

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR
T 0845 123 6001
F 0845 123 6002

Ofsted helpline
08456 404045
edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs L Small
The Headteacher
Huntington Primary School
Stafford Road
Huntington
Cannock
Staffordshire WS12 4PD

Dear Mrs Small

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HUNTINGTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Pat Lowe, 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 March 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, various groups of pupils and teachers, parents, the chair of governors and two representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last visit the acting deputy headteacher has been given a permanent position following interviews in July. The senior leadership team has been restructured to include a Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 leader. Other middle managers have also been appointed, for instance as literacy and numeracy strategy leaders and as special needs coordinator. In addition, nearly all teachers have changed year groups or key stages.

Achievement and standards

Whilst overall achievement is still inadequate, there are some signs of an upturn. This is particularly evident in the 2006 national test results where there was a significant improvement on those in 2005. In Year 2, 20% more pupils gained levels that were in line with those expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. Similarly, in the Year 6 tests, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected Level 4 in English, mathematics and science were the highest within the school for some years. However, the test results also show that there are still some areas where achievement is not high enough. Writing results are still too low and the pupils capable of achieving better than average standards in mathematics and science are not progressing as well as they should. In addition, there are some year groups, notably Years 3 and 5, where the legacy of underachievement is still depressing standards.

As at the last visit, achievement in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory but is less variable than it was. This is because the structures are being put in place to ensure there is a smooth transition between the Nursery and Reception classes. In addition, moderated assessments are helping the teachers to uncover the weaker areas of progress such as in communication, language and numeracy.

Through the school, pupils are making different rates of progress depending on what classes they are in and this is directly connected to the quality of teaching. Where teaching is strong, then pupils are very quickly catching up on the specific subject skills that they have missed in the past. However, this level of progress is much less evident where teaching is only satisfactory.

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

- raise achievement and standards in Years 1 and 2 by improving the quality of teaching and building on what pupils have learned in the Foundation Stage – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Personal development is good. An effect of the better quality of provision can be seen from the steadily rising attendance figures, which are now close to the national average. The school has received good support from outside agencies to achieve this improvement. Good attitudes, behaviour and relationships have contributed significantly to the slowly improving academic progress that pupils are making. Most pupils are enthusiastic and enjoy learning. This can be seen from their improving levels of effort and concentration. They feel safe in school and know whom to approach if they experience difficulties. They have a good understanding of the need to lead

healthy lifestyles and take on responsibilities with enthusiasm. Through membership of the school council and opportunities to develop enterprise skills, they are starting to contribute to the development of the school and the community.

Quality of provision

Teaching has improved since the last visit but is still too variable between classes. There are now some examples of both good and outstanding teaching but, as the school's monitoring has shown, there are still some pockets of inadequate teaching. Planning has improved and is no longer undertaken in isolation. This has resulted in pupils being given more appropriate work that builds on what they have learnt before and has helped raise the standards by the end of Years 2 and 6. In addition, the high levels of support being provided have helped improve the weakest teaching and, in some cases, teaching in these classes is now good. More remains to be done. The school's target of all teaching being satisfactory and half of it good has not yet been reached because some teachers are not challenging pupils enough through their questioning or providing work that makes pupils think. Nevertheless, there is a new found confidence within the teaching, a fact acknowledged by the pupils who say they now find learning more exciting. This is due, in part, to the new team structure that is allowing staff to share ideas. Many are now prepared to accept that they must improve the delivery of lessons to ensure that lost ground is made up quickly.

The curriculum covers all the expected subject areas and there have been some good attempts to enliven more mundane aspects. Inevitably, because of low performance, this has been concentrated around the basic skills within literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology and science. Other subjects have had less attention, although this is starting to change. Good use is made of visits and a sports coach provides pupils with specialist support once a week. Links to basic skills are being incorporated, such as through a topic on India.

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The school provides a good level of personal guidance and support which contributes to pupils' personal development, enjoyment and well-being. Careful attention is paid to health and safety issues and child protection. Improved induction arrangements have helped Nursery and Reception children to settle happily into new routines. Transfer arrangements to secondary schools are carried out sensitively. The school continues to develop good links with parents. With the appointment of a new special needs coordinator, the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities has improved and is now satisfactory. Effective links with a range of local agencies safeguard the needs of the most vulnerable pupils. The impact of care, advice and guidance on individual pupils' academic progress has greatly improved, especially within planning and through the marking of pupils' work. Analysis of whole-school trends is

now a school priority. Work has started on using the data more systematically but it is still at an early stage.

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

- accelerate achievement and raise standards in English throughout the school by raising teachers' expectations, sharpening marking and assessment and using the information properly in planning – good.

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

- help better integrate the provision of the Nursery and Reception Years, review and share the planning and range of active learning experiences across the classes – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The new headteacher has created an ethos in which staff, parents and pupils have a common aim of raising achievement. Morale is high. She is being very well supported by the local authority and the senior leadership team. Management systems have improved and there is an increased emphasis on monitoring and self-evaluation. Staff have good opportunities for professional development and training. Staff are now more carefully deployed to ensure that pupils are taught better and are well protected. All this has led to an improvement in the quality of teaching. The improved tracking procedures have enabled staff to start identifying more accurately where individual pupils are underachieving. Governors have received high levels of training and support. Financial management has been stringently analysed by outside auditors and actions taken to remedy the deficiencies. The governing body is trying to take a more active role in shaping the vision and direction of the school and so providing a greater level of challenge. However, this has not yet had significant impact. For instance, the minutes of meetings are not always recorded and so governors cannot keep a close track of decisions or where responsibility lies for taking action. In addition, some governors' attendance at meetings is sporadic. Until these issues are addressed, the governors cannot determine whether progress will be maintained or that developments will be sustainable into the future.

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

- establish more rigorous systems for checking and improving teaching and learning, clarify what is being checked and why and take robust action to tackle weaknesses when they occur – good.

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

- identify and measure the effectiveness of the proposed staffing restructuring, particularly for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities – satisfactory
- provide governor training to ensure that they better understand the issues facing the school and can support and challenge the leadership team and make the school more accountable for its actions – inadequate.

External support

The quality of external support has been good. The local authority has produced a new and very specific statement of action that clearly defines where improvements are needed, how these should be measured, and what will happen if they are not accomplished. A number of specialists are working with teachers and the positive effects can be seen in the improvement being made both in individual lessons and in pupils' progress.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may now be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Use assessment information to identify whole-school trends in performance, to track different groups of pupils and to gauge the effectiveness of teaching.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

David Collard
Additional Inspector