to target more accurately. They also help pupils learn about their progress but they have not yet led to significant improvement in their achievement. The marking of pupils' work in Years 1 and 2 has improved. It gives pupils better clues about what to do next as well as praising their achievements.

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

- improve the quality of marking in Years 1 and 2—satisfactory progress
- improve the quality and provision of accommodation and resources within the Foundation Stage—satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The senior leadership team has made several improvements. Following the inspection in November 2005, the school improved its approach to assessing the pupils' progress. The outside activity area for the children in the Foundation Stage has been completed recently. Additional non teaching time provided for senior managers has given them more opportunity to fulfil their responsibilities. However, there are still substantial weaknesses in leadership and management.

The headteacher has made monitoring teaching, raising staff morale, and providing stability in day to day activities his top priorities. The headteacher has provided a stable influence over daily routines. He has worked hard to review the school improvement plan; nevertheless, it is too detailed. Although the plan contains a lot of relevant actions, there are too many overlapping priorities to make the actions and their intended impact clear to all. The ensuing uncertainty does not make for the best use of resources and adversely affects morale. The monitoring of teaching has been regular but it has not resulted in a clear whole school vision about how to improve the pupils' learning or increase the proportion of good or better teaching.

The governors provide satisfactory day to day support. Despite help from the LA and an additional governor, they do not yet give clear enough direction or sufficiently hold the senior leaders to account for the school's progress. Staff appreciate the governors' support but there is a lack of clarity and shared vision about the school's aims, values and future direction. Although the school's self-evaluation is more accurate, not enough notice is taken of the views of parents, pupils and governors. At present, self-evaluation does not provide a complete picture of the school provision and does not make best use of the information and resources available.

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

- rectify the weakness in the leadership and management of the school, especially with regard to the rigour and robustness of the self-evaluation and monitoring process—inadequate progress.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is good. It outlines the actions and support that the school has received, along with future support that is well targeted on the school's areas for improvement. There are clear pointers for judging progress in implementing the plan with helpful and clear timelines. The level of support given to the school has been good. It has been most effective in helping to improve assessment and in clarifying the role of senior leadership staff. Although the level and suitability of support has been good, the school has not improved its governance and leadership skills of the senior team quickly enough. The LA's frank and accurate review just carried out gives a clear steer on the improvements that the school must make quickly. External consultants have provided good levels of expertise and guidance, particularly in improving literacy planning and assessment procedures.

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.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the pupils' learning and achievement still further by improving the satisfactory teaching to good or outstanding.
- Develop the headteacher's and governors' roles by being more rigorous in self-evaluation and by using the information gained, including that from parents, staff and pupils, to guide sharply focused actions for improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Gloucestershire.

Yours sincerely,

Kevin Hodge
Additional Inspector