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Mrs Libby Banks
The Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Banks

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF REDHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Nancy Walker, Additional Inspector, 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 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 acting headteacher, senior staff, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, a representative from the local authority (LA) and some parents. Lessons were observed in every class.

Context

There continues to be a high number of changes to staffing. Several teachers and support staff have left or are about to leave and the previous headteacher has now resigned. The school hopes to appoint a permanent headteacher in the near future. The number of pupils in school, following a period of gentle decline, has stabilised recently.

Achievement and standards

The standards reached by pupils aged 11 show some improvement but because of the continued lack of progress made by many pupils in Years 1 to 4 and the results achieved by the younger pupils, standards and achievement remain a cause for concern and inadequate overall. This is especially true for writing.

In the 2006 national tests pupils aged 11 showed a welcome improvement, especially in their reading. Results are no longer significantly different from the national average and, given the legacy of low standards from previous years, this is a considerable achievement. Although the number of pupils reaching the higher levels remains low, a small number did manage this which is an improving picture from previous years.

However, the standard of writing is a serious concern and is the main reason why standards remain low overall. Similarly, the results attained by pupils aged seven in 2006 were disappointingly low and the standard of work in Years 1 to 4 is not improving rapidly enough. This is not the case in Years 5 and 6 where good teaching and higher expectations are leading to rapidly improving standards.

There are, however, some specific aspects of work that are still poor across the school. In particular, the standard of handwriting and presentation is inadequate and many pupils still have a limited awareness of spelling strategies. There are few examples of the use of a rich vocabulary in either speech or writing because there are too limited opportunities for pupils to practise and develop this breadth.

In mathematics there are signs of significant improvement in the Years 5 and 6 classes where pupils show an enthusiasm for the subject and can multiply two and three digit numbers using a range of strategies and solve problems with increased accuracy. However, this encouraging development is not yet reflected by the younger pupils where there is a fragile grasp and understanding of basic number skills.

Pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities are often well supported in class with additional help. The quality of this support is generally good and, as a result, these pupils make better progress in lessons. The difference in performance between boys and girls by age 11 has narrowed slightly since the inspection in January, especially in reading, but remains significant with girls performing better than the boys in all main aspects, but especially writing.

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

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science by ensuring that boys do as well as girls, and speaking and listening and writing are developed well in all subjects – inadequate progress overall despite an improvement in the speaking and listening skills of many pupils and the work of Years 5 and 6.

Personal development and well-being

Standards in pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are adequate overall. Pupils are often very polite to visitors and they follow well established routines. They are happy to come to school and say the teachers are the best thing about their school. Attendance levels are broadly average. Pupils work well together in lessons, even when the work they are asked to do is unsuitable for their ability. Pupils try their best and they often try to help each other. This all helps to create a calm and orderly environment.

As a result of improved teaching in some classes, pupils' attitudes are now better. Pupils follow instructions more closely, although the use of play as a reward does not always encourage a good work ethic. For example, some pupils in Years 1 to 3 think it is good to finish their work before the end of the lesson so they can play. Attitudes of pupils in Years 5 and 6 are better but some pupils are reluctant to take up the offer of an after school mathematics club to help them to improve. Behaviour is generally satisfactory but pupils themselves think there is still too much 'name calling' and 'telling tales'. The school council is hoping to improve the playground facilities but councillors are unsure as to how, or when, they will make this happen.

Quality of provision

The quality of the curriculum, apart from in the Nursery and Reception classes where it is satisfactory, remains largely the same as it was in January 2006 when it was judged to be inadequate. There is little evidence that it has been developed to build on pupils' skills in subjects as pupils progress through the school, although a very useful document has been produced to do exactly that but only in the four basic rules of mathematics. The curriculum is better now in Years 5 and 6 and this is reflected in an improvement in the standard of work. The outdoor facilities for the Reception and Nursery children remain bland and inadequate and classroom equipment is sometimes lacking which hinders learning. Pupils appreciate visits out of school and say they make topics more interesting but the range of out of school activities is extremely limited.

The standard of teaching is satisfactory overall but improving, with an increasing proportion of good teaching. The school is also aware that some teaching remains inadequate. The best classes are now characterised by

higher levels of challenge and expectations, but this is not yet consistent throughout the year groups. In those classes where this is more commonplace the pupils thrive on it and say they enjoy their learning and behave better. One pupil expressed this in terms of 'we are learning so much more now.'

In some classes teachers are now looking for opportunities to lift the level of challenge through effective questioning. However, there remain too few opportunities for writing at length in class. For those pupils with limited language skills this inhibits progress and learning. Many more pupils can now explain their targets and what they have to do to reach them, but a considerable proportion are still unclear about the purpose of what they are doing in lessons.

Where teaching is inadequate or just satisfactory there is a tendency for teachers to talk for too long at the expense of pupil discussion and writing, or to accept work that is below what pupils are capable of. Similarly, there is a lack of effective assessment so lesson planning is not always well matched to pupils' needs. Sometimes work is too hard and sometimes too easy. Marking has improved and now offers constructive advice but this is more evident in the older classes.

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

- improve the quality of learning through raising expectations of what pupils are able to do, ensuring challenging activities are matched to their needs and improving the pace of learning – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the school continue to undergo substantial change and, as a result, remain fragile. The acting headteacher has won the confidence of governors and is managing the day to day work with sensitivity. She has a determination to succeed and has made some improvements to the way the school is managed. In particular there is now a focus on raising standards. However, there remains much that is not done with enough rigour or which remains incomplete. The depth and quality of monitoring the school's progress is insecure and the analysis of performance data is not yet used to help school planning in sufficient detail.

The governing body remain supportive and encouraging to the school. However, there are some vacancies for governors that remain unfilled and the work of the sub groups suffers accordingly with much of the responsibility resting on a few key governors. This has the effect of limiting their contribution to school planning and analysis, although they increasingly ask pertinent questions and report a more rigorous level of discussion.

The senior management team works hard with the best interests of the pupils at heart but the quality of its planning is variable and sometimes lacks specific targets. Where there are targets it is not always clear where they have come from. The major school documents, such as a school improvement plan, are incomplete and embryonic. Records kept often lack detail and much good work fails to have the impact that it should. An example of this is in the minutes kept from various meetings which do not always show what decisions are taken. The result of this is that the required changes are not made urgently enough. There are also some basic safety concerns that need rectifying as a matter of urgency.

The role of subject leaders is underdeveloped and in some subjects about to change. There are examples of good leadership emerging in some subjects, for example mathematics, where an accurate awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses leads to a realistic plan for improvement. However, the role undertaken by subject leaders is still variable, not all have the time to carry out their role fully and the school acknowledges some areas where resources are dated and inadequate.

The above picture prevents leaders from having the impact on raising standards that is necessary. There is not sufficient urgency. Many of the plans do not focus sufficiently on outcomes for pupils. This is despite some of those concerned working hard and diligently. The problem remains a lack of basic management systems that help make actions routine and more formal. For example, the monitoring of teaching, although taking place, lacks focus, sometimes incomplete, and overly informal at times. Crucially, the outcomes of this monitoring are not used sufficiently to improve the quality of teaching. As a result some plans lack the clarity and simplicity that would contribute to school improvement.

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

- strengthen the leadership of the school by improving existing monitoring and evaluation systems so that the information gained is used rigorously to raise standards – inadequate.

External support

The school values the support of the representatives of the local authority and the attached inspector in particular. They recognise the importance of the advice being given. However, there is not enough practical, regular and formalised support offered to the school by partners in the leadership programme. This leads to some delays in decision making that have impeded the progress the school is struggling to make. As a result, despite the helpful work of many, external support is inadequate.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – there are some encouraging signs, especially in relation to standards attained by age 11, but the pace of change and the continued lack of rigour in monitoring makes progress since the last monitoring visit inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve standards of writing across the school.
- Inject rigour into the analysis of data, the monitoring of the extent of pupil progress and of teaching quality.
- Ensure all teachers plan lessons that provide sufficient challenge for all pupils in order to increase the pace of learning

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

Yours sincerely

Ceri Morgan
H M Inspector