



8 December 2006

Ms A Hennell James
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Hennell James

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HALIFAX PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Heather Weston HMI, and Gulshan Kayembe and Denis Pittman, Additional Inspectors to your school on 22 and 23 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

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, pupils, staff, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The school organisation has changed since the last monitoring visit. The acting headteacher's appointment has been extended to August 2007. The school was unable to appoint a permanent deputy headteacher for September. A new senior member of staff, appointed to lead work in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, is covering the position of acting deputy headteacher until August 2007. Three members of staff have retired and two new teachers, one of whom is newly qualified, have joined the staff. An

experienced teaching assistant has been appointed to lead the school's work on improving behaviour. Support from an advanced skills teacher which was expected to begin in September will start next week. A new chair of governors was elected by the governing body in October. As a result of building work in the summer holidays, some of the open plan class spaces in Key Stage 2 are now enclosed classrooms.

Achievement and standards

Standards and achievement were judged inadequate at the time of the inspection and, although they are improving, they remain so. At the end of the last school year in 2006, standards at the end of the Reception year were well below average. Standards at the end of Year 2 had improved in comparison to 2005, with the exception of results at the higher Level 3 in writing, but were still below average. Trends in results for pupils of average ability rose in reading, were static in mathematics, but fell in writing. Standards improved in English at the end of Year 6 and were in line with national averages although results in mathematics and science remained well below average.

Overall, standards in pupils' work are well below national expectations, with variations between classes and year groups. The progress pupils are making is still too uneven; pupils in some classes and year groups make better progress. From a scrutiny of pupils' work and an analysis of the school's tracking data, improved progress is evident in Years 2, 4 and 6. Weaknesses in pupils' word and sentence skills are contributing to the low levels of achievement in writing.

Further improvements have been made in developing the use of data for tracking progress. A system for marking, recording and analysing regular assessments in writing and mathematics is now in place. The mathematics subject leader has analysed the outcomes of mid-term assessments, and returned the analysis to teachers with a report on pupils who are underachieving and need intervention. The English subject leader is aware that not all staff have a clear understanding of how to accurately judge the quality of children's writing. Consequently, she plans to moderate assessed writing with each teacher to assure a consistency of judgements, and ensure that teachers have a clear understanding of how to help pupils improve.

Clear guidelines have been given to teachers on the progress pupils can be expected to make. Each teacher has received guidance on keeping an up-to-date assessment file but there is still some inconsistency in its use. More precise targets for learning are now displayed in classrooms and are recorded in pupils' literacy books. However, not all pupils are sufficiently aware of these. Discussions on improving the marking of pupils' work have taken place and a revised system for marking has been provisionally agreed. In the classes where this is already adopted, it is having a positive impact on pupils' progress.

The acting deputy headteacher is supporting the development and use of assessment in the Foundation Stage effectively. As a result of her analysis of the 2006 Foundation Stage profile, teachers in Year 1 have a clearer understanding of the weaknesses in pupils' skills and standards. Although the organisation of assessment in the Reception class has improved, an overall entry profile, from which to judge progress in the Foundation Stage, is not yet in place.

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

- To use assessment data to regularly monitor progress – satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

The management of pupils' behaviour has improved. Good procedures are now in place. These are consistently applied by staff so that much of the behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. This is a considerable improvement since the inspection and on the situation encountered on first monitoring visit. A comprehensive system for tracking individual pupils' behaviour is helping to identify patterns and pick out those who persistently offend. This has had a positive impact on modifying behaviour and reducing the level of disruption to learning. Pupils have noticed this themselves. They say that major disruptions to learning are now rare, although some minor disturbances continue.

The school recognises that several pupils continue to require a system of sanctions to maintain their good behaviour. A minority of pupils, mostly in Years 5 and 6 have found it difficult to adapt to the new and more demanding expectations. These pupils continue to disturb some lessons and, on occasions behave unacceptably. Consequently, fixed term exclusion rates remain high. A range of initiatives is in place to support pupils with challenging behaviour, including working with the high school to support successful transition from primary to secondary school in an attempt to reduce the risks of exclusion in the future. The visible presence of the behaviour support assistant, who took on this role in September, is adding to pupils' sense of safety and provides encouragement to all to try hard to behave well. In the case of a very small number whose behaviour is persistently unacceptable, the school has requested that the LA make alternative provision. Although the LA has agreed with the school's judgement, places are not currently available.

There are improved opportunities for pupils to take responsibility around the school. For example, older pupils help to set up the hall for assemblies and provide support in the dining room at lunch times. The school council is continuing to develop its role and members are aiming to include their

classmates in discussions about how the school can be improved. The chair and vice chair of governors plan to meet the school council to discuss how, together, they might bring about improvements. Pupils, in the main, are not concerned about bullying though they indicate that there is still some name-calling. Nevertheless, they are confident that staff will deal with such issues if they are brought to their notice.

Attendance has improved this term, although a few pupils continue to arrive late. From a below average position last year, the attendance so far this term is in line with the national average. Thorough monitoring systems are in place and a system of rewards, MIMO (Miss It Miss Out) for good attendance is encouraging pupils to come to school regularly. More parents are informing the school about why their children have been away. Unauthorised absence is still above average. This is because the school no longer authorises any holiday in term time, and teachers record late arrivals after the registers close as unauthorised absence. The school is working effectively with the education welfare service to support those pupils who are frequently absent.

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

- Secure consistency in the management of pupil behaviour – good progress

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is now satisfactory; this represents an improvement since the last monitoring visit. The proportion of good teaching, just over half, has increased and met the revised target set by the school for December 2006. The judgements on teaching, made by the acting headteacher and deputy headteacher when monitoring lessons, correlate closely with those made by inspectors. Although there were no inadequate lessons observed during this visit, just under half of the lessons seen were satisfactory. The school appreciates that consistently good teaching is needed in all classes to tackle underachievement.

Teaching is better because teachers have responded positively to the good support and guidance for effective planning and assessment. The regular monitoring of lessons and detailed feedback, including points for improvement, have also had a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching. The developing teamwork in year groups is helping teachers to share effective teaching strategies. Teachers' planning is now more focussed on creating interesting lessons. Teaching assistants are better at supporting pupils when teachers are teaching the whole class. Interactive whiteboards are used more frequently to help stimulate learning and illustrate teaching points. In some classes, teachers are starting to use the end of lesson

plenary to engage pupils in evaluating the success of their learning. Behaviour has improved so relationships in lessons are more positive. In spite of the improvements, teaching is less effective in the year groups where pupils are making less progress. In some lessons, the work is not matched precisely enough to pupils' levels of ability. The time allocated in lessons for teaching the whole class can be too long with too little time included for pupils to work independently or in groups. Sometimes, lessons are over-directed by teachers when they feel this enables them to maintain better control. This inevitably reduces the opportunities for pupils to work independently. The school recognises that assessment for learning techniques are not yet fully adopted by all teachers, and that older pupils would benefit from having more structured opportunities to improve their problem solving and independent working skills. Opportunities for pupils to use information and communication technology (ICT) while learning in other subjects are currently very limited.

Improvements have been made to the curriculum since the last monitoring visit. A new overall plan was introduced in September with a better balance between subjects, including more time for science and a greater focus on key skills. There is now a greater clarity of purpose in lessons and pupils are made more aware of how their learning is connected. Teachers are beginning to link learning in different subjects together and make lessons more interesting. For example, Year 6 pupils worked excitedly on a follow up to an educational visit to London which had captured their interest and increased their motivation for learning. Attractive displays of art work around the school illustrate the wide range of experiences provided. Lessons in PSHE observed during the monitoring visit were used well to help pupils think about how best to manage their behaviour.

The introduction of the support class for Key Stage 2 pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties is a positive development. Pupils are supported well in this class, behaviour is managed expertly and pupils' personal development is benefiting significantly from their inclusion. Intervention groups, taught by teaching assistants, are now organised for mathematics. The school has begun to consider the provision for gifted and talented pupils and started to increase the number and range of extra-curricular activities available for pupils after school. The involvement in a local sport partnership has provided teachers with gymnastics training and sports coaches lead some of the after school clubs. The amount of curriculum time for Key Stage 2 pupils remains below the statutory minimum. The school is taking action to remedy this and is following the recommended procedures for consulting parents.

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

- To improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that all lessons are well planned and sufficiently challenging to raise standards – satisfactory progress

- To use time more effectively and improve the balance of the curriculum – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

Leadership and management continue to improve. The acting headteacher has successfully built on the positive start made in the summer term bringing much needed stability to the school. This continues to be appreciated by staff, parents and pupils. The school is presented as a brighter, more attractive learning environment and staff are a much more cohesive team. The appointment of a senior teacher who has taken the role of deputy headteacher is another positive improvement. Together the strong partnership of headteacher and deputy headteacher is working successfully with the school's leadership team, staff and governors to tackle the key issues identified in the inspection.

The leadership team has embarked upon a regular and clearly focussed programme of monitoring. This includes observations of teaching, the scrutiny of planning and sampling of pupils' work. Teachers now receive detailed feedback on the strengths and areas for improvement in their lessons. Performance management procedures are much more robust and all teachers have targets which are linked to the progress made by pupils. The contribution made by the acting deputy headteacher has been crucial in bringing about improvements in teaching and learning, particularly in the Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1. Improvements in planning and assessment expectations in Reception and specific guidance and support for newly qualified teachers have proved particularly effective. She has also accompanied teachers to see effective teaching strategies modelled in other schools.

The post inspection action plan has been revised and is now a much more sharply focussed document. The school's self evaluation record has also been rewritten and includes mostly accurate judgements of the school's overall effectiveness. Several other documents have been drafted to guide future improvements and a new, attractive, accessible and well presented prospectus provides good information for parents. Open mornings have been organised to enable parents to come into school and see it in action.

Subject leadership in English and mathematics continues to improve. Both subject leaders are regularly involved in the monitoring and evaluation programme. They have written reports, following a scrutiny of pupils' work, on the quality of differentiation and marking. Each year group has received feedback on points for action and improvement. The management of the support for children with learning and behavioural difficulties has also strengthened and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) is an active member of the leadership team. Intervention programmes have been

introduced to help children catch up in mathematics and an evaluation of these indicated some points for improvement which the school will introduce later this month. Subject leadership other than English and mathematics still requires improvement.

Governance has improved since the last visit. The governing body has begun to discharge its duties in a more coherent and systematic way. The school now has a full complement of governors and a new and experienced chair of governors has been elected. The pivotal partnership between the acting headteacher and chair of governors is much stronger. Regular meetings between them ensure that the governing body is kept fully aware of the actions the school is taking to bring about improvement. An up-to-date monitoring schedule of governors' visits shows that regular visits have been made and feedback reports written, including in some cases points raised for the governing body's attention. Governors are becoming better informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses.

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

- To improve the quality of leadership and management through the use of rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures – good progress

External support

This has improved and is now good. The weaknesses identified in the last monitoring letter have been remedied and the school considers the support from the LA to be good. LA consultants are successfully helping to guide the work of the mathematics and English subject leaders. Better advice and guidance is received to ensure support for children with behavioural and learning difficulties is effective. Staff and governors have also received useful training from the school's link inspector. The core action group meets regularly to review progress since the school was placed in special measures. The LA and school are rightly pleased that improvements are now underway and that progress is at least satisfactory in all respects against the key issues identified in the inspection.

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

- The priorities highlighted during the first monitoring visit remain the same.

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

Yours sincerely

Deemed signed in absence of signature

Rob McKeown
H M Inspector