

1 December 2006

Mrs W Marriott
The Acting Advisory Headteacher
Four Acres School
Four Acres
Withywood
Bristol BS13 8RB

Dear Mrs Marriott

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF FOUR ACRES PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Gail Robertson, Additional Inspector, to your school on 14 and 15 November, 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 January 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 including pupils' work, met with the headteacher, staff, groups of pupils, parents, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The acting advisory headteacher remains in post. Two new teachers have been appointed since the last monitoring visit, one of whom is a newly qualified teacher. Two teachers have left after long term sickness. One vacancy has been filled by a long term temporary teacher.

Achievement and standards

The assessments made when children first enter school show that children are well below what is expected for their age. The detailed tracking shows

that they are making steady progress throughout the Nursery and Reception classes, but many Reception-aged children still have a long way to go to achieve the necessary skills and knowledge to start the National Curriculum.

The results from the Key Stage 1 teachers' assessments show that standards remain below national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards in writing have improved significantly, but standards in reading and mathematics are lower than found the previous year. This result reflects the thoroughness of the recent assessments. In Key Stage 1 the legacy of poor past achievement and weak speaking and listening skills, as well overall literacy skills, means that achievement and standards remains inadequate. Scrutiny of work and assessment data shows that pupils and teachers will have to work very hard to achieve the expected level for seven-year-olds in reading, writing and mathematics.

Pupils' standards at the end of Key Stage 2 tests in 2006 for mathematics and science were roughly in line with national expectations. This shows good improvement since the last monitoring visit. There has also been some improvement in the pupils' writing standards. However, overall, the English results remain well below national expectations in this key stage.

The school now has good procedures for tracking pupils' achievements and attainment across all year groups. The leadership carries out in depth analysis of all test results and findings are presented in a format that is clear for all staff and governors.

Personal development and well-being

The majority of pupils are happy and proud of their school and enjoy their working day. Their behaviour and attitudes are generally good. Although there are a few pupils who do not always meet the school's expectations for behaviour, the school is working hard to improve the situation. There have been no exclusions for over two years.

Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to learn independently, such as having discussions with a partner. Many pupils lack sufficient skills to make the most of these opportunities. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. There are now many opportunities for pupils to become involved in the running of the school and to take responsibilities. The school council makes recommendations to influence the smooth running of the school. Its first challenge was the lack of playground activities. The pupils on the council helped to devise the Key Stage 2 playground markings for imaginary games. Year 6 'zone park' leaders are very effective in their work in the playground. They not only help younger children play together, they also calm any conflict. The leaders accept responsibility in a mature way and contribute well to the happy break times. Pupils can also opt to be school librarians and help to keep the library tidy and check on the book stock.

Pupils know about healthy eating and how exercise keeps their bodies fit but, as was found in the last monitoring, pupils still do not always make a healthy choice when choosing a meal at lunch times. Healthy eating at break times has been organised by the parents. Attendance continues to improve and is now broadly average and most pupils are punctual. Pupils said that they feel safe and secure. They understand right and wrong and how to live and contribute to a mutually supportive community. Their varied level of basic skills means that not all pupils are sufficiently prepared for their future economic well-being.

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

- introduce more opportunities for the pupils to become independent learners and to make a stronger contribution to the running of the school – good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There is good teaching in the new Foundation Stage units, in the mostly Year 2 group, and in Year 6. New teachers have settled well in Key Stage 2 and are being appropriately supported in their work. One post is still covered by a long term supply teacher. Stronger teachers match the work well to each pupil's needs but in some classes this ability is still developing as the teachers get to know their new classes more thoroughly. Tasks are clear in all classes but are still not varied enough for all pupils' learning styles. Staff manage behaviour positively and new staff are adopting the school's policy appropriately. Teaching assistants are well deployed and they have a good impact on pupils' learning.

In a minority of lessons progress is steady rather than swift. New strategies are not fully embedded. Evaluation is required to see if these strategies are having sufficient impact on pupils' progress. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are still underdeveloped and teaching does not always focus on these sufficiently. Lesson plans are in place but the degree of sophistication is varied with some having a better range of tasks than others. In good lessons higher attaining pupils are now given sufficiently challenging tasks. All pupils benefit from the high degree of consistency in the marking.

Writing continues to develop across both key stages but there is more to be done to ensure that the progress is maintained at a sufficient pace in all classes. Pupils' confidence in their ability to write is growing.

Target setting continues to be clear and is firmly based on assessment. The very clear analysis of results has correctly identified pupils in need of extra support. Intervention programmes are short and sharp and lead to some good improvements. Teaching assistants play a valuable part in this work.

Since the last monitoring the analysis of results by gender has been developed, it effectively assists staff in planning appropriately to address any related issues. The Foundation Stage assessment is thorough and the information has been transferred effectively to Year 1 staff who now know exactly what children have achieved previously.

The school is taking the necessary steps to enhance the curriculum through the introduction of links between subjects. This was evident in a literacy lesson when pupils were learning about life in Victorian times through reading a play set in those times. Pupils showed their interest and enjoyment by concentrating on their learning and completing tasks. A recent week celebrating the school's 50th birthday brought many subjects of the curriculum together thus ensuring that the learning was good fun and meaningful. Pupils reported that they enjoyed their lessons but sometimes found them hard. The school continues to look for exciting visits out of school and visitors to the school to support learning and bring the subjects to life. The new computers have arrived and pupils are very keen to use the new suite even though the decoration has yet to be completed.

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

- improve the range of tasks in lessons so they are more closely matched to the range of pupils' needs – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The acting advisory headteacher provides good leadership. The chair of governors and other governors are playing a full role in the continued development of the school. The governance of the school is good. The governors have extended their ability to act as critical friends and have made some useful observations on their focused walks through the classrooms. Relationships with parents are developing very well. Parents are more confident to take an active part in the school. Notable successes have been the 50th anniversary celebrations and the cooking club. Both activities have raised the school's morale. The deputy headteacher is a strong role model for other teachers and has included all staff well in the target setting process. He has helped develop writing in Key Stage 2 and is increasing his awareness of the situation in Key Stage 1. The leadership team is functioning effectively. Mathematics is well led. Middle management roles are developing appropriately but there are too few experienced staff to ensure all subjects are fully covered by specialists at present.

Much thought has been given to developing the teaching and learning policy and staff have all played a good part in this work. Pupils have begun to develop their independent learning but this is still in the early stages in most classes.

The improvement plan is effective and is driving improvements in the quality of education and improving standards. The school exceeded the Key Stage 2 targets in mathematics. The criteria for improving English are less clear and require further clarification. Overall, the school demonstrates a good capacity to improve.

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

- develop the capacity for leadership and management across the school – satisfactory.

External support

The school improvement officer has changed since the last inspection. The new officer has already offered the school good support this term. The local authority gives further support through the Intensifying Support Programme, specifically work with the newly qualified teacher and the other new appointment. Good support has been given to the subject leadership of mathematics.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Priorities for further improvement

- Evaluate the current strategies that have been introduced to develop writing, consider streamlining the approaches and also how progress can be best accelerated.
- Continue the monitoring and support for new staff to assist them in honing the match of the work to the different groups of pupils.
- Further develop English leadership in checking the progress of pupils across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Mo Roberts
H M Inspector