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Mrs L Small
The Acting Deputy Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Small

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HUNTINGTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Christine Field, Additional Inspector, to your school on 5 and 6 July 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 March 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 deputy headteacher, the attached consultant headteacher, groups of pupils, parents, the vice chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last inspection, the headteacher has resigned and the assistant headteacher has taken on the role of acting deputy headteacher. A consultant headteacher from another local school has brought further experience and

support. In addition, the services of another local headteacher have been used to improve the expertise to the governing body. There are no plans to close the school and the previously proposed rebuilding of the school on another site is due to be completed in September 2008.

Achievement and standards

As identified in the previous inspection report, achievement in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory but recent monitoring has shown it to be variable. Children make a good start in the Nursery but in the Reception classes some do not achieve their full potential in aspects of literacy and numeracy. Progress is satisfactory in the other learning goals and many children reach the levels expected for their age. This inconsistent progress is partly linked to a lack of communication and the physical distance between the Nursery and Reception classes. This is making it difficult to provide a smooth transition through the two years and on into Year 1.

Achievement through the rest of the school remains inadequate, although there are signs that this is improving. Standards, while marginally improved by the end of Year 2, are below average overall and pupils' achievement is not yet high enough to eliminate the inconsistent progress in the past. This year's national tests for those in Year 2 are likely to show an improvement. Pupils' standards at the end of Year 6 are average. In the recent national tests, the percentage of pupils achieving the expected Level 4 has improved on the 2005 figures and exceeded the targets that were set. However, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher Level 5 is still too low, even though a number are capable of achieving this. This confirms that the legacy of underachievement caused by the weaker teaching is taking time to be eliminated.

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

- raise achievement and standards in Years 1 and 2 by improving the quality of teaching and building on what pupils have learned in the Foundation Stage – satisfactory
- accelerate achievement and raise standards in English throughout the school by raising teachers' expectations, sharpening marking and assessment and using the information properly in planning – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils continue to have good relationships with one another and the positive behaviour underpins their sound personal development and well-being. Pupils told inspectors that following the last inspection they felt very disappointed and to some extent partly to blame for the school not doing very well. They can point to some changes that have helped them to enjoy their learning. These include a reshaped timetable that means they can make sense of the work they are set and better organised homework that sets them weekend

challenges in mathematics and English. The range of sporting opportunities has been extended and new experiences, such as the gardening club, have all helped to raise self esteem.

Attendance, at 93%, has fallen slightly since the last inspection and is below the school's target. Senior managers have usefully begun to make tight checks on absences to establish any patterns and so provide families with appropriate support.

Quality of provision

The teaching seen in individual lessons was generally satisfactory, but the weaknesses identified in the last inspection are still restricting progress over the longer term. Recent external monitoring has identified that weak teaching was more widespread than was initially the case and that there is very little exemplary practice that would provide good role models for less confident teachers.

Pupils continue to be well managed and short term planning has improved through the use of a common lesson plan. Over the longer term, this will ensure that pupils do not miss out any important aspects of subjects. Effective feedback for teachers means that classes do not spend so much time sitting on the carpet and, in some cases, the questioning techniques are more open ended ensuring pupils have to think about their answers. Despite the good start made in developing better teaching, the expectations about what pupils are capable of are still too low. The inspection earlier this year criticised the balance in lessons between teaching pupils about how to think and actually improving their knowledge and understanding. This still remains the case. Hence, lessons are not providing the correct level of challenge and so underachievement remains prevalent.

A useful start has been made in developing assessment, but much more remains to be done so that it is an effective process that assists both teaching and learning. Marking is still not good enough and, in some cases, is cursory. The senior team has started to develop scrutinies of pupils' books to help teachers focus their assessments more accurately.

There are comprehensive procedures in place to ensure that pupils work in a safe and healthy environment. Child protection procedures as well as health and safety arrangements remain robust. Effective support is given to those pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. This includes two specialist classes, one in the infants and another in the juniors. Whilst this provides good academic opportunities, the school has not yet fully analysed whether these pupils are being provided with the full range that others receive or whether all areas of the curriculum are fully covered.

Leadership and management

The acting deputy headteacher and consultant headteacher are providing clear educational direction. In this interim period before the appointment of a permanent headteacher, they have been able to raise the morale and self esteem of staff.

Initial work has been undertaken to identify key weaknesses and in taking a series of actions to begin to remove them. These include reducing the size of the senior management team appropriately and emphasising its role in the leadership of the school. A review of roles and responsibility with all staff allocated to one of three school improvement teams has empowered staff to take a proactive lead in tackling the weaknesses. It has also enabled the production of a well focused school improvement plan that includes clear priorities and ways of checking how successful these have been.

Effective monitoring of teaching, learning and the school's overall provision has raised more issues than were apparent at the last inspection. For instance, it has been found that the provision for the Foundation Stage lacks cohesion and through the rest of the school there were some significant gaps in pupils' knowledge. In addition, the governing body were not well enough aware of how to fulfil their role. Too little time has elapsed for these weaknesses to be remedied but the LA is working closely with the school to revise their own action plan and so provide the correct level of support. Some improvements have been started. The range of assessment data is helping teachers to have a clearer view of the pupils' attainment. However, most teachers lack experience in using this information and so individual targets are not linked well enough to pupils' needs.

Governance is inadequate. Governors accept that, until recently, they have had limited understanding of the school's position in relation to the issues raised by the previous inspection. Training is being implemented to improve this so that they are able to hold the school to account and apply the principles of best value. The governing body has restructured its committees from 21 to 5 and provided each of these with a clear remit. A serving headteacher, experienced in governance, has been appointed to lead the newly comprised school improvement committee set up to monitor the school's post-inspection action plan. The finance committee have only recently come to terms with how to understand the budget and intensive support and training will be needed to ensure that the proposed financing of the new school building and its resources are managed effectively.

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

- establish more rigorous systems for checking and improving teaching and learning, clarify what is being checked and why and take robust action to tackle weaknesses when they occur – satisfactory.

External support

The quality of support has been satisfactory. The use of an experienced consultant headteacher has greatly supported the work of the acting deputy headteacher and the extra governor support is directing where the governing body role can be improved. Other specialists have also begun the work of targeted support although the school reviews are too recent to have had any impact on improving the achievement of pupils.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Quality of the local authority's initial statement of action – satisfactory. However, the recent outcomes of intensive monitoring indicate that the priorities have changed. Therefore, it should be reviewed and updated.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed until the senior leadership team has been stabilised and a permanent headteacher has been appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- To help better integrate the provision of the Nursery and Reception, review and share the planning and range of active learning experiences across the classes.
- Identify and measure the effectiveness of the proposed staffing restructuring, particularly for the pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- Provide governor training to ensure that they better understand the issues facing the school and can both support and challenge the leadership team and make the school more accountable for its actions and outcomes.

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

Yours sincerely

David Collard
Additional Inspector