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Mrs Tracy Ruddle
The Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Ruddle

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CORNGREAVES JUNIOR AND INFANT SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with John Lilly, Additional Inspector, to your school on 19 and 20 September 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

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met the headteacher, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Three new staff have been appointed since the previous monitoring visit. Three quarters of the current teaching staff were not at the school when it was inspected in October 2005. The consultant headteacher is continuing in post until the end of the summer term 2007. A robust recruitment process is underway to secure permanent appointment for the post of headteacher.

Achievement and standards

The children's attainment on entry to the school is well below average owing to their limited skills in communication, language and literacy and in personal, social, and emotional development. The improved provision in the Foundation Stage since the previous monitoring visit is already having a positive effect on the children's skills in these areas. As a result, the children are now beginning to make better progress.

Achievement is improving in the rest of the school too. A scrutiny of current work and lesson observations indicate that good progress is beginning to be made in Reception, Years 3 and 6, particularly in English and mathematics, because of the improvement in the quality of teaching. Nevertheless, achievement remains inadequate for many of the pupils in the other year groups. There is a wide range of ability in each class and the teaching does always not take sufficient account of this. The school has recently introduced appropriate intervention to offset further slippage.

Progress in reading is improving, particularly since the teachers are now including a specific lesson every day to target particular groups of pupils. Sensibly, the school has recently introduced a similar programme to improve achievement in writing but it is too new to have had any discernable impact.

Standards in speaking and listening are significantly below average across the school. However, some of the older pupils are becoming more confident speakers because of the regular opportunities provided for them to talk about issues with their partners. These opportunities enable pupils to understand the value of discussing ideas and to learn from each other. However, this good practice is not evident in all classes. Therefore, pupils are not yet skilled enough in extending their vocabulary, developing their ideas, and justifying their opinions. This has a direct consequence for their writing, which is still not of sufficient length or well enough organised. Inaccurate spelling, grammar and punctuation hamper the achievement of pupils.

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

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science throughout the school, but particularly at the end of Year 2 – satisfactory
- ensure that all groups and individual pupils make at least satisfactory progress – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Most pupils have maintained good attitudes to their learning and these have a positive impact on their work. Behaviour is good in most lessons and around the school so pupils use the time for learning purposefully. However, the

impact of staff changes has resulted in some pupils in Key Stage 1 feeling insecure and unsettled and this constrains their learning. There are signs that the older pupils are enjoying their increasing achievement but too many pupils still lack the confidence and skills to evaluate their own work and set their own targets.

Quality of provision

Teaching is satisfactory overall. Although a number of outstanding lessons were observed, some inadequate teaching remains. In a minority of lessons, teachers' lack of understanding of the subject and how to teach it, is limiting the progress pupils make.

Where teaching is good or better lessons are well structured and have a brisk pace. Pupils are given ample opportunities to apply and consolidate learning, resulting in them making rapid progress. Importantly, the use of rigorous curricular targets, the teachers' good knowledge of each pupil's strengths and weaknesses, and thoughtful marking and feedback have contributed to boosting achievement at all levels. Nevertheless, there are still some shortcomings in the way work is matched to the needs of all pupils, particularly where teaching is weak. Here, teachers are not taking sufficient account of pupils individual needs and therefore are not providing appropriate work at different levels for different groups of pupils at widely varying stages of development nor do they make best use of assessment information.

There is improved provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD). The newly appointed special needs coordinator has made a good start, including the review of individual education plans. Intervention programmes are now in place to tackle underachievement.

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

- improve the overall quality of teaching by ensuring that lesson activities are matched to the needs of all pupils, so that they do as well as they should – satisfactory
- continue to develop the use of data from assessment to track pupils' progress and set challenging targets for pupils of all abilities – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The leadership team are resolutely focused on raising standards and promoting a caring, supportive ethos within the school community. This is being achieved through intolerance of unsatisfactory teaching as well as to improve procedures for assessment. The leadership of the Foundation Stage is now strong, with robust systems to track the children's movement through the 'stepping stones'. Good provision for the six areas of learning now supports this.

However, inconsistencies across the school prevail. For example, in the drive to improve the pupils' writing skills, the need for a systematic development of speaking and listening skills has not yet been fully developed across the school.

The headteacher continues to provide effective leadership and is moving the school forward well, often in the face of very difficult circumstances. She has a very clear appreciation of the school's current strengths and weaknesses and has the vision to know what needs to be done to improve it further. Teaching is monitored by the headteacher, officers of the local authority and some of the senior leadership team. These actions are beginning to have an impact on standards across the school. However, there remain areas of the school where teaching needs to be monitored and improvement supported more frequently than is currently the case.

Members of the governing body are developing appropriate monitoring roles and are building effective partnerships with subject leaders for English and mathematics.

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

- establish and develop the management roles of all staff so that they have a more accurate knowledge of the school – good.

External support

The local authority has successfully supported the school in resolving short and long term staffing difficulties. It has also been constructively involved in the school's gradual improvements through regular monitoring visits from advisers and consultants. The school improvement adviser's monitoring and evaluation are usefully linked to the previous HMI monitoring letter. The local authority provides a good level of support to the school.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of good teaching in all year groups.
- Improve the pupils' speaking and listening skills.
- Give pupils more opportunities to evaluate their own achievement and plan ways to improve it.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Chief Education Officer for Sandwell.

Yours sincerely,

Jacqueline K Wordsworth

H M Inspector