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Mrs Marion Fitzgibbons
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Dear Mrs Fitzgibbons

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ANGEL ROAD FIRST SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Michael Madden, Additional Inspector to your school on 3 and 4 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, subject managers for English and mathematics, newly qualified teachers, the chair of governors and one other governor, groups of pupils and representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the inspection in February a senior member of the teaching staff has become ill and has been absent since May. Since that time his class teaching responsibilities have been completed by a number of supply staff. Meanwhile the local authority has loaned the school an advanced skills teacher (AST) who has taken over the teaching of a Year 3 class each morning and has supported the work of another member of staff in the afternoon.

Achievement and standards

From a generally below average point on entry, the children continue to make good progress in the Reception class and the majority are achieving the expected standards by the time they are ready to enter Year 1. Progress throughout Years 1 and 2 was inadequate at the time of the last inspection and despite some improvements in provision, it remains so. The causes of this slow progress include some inadequate teaching in at least two of the classes. As a result, despite some gains in reading, overall standards are still below average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2.

One of the main improvements made in the provision is the restructuring of classes for English and mathematics during the morning, with pupils taught in single age group classes. This is making a real difference and teachers are finding it much easier to plan interesting and relevant activities now that the span of ages and abilities has been reduced. In several English lessons, this better planning led to increased progress.

The school has received continued support from a local authority literacy consultant. Under her guidance, and with the developing influence of the schools own literacy manager, the teachers are working steadily to promote reading, foster oracy and to introduce pupils to basic writing skills and to a wide range of written genre. A particularly effective lesson for pupils in a Year 2 group, for example, promoted literacy well by focusing strongly on the structure and content of book reviews. Teachers are also beginning to make good use of the techniques included in the Intensive Support Programme (ISP) and pupils in all classes are becoming increasingly aware of the need for care when constructing sentences.

Pupils in Year 3 are still behind where they ought to be at this stage, but they are now making at least satisfactory progress in English and mathematics. This is mainly because, coupled with the provision of the single age group classes, the quality of teaching has been improved through the loan of an advanced skills teacher by the local authority.

The school has a suitable system for tracking the pupils' acquisition of vocabulary and literacy skills as they move through the school. Teachers respond to written work systematically, recognising signs of progress and setting targets to stimulate and steer the next steps in learning. Detailed records are kept also of the pupils' reading. However, the quality of the assessments made and the records maintained in some classes remain weak. In one class, in particular, pupils overall progress fell well short of the agreed targets for both reading and writing. Currently, the school is unable to formulate reliable targets consistently and so take swift remedial action when

the projected progress is not made. The new, committed and enthusiastic subject leader for English has made a good start to resolving some of these problems, and is conscientiously gathering portfolios of pupils' work and analysing assessment results to gauge the progress of individuals.

There is considerable scope for further improving the climate for literacy in the school by ensuring consistently higher expectations of pupils' writing. There are too few displays of, for example, higher level writing, and the library does not provide an attractive accessible place for pupils to enjoy reading outside the classroom.

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

- Raise standards in English and mathematics, and particularly in writing – satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Whilst there have been some minor improvements, including a continued rise in attendance which is now broadly average, the personal development and well-being of the pupils remain only satisfactory.

Where teaching is captivating and lessons proceed at a brisk pace, pupils find the teaching compelling and respond with suitable enthusiasm, particularly in the Reception classes. However, in too many lessons there are a significant proportion of pupils, often boys, who do not engage readily and do not subsequently make the required progress. Behaviour in classes is generally satisfactory, although in too many lessons the learning is disturbed by low level disruption.

Behaviour around the school is satisfactory, but a lot of time is wasted by pupils since routine procedures are not sufficiently embedded and the general ethos of the school is not sufficiently focussed on good achievement and high expectations. As a result, for example, pupils do not see the point of hurrying back from the toilet and often disrupt learning in other classes as they stand and chatter in corridors and shared areas. The school's policies and procedures regarding the pupils' movement around the school are not clearly communicated to all staff and are not implemented with rigorous consistency.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is similar to that found at the last inspection; it remains inconsistent and is not sufficiently effective in improving levels of achievement and raising standards.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in seven out of the eight lessons seen; it was good in four and inadequate in one. The best teaching is highly engaging. It stimulates and interests the pupils and because it is accurately matched to the needs of the pupils, it results in effective learning. Two of the good lessons were observed in Reception, where both teachers will leave the school at the end of this term, whilst a further good lesson was taught by a teacher loaned to the school by the local authority. The school remains some way from providing the consistently good teaching that is needed to raise standards.

The inadequate lesson lacked pace, too much time was spent by the pupils sitting on the carpet and insufficient time was allocated to the completion of the planned activities. This allowed the concentration of many of the pupils to waver and the behaviour of some deteriorated. In addition, the behaviour management strategies were not sufficiently rigorous and led to a small group of pupils, mainly boys, disrupting the learning of others.

The curriculum in the two Reception classes is broad and balanced and meets the needs of the school's youngest children well. The curriculum for the remainder of the school gives a generous allocation of time to the teaching of literacy and numeracy, with the remaining time allocated to the other subjects of the National Curriculum. However, currently the time allocated to some of these subjects, including music and physical education (PE) for example, is insufficient and further work is required to give a better balance between the subjects. Further improvement is anticipated next term when a new member of the staff will strengthen the provision for music. Whilst pupils receive regular lessons in information and communication technology (ICT) the use of these skills across the school is inadequate.

Pupils in Year 3 are gaining from the added stimulus of working on Key Stage 2 material with a larger group of their peers. A recent timetable adjustment is allowing fuller use of the morning for the teaching of English and mathematics. This has, however, created a very lengthy period before the morning break that is not always used sufficiently well to inspire and maintain the interest of the school's young pupils. Afternoon sessions include engaging and productive work in some foundation subjects including design and technology, drama and art. Displays and pupils' books show some stimulating work on topics such as the rain forest, although there are insufficient opportunities provided for pupils to develop their independence by conducting individual research.

The school is planning further changes to the pattern of the school day and has revised plans for its curriculum and its organisation of classes for next year. Some potential benefits are being identified. However, more work and further time are needed to establish appropriate timetables and a curriculum

that makes full use of the range of subjects to promote learning. Although samples of possible timetables exist, it remains unclear how the school will provide a broad and balanced curriculum next term. Arrangements for the care, guidance and support of the pupils remain satisfactory overall despite the continued weaknesses in teachers' assessment and target setting.

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

- Ensure that teaching is consistently good or better – inadequate progress.
- Review the planning, organisation and delivery of the curriculum to ensure better breadth and balance – inadequate progress.

Leadership and management

The school's leaders have been slow to tackle many of the issues that were identified in the inspection report, although some important organisational building blocks for improvement have now been put in place.

The amount of teaching time has been increased and, once further adjustments have been made in September, all pupils in the school should be receiving the appropriate allocation of time. A change to the structure of classes has been agreed and, from September, all but the Reception/Year 1 class will be taught in single age group classes. Staffing for the new academic year has been secured and, with the support of the local authority, two experienced members of staff have been appointed for next year. Together with the headteacher, they will constitute a new senior management team. Governance is now satisfactory. Two experienced governors have been added to the governing body by the local authority, one as chair. The governors have redefined roles and restructured their committees. As a result, governors now have a better awareness of the work of the school and are better able to hold it to account.

Despite the organisational improvements, progress in other areas has been too slow. The headteacher has yet to communicate to the staff a clear vision that will enable the school to improve provision and raise levels of achievement. As a result, most members of staff remain unsure of the action they should take and several of them are anxious about their future. The two newly qualified teachers have not been supported effectively during their initial year

Regular monitoring of teaching and learning has been completed by the headteacher, senior staff and officers of the local authority, but this has not had sufficient impact and the quality of teaching and learning is still too inconsistent and is inadequate overall. In addition, the assessment of pupils' work and the tracking of their individual progress lack sufficient accuracy. Subsequently achievement is not good enough and standards are still much too low.

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

- Ensure that the leadership team provides good strategic direction in order to improve the quality of education for all pupils and tackles the underachievement of pupils of average ability - inadequate progress.

External support

The local authority has provided substantial support for the school and its headteacher since 2003. Arrangements have been made for closer co-ordination of contributions from different personnel including those in advisory, finance, governance and personnel services. The local authority's statement of action complements the school's own development and improvement plan with advice and practical support focused on each of the matters requiring improvement. The local authority has prudently identified a number of alternatives for the school's future and attaches urgency to a rapid resolution of its problems, ideally in good time for a change of status planned for 2007.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures is inadequate.

The quality of local authority's statement of action is good.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Consolidate recent ideas about the curriculum into clear and agreed plans that ensure breadth and balance.
- Ensure the consistent implementation of effective teaching practices so that achievement is improved.
- Strengthen the arrangements for tracking pupils' attainment and projecting targets so that they are based on secure assessments.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children and Learning Services for Norfolk.

Yours sincerely

Tim Boyce
Additional Inspector