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28 November 2006

Mrs Alison Norcross
The Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Norcross,

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF EAST HUNTSPILL SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 14 and 15 November 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 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

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, the teaching staff, a group of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, a senior member of staff has left. A full time teacher joined the school in September on a temporary contract to take the Reception/Year 1 class. This teacher has since been appointed as the senior teacher from January 2007. The school has another new full time teacher on a one year contract who is taking the Year 5/6 class. Year 2 children are now part of a Year 2/3/4 class, but are taught as a separate group for literacy and

numeracy each day. The school has a new local authority school development adviser.

Achievement and standards

From observation of lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work, and the school's own assessment and monitoring information, standards in English and mathematics are judged to be average. However, a number of pupils in Years 5 and 6 are underachieving as there is sometimes insufficient account taken of their starting points and a lack of appropriate challenge. The majority of pupils in Key Stage 2 make satisfactory progress and many in Years 3 and 4 are making good progress. The more able pupils are making good progress where work is targeted at an appropriately high level and where their eagerness to do their best is encouraged.

In Key Stage 1, progress in lessons is good and pupils know what they have to do to improve. Very good use is made of Foundation Stage profile assessments to set appropriate targets for the Year 1 pupils. The school continues to provide considerable, well targeted additional support to pupils in Year 2 and they are making good progress. The school does particularly well for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities through its provision of effective programmes carefully matched to their needs. These are delivered successfully by the school's excellent team of very skilled learning support assistants.

Children have a good start to school. They are eager to learn and have fun doing so. When they began in September their attainment was broadly average. There were strengths in aspects of their social development and language for thinking, but the majority had a limited understanding of linking sounds and letters. The staff are working hard to develop children's knowledge of phonics and this area shows good signs of improvement in just half a term. The needs of the more able children are recognised and they are being challenged appropriately. Standards in the Foundation Stage are average. The very effective and rigorous monitoring demonstrates that most children are making at least satisfactory progress and many achieve well. Early assessments indicate that the majority of children are on course to meet the learning goals set for the end of the Reception year.

The school continues to analyse assessment information very effectively and to use this to set appropriate targets for each year group. The targets for pupils' attainment by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 are very challenging. The school appreciates that everyone will have to work hard to meet them. The staff make good use of assessments to identify the priorities in reading, writing and mathematics for each year group as well as for individuals and smaller groups. These targets are displayed in the classrooms and most pupils know what they are and understand what they have to do to meet them. Improving the quality of writing has been a specific target and this has

had a positive influence on pupils' work although some aspects of punctuation and spelling are still being developed.

Regular, well focused monitoring of teaching and learning is helping to identify where pupils are doing particularly well and how teachers could improve achievement and raise standards. It is evident from observations that many of the pupils, especially those in Years 3 and 4, have a real thirst for learning and are eager to explain how well they are progressing towards their targets.

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

- raise standards of pupils' basic skills in English and mathematics – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

This is not an area for improvement and was not monitored on this visit.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and some outstanding lessons were observed. Generally, planning has clear learning objectives with account taken of the mixed ages and abilities in the class. Where planning is weaker, the learning objectives are not based on what pupils already know and what they should be learning next and this limits their progress. Lessons are usually well organised and appropriately resourced so that the pupils have the opportunity to be actively involved in their learning. Pupils enjoy being challenged and having opportunities to share their ideas with the rest of the class. The reward system motivates pupils to do their best and to work as part of a 'house' as well as aiming for whole class targets, but the system is not always used consistently. Pupils comment on how much they enjoy earning recognition for hard work, helping others, and good behaviour. The learning support assistants are very well deployed in class and when leading carefully targeted group work outside the classroom.

The younger infants are actively engaged in a wide range of appropriate activities with full use made of the outdoor area to extend their learning through play. Work is differentiated effectively for the two year groups and they rise to the challenges offered.

Ongoing assessment is used very well in most lessons. Teachers often ask challenging questions to assess learning and to offer additional challenges, particularly for the more able pupils. Those with learning difficulties are also very willing to answer questions and misconceptions are managed very sensitively. The pupils in Years 3 and 4 are very adept at assessing their own learning and can give full explanations for their judgements. The comments

they make in their books regarding what they have learned in the lesson and what they found easy or difficult form an excellent foundation for a written dialogue when the teacher marks their work. Good planning is based on such assessments.

Behaviour is generally good or better although a number of the older pupils are not always engaged fully in lessons and behave inappropriately at times. The majority of pupils in the school have very positive attitudes to learning. This includes the youngest children who enjoy working hard in groups, with partners and on their own. Most pupils are given good opportunities to offer ideas, to develop their thinking and to make a contribution to what goes on in lessons.

Curriculum was not a focus of this visit.

Care, guidance and support

Care, guidance and support were not a focus of this visit.

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

- ensure that teaching meets the needs of all pupils by age and ability – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the school continue to improve. The headteacher has led the school very effectively through this time of significant staff changes and has now made an important appointment to support further planned improvements and strengthen the leadership team.

The school's development plan is thorough. Its progress is evaluated extremely well to provide an accurate overview of where improvements have been made, where these still need to become embedded in practice, and where more work needs to be done. The leadership team measures improvements and plans the next steps by the effects on pupils' achievement and standards. Staff work very well together as a team, sharing a vision for the school's future, and participating in the improvement planning process.

Governors are developing very effective approaches to providing the school with appropriate support and challenge including individual links with members of staff according to a subject specialism, for example. They are well led by an informed and highly committed chair. Governors are conscientious in their monitoring of lessons and are gaining a breadth of understanding of the strengths and areas for development across all aspects of the school. They have particularly appreciated the teachers' contributions

to their meetings such as the recent, very informative presentation on mathematics.

Subject leaders and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) have gained noticeably from the good quality support provided by local authority's officers and specialists. The SENCO has successfully built on the contributions from a colleague in another school and on training provided by the local authority to establish new systems for early identification and monitoring of pupils with a range of individual needs including learning difficulties. Staff have had time to reflect on the training and support received last term and to develop their practice to improve provision and outcomes for pupils. They know what is working and have accurately identified where they next need help. These areas include using and applying mathematics and developing the skills of enquiry in science. The good partnership working with staff from other schools is helping the school to develop in the right direction.

The schools' documents, including minutes of governors' meetings, demonstrate close alignment between the school's improvement planning and their finances. The leadership and management recognise what everyone has achieved and, more importantly, what still needs to be done, especially in relation to raising standards. The staff team has worked hard to consolidate the gains made last year and to prioritise the next steps for improvement under the good leadership and management of the headteacher. The school's capacity to improve is good.

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

- ensure that leadership and management have detailed and measurable targets for school improvement – good.

External support

Since the last monitoring visit, the school has received visits from its new adviser who has provided clear guidance and support, especially during the interview process for the senior teacher. The core group has quite rightly recognised the strides made by the school and recognises its role in supporting the next stages of development. Following support received last term, staff have had an opportunity to try out new ideas and to measure their impact on teaching and learning in the short term. This has been positive. The staff look forward to the support of a leading teacher planned as a result of a visit by a literacy consultant.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that all planning is based on what pupils know and what they need to learn next.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Wheeler
H M Inspector