



11 December 2006

Mrs Jacqui Faux
The Headteacher
Priory School
Burr Hill Chase
Prittlewell
Southend-on-Sea
Essex
SS2 6PE

Dear Mrs Faux

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF PRIORY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Jill Bavin Additional Inspector to your school on 23 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 and met with the headteacher, associate headteacher, senior managers, teaching assistants groups of pupils, the chair of governors, two representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last visit the school has continued to experience staffing difficulties which is having a negative impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. There are currently two vacancies on the governing body which are due to be filled next term.

Achievement and standards

Standards in GCSE examinations in 2006 were above those of similar schools and Year 11 pupils made good progress. For example four pupils who attended regularly gained four GCSE's grades C to F in English, mathematics, science and history. They also achieved the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award and three pupils were awarded with the information and communication technology (ICT) certificate of competence. Furthermore, all pupils who entered achieved the ASDAN Silver Award. Currently, Year 11 pupils who attend regularly and many of whom have lower starting points are making similarly good academic progress. Progress in vocational skills is limited because work-related learning has only recently been introduced and has yet to have full impact on pupils' achievement. Progress at Key Stage 3 is inadequate because there remain too many inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics and science. Throughout the school pupils' progress in personal and social development is limited because there is no provision for the teaching of citizenship. Therefore progress is still uneven throughout the school.

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

- To ensure consistency in pupils' progress across the school, particularly in mathematics and science – inadequate progress

Personal development and well-being

Satisfactory improvements in the curriculum and in the school's approach to behaviour management since the last monitoring visit are beginning to support satisfactory improvements in personal development. During informal discussions pupils were positive about their school, which they feel is improving. Most value the system of rewards and credits and believe that behaviour is getting better as a result. They feel safe in school, appreciate the help they receive and trust staff to help them. Their enjoyment of school is demonstrated in much improved attendance rates and a significant fall in exclusions, since the last monitoring visit. Those who attend are beginning to enjoy their learning. Nevertheless, some lessons are still disrupted by poor behaviour and on too many occasions pupils behave inappropriately around the school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2006

- To improve attendance and reduce exclusions – good progress

Quality of provision

The progress in improving the quality teaching since the last monitoring visit is inadequate, set back by staffing difficulties. As a result the school has failed to meet its ambitious target to increase the proportion of good teaching to 60% and eliminate inadequate teaching. Although most teaching seen was satisfactory, it varied between outstanding and inadequate, particularly at KS3. In the best lessons, teachers have very good relationship with pupils, lessons are brisk and lively, good use is made of resources, particularly ICT and behaviour is managed well. In good lessons pupils make good gains in key skills and in relating to others. However, too many lessons remain inadequate because teachers have weaker subject knowledge or because they do not manage pupils' behaviour well enough. As a result, pupils do not learn enough and they make inadequate progress. Consequently their preparation for life beyond school and future economic well-being are limited. On too many occasions staff tolerated high levels of abusive language and disruptive behaviour without tackling it head on in lessons by referring to the credit system. As a result, pupils continued to disrupt and show disrespect instead of focusing on their work. This inconsistency means that the new behaviour code is undermined and does not always help pupils to make a positive contribution to the school community. The school is developing a number of plans to remove weaknesses in teaching, particularly in subject knowledge.

The curriculum remains inadequate, although improvement since the last visit has been satisfactory. There has been good improvement in the use of ICT across the curriculum and the amount of taught time, which is now satisfactory, has increased. The credit system is promoting more active participation in sport and physical exercise. The school has made a satisfactory start in offering music, religious education and work related learning. However, there is no provision for citizenship and recent staff absences have also affected the delivery of design and technology. The satisfactory start to providing work-related learning means that all pupils in Year 10 have a 'health and safety interview' which raises their awareness of safety in a working environment. They now also prepare for a work placement interview which encourages them to consider their choices on leaving school. There are good systems for monitoring and rewarding attendance through the credit and reward system. Monitoring of academic achievement is satisfactory. The school has identified four pupils who are underachieving in Year 9 but they are not making enough use of this information to address their needs urgently.

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

- To improve the quality of teaching by making lessons more exciting, being clear what it is the pupils are to learn and

ensuring that the work challenges pupils and matches their abilities – satisfactory progress.

- To improve the curriculum, especially with regard to broadening the vocational choices available. Increase the amount of time for lessons, offering music and enhancing provision for citizenship, religious education in Year 11 and ICTAC – satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

Improvement to leadership and management since the last monitoring visit is satisfactory. The headteacher is now providing stronger leadership and is proving to be less reliant on the support of the associate headteacher. She has provided a strong drive for improvement and has now introduced and implemented performance management measures. There are improved procedures for systematic monitoring of attendance, teaching and learning and the curriculum which are having a positive impact in the school. The school improvement plan now contains more challenging targets and clear criteria to measure success against each priority for development. The headteacher, therefore, demonstrates a clear capacity to improve. However, the capacity to improve overall remains inadequate because the work of senior managers and governors does not have a strong enough impact on school improvement. Although senior managers support the headteacher, they are not vigorous enough in driving improvements forward. Governors are now more involved in monitoring the progress against each area for improvement with a named governor responsible for a specific areas to ensure the development of the whole pupil. They now visit more regularly to monitor progress, but they have yet to ensure that the outcomes of these visits have an impact on the areas for improvement.

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

- To ensure that the leadership and management of the school have a clear view about how the school should move forward, monitor and evaluate its work effectively and use the available information to identify the areas that need further improvement - satisfactory progress

External support

The LA has continued to provide satisfactory support for the school's improvement. Since the last monitoring visit, it has provided the school with satisfactory advisory support to promote the development of ICT, French, and the interpretation of whole school data. It has also secured improvements to the school accommodation to facilitate teaching and learning. It has monitored the work of the school through the School Recovery Panel and

provided good support for leadership through the associate headteacher. It has also considered a contingency plan for improving teaching and developing the curriculum in the event that teachers who are absent do not return next term. This needs to be formalised and urgent action is required prior to January 2007.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that targets for eliminating inadequate teaching and increasing the proportion of good or better teaching to 60% are met, by improving teacher's subject knowledge and ensuring that they have higher expectations for behaviour in lessons.
- Ensure that citizenship and design and technology are taught and that work-related learning and music are extended.
- To ensure that all senior managers are monitoring and supporting teaching and learning more rigorously through regular and systematic visits to lessons.
- The LA must ensure that urgent action is taken to enable the school to reach and sustain its targets for improving teaching and addressing the weaknesses in the curriculum.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children and Learning for Southend-on-Sea LA

Yours sincerely

Deemed signed in absence of signature

Declan McCarthy
Additional Inspector