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Miss Christine Willmott
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Dear Miss Willmott

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HOLBROOK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Chris Russell HMI to your school on 29 and 30 November 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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 headteacher, the deputy headteacher who is also one of the science subject leaders, subject leaders for literacy and information and communication technology (ICT), the special educational needs coordinator, groups of pupils from Key Stages 1 and 2, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA). Inspectors also observed eight lessons or part lessons, playtime and lunchtime, and talked informally with staff and pupils.

Context

Since the last inspection two teachers have left and the school has appointed a temporary numeracy subject leader. The school has reduced from ten to eight classes. The headteacher is leaving the school at the end of the autumn term. An acting headteacher is being sought for January 2007. The governing body has begun the recruitment process for a substantive headteacher.

Achievement and standards

Standards, as shown by the 2006 national test results, are satisfactory. Achievement and standards are inconsistent throughout the school. The school's monitoring of pupils' standards and achievement shows that inconsistencies remain between classes and also between different subject areas. This is because recent improvements in teaching and learning and the curriculum have not yet been in place long enough to ensure satisfactory achievement is sustained over time. At the end of the Foundation Stage, in 2005–06, standards were below average. There were particular weaknesses in writing, calculating and measuring shape and space. The school is now better able to identify pupils' attainment on entry, which remains well below average.

In lessons seen, more pupils are beginning to make good progress because of the continued improvements in teaching and learning. Pupils' writing is still inadequate because too many pupils do not make sufficient progress in their writing. The school is taking action to improve this. For example, the number of opportunities for writing and the range of different types of writing have increased. These have yet to have a significant impact on standards.

Pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress but this masks inconsistencies between year groups. For example, in 2005–06, all pupils with learning difficulties in Year 3 made good progress, whereas in other years there was some underachievement.

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

- increase the rate of progress in raising standards, particularly in mathematics and science for pupils in Years 1 to 6 – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Personal development and well-being are good. The pupils behave well in lessons and at play. Attendance is above average. The pupils have a good understanding of the need for healthy food and exercise. Pupils in Year 2 were able to explain clearly that good food and exercise helped them to grow 'big and strong'. Pupils feel safe in school and know that bullying is dealt with effectively. They are also sure that, if they have a problem, they can seek

help from an adult. Pupils enjoy school and like taking part in different activities in different lessons.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and good in the Foundation Stage. All teaching seen during the inspection was at least satisfactory and half was good. There was no inadequate teaching, which is an improvement from the last monitoring inspection. As a result, almost all pupils are able to make adequate, and in some cases good, progress in their learning. New procedures for managing behaviour are being applied consistently in lessons. Pupils understand them and report that they have reduced disruption in lessons, allowing them to focus much more on their learning.

Good teaching is characterised by thorough planning, with a detailed consideration of the needs of individual pupils. Teachers use their knowledge of pupils' achievement to ensure that work is well matched to the needs of individuals in the class. There is a good variety of activities which interest and motivate the pupils. As a result, they are able to work well on their own or in small groups without excessive support or intervention from the teacher. Skilled teaching assistants are used effectively to support individual pupils and to work with small groups of pupils. For example, in a good mathematics lesson, the teacher used a range of different activities and approaches, including games and competition, to engage the pupils. She used her knowledge of the individual pupils to plan a range of tasks which successfully met the needs of each. Consequently, pupils were well motivated, behaved very well and all made good progress. In a lesson with Reception children and Year 1, all made good progress in their writing skills. This was because the teacher, together with the teaching assistant, provided well planned and targeted activities for different groups of children.

Weaker aspects of teaching include the lack of planning in sufficient depth to cater fully for the needs of pupils of different abilities and aptitudes. Activities are insufficiently adapted to the specific needs of individuals and small groups. Consequently, some pupils are not fully engaged in what they are doing. They have difficulty settling to individual or group tasks and find it hard to work without direct support from an adult. Some opportunities are missed to adapt plans during the lesson when groups or individuals make greater or lesser progress than anticipated. As a result of these weaknesses, pupils are unable to make the accelerated progress needed to overcome previous underachievement.

The curriculum is satisfactory and improving. There is now a sound planning framework, based on the development of pupils' skills in different subjects. This enables the school to plan the content and skills required so that pupils make sufficient progress in each subject as they move through the school. Clear outline plans are in place for the coming two years, with more detailed plans for the next term. The curriculum is being developed to strengthen the

school's provision in a number of important areas, including science. Longer term curriculum plans for the foundation subjects are at a very early stage of development.

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Pupils are well cared for and provided with good pastoral support. As a result, there are good relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff. The school makes good use of external support for pupils with behavioural and emotional difficulties and those with some specific learning difficulties. Pupils with learning difficulties receive satisfactory support through implementation of individual education plans but this is inconsistent. Pupils with learning difficulties are well supported in lessons through effective deployment of teaching assistants.

Marking continues to improve and is more consistent. Much of the marking helps pupils to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their work and indicates how to make improvements. Older pupils, however, are not aware of the precise National Curriculum levels they achieve for much of their work. Pupils do not have target levels for attainment so expectations of their achievement are not sufficiently clear. They have learning targets which help them focus on areas for improvement. The school's recent analysis shows that learning targets for writing are not sufficiently precise to bring about the acceleration in progress needed by many pupils.

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

- raise the quality of teaching and learning to ensure all pupils are consistently challenged to make the progress of which they are capable – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory rather than good because the improvements made have yet to bring about sustained progress. The school, through the effective leadership of the headteacher, has a much clearer sense of purpose about the improvements it needs to make. Self-evaluation is satisfactory and school leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school improvement plan is much improved. It now has more clearly defined targets for pupils' achievement and standards and identifies a range of objectives to be achieved over shorter timescales. As a result, the school is better able to focus its energies on key areas for improvement. The school is less dependent on the LA for support and is taking an increasing role in deciding what improvements are needed and how these are implemented. For example, some improvements to teaching and learning are being planned and implemented by senior staff in school rather than by the LA support. The school's capacity for improvement is getting better but is not yet sufficiently well developed to be sustainable without further external support.

The school has effectively reorganised and clarified the responsibilities of staff in leadership roles. As a result, school leaders are able to make more effective use of leadership time for collaborative planning, monitoring, evaluation and supporting teaching. This is beginning to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Subject leadership remains inconsistent but continues to improve as the school and the LA support its development.

Monitoring by the governing body has improved but there are still weaknesses in governance which the governing body recognises. These include evaluating information gathered through monitoring activities and developing the ability to hold the school to account for the quality of education it provides. The need to recruit and appoint a headteacher is helping governors to consider a longer term vision for the school.

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

- improve the rigour of monitoring and evaluation procedures to ensure rapid improvements in the curriculum provision, teaching and learning – satisfactory.

External support

The quality of support provided by the LA is good. The advisory headteacher provides high quality support for the headteacher and coordinates support effectively for other aspects of the school's work. Support is increasingly provided at the behest of the school in order to best meet its own identified needs. The school also values highly much of the specific subject support provided, for example, in literacy, numeracy, science and ICT.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the rate of improvement in standards of writing.
- Improve lesson planning to provide more sharply planned activities for pupils of different abilities and aptitudes and to enable more effective learning when pupils are not directly supported by an adult .
- Ensure that improvement programmes are not interrupted by the change in headteacher.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Winskill'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent upward stroke at the beginning.

Tom Winskill
H M Inspector