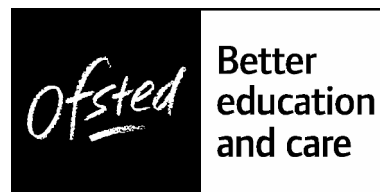


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15 December 2006

Mrs V Cranton
The Headteacher
Gorse Hill Community Primary School
Hollymount Road
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Worcestershire
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Dear Mrs Cranton

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF GORSE HILL COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Mark Hitch and Liz Bull, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 6 and 7 December 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first 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 you, the senior leadership team, the chair of governors, an additional governor and a representative of the local authority (LA).

Context

Following the inspection in March 2006 the deputy headteacher was appointed as the acting headteacher for one term. Subsequently the governors recruited you to lead and manage the school from 1 September 2006. At the same time, the LA also seconded an experienced deputy headteacher to further strengthen the school's leadership. During this

inspection an arts week was taking place which meant that the normal weekly curriculum was suspended.

Achievement and standards

The results of the 2006 national tests present a mixed picture. At the end of Key Stage 1 standards fell considerably, particularly in reading and writing where just over half the pupils reached the level expected for their age. At the end of Key Stage 2 standards rose significantly in mathematics, fell in science, and remained at a very low level in English, where fewer than half the pupils reached the level expected for 11-year-olds. In each key stage standards are below and sometimes well below average and pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory. Rates of progress are far too slow and too many pupils are either making no progress or falling further behind in their work. The gap between what the pupils are currently achieving and what they are expected to achieve for their age is too wide and not yet closing at a sufficiently speedy rate. There is considerable underachievement in each year group and particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.

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

- improve achievement and raise standards in English and mathematics by accelerating the rate of pupils' progress in both subjects – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils behave well, are courteous, polite and welcoming to visitors. They listen attentively and are keen to learn. Relationships between pupils and between adults and pupils are generally good. In lessons pupils work well with each other, particularly in small groups and with their 'talk partners'. Children in the Reception classes work well, particularly without direct adult supervision.

Quality of provision

Whilst the quality of teaching ranges from good to inadequate and remains unsatisfactory overall, there is clearly the potential to improve it further and increase the proportion of good and better teaching. All teachers have received intensive training and support to improve the quality of lesson planning. This is beginning to improve and there is a greater consistency of approach in each key stage. Where teaching is good, expectations are high, there is a good pace of learning and questions are used effectively to challenge the pupils' thinking.

Nevertheless, significant weaknesses remain and these are impeding the pupils' progress. Assessment information is not used well enough to plan work that is matched sufficiently accurately to the pupils' different learning

needs. As a result the pupils' progress is too slow. Learning objectives are often too broad and confused with the pupils' tasks. Because of this it is difficult for teachers to measure how successful their lessons are in raising standards and helping the pupils increase their knowledge and understanding. Basic skills are not taught well enough, particularly in reading and writing. The work of teaching assistants is too variable. In some lessons assistants provide good support, rephrasing and repeating the teachers' questions to help groups of pupils make satisfactory progress. In other lessons, particularly in whole class introductions, when the teacher instructs, the class teaching assistants are too passive.

The curriculum is being revised to increase opportunities in other subjects for teaching English and mathematics. Whilst this is appropriate there is some confusion about how literacy and numeracy should be taught alongside revisions to the overall curriculum. There is not a sufficiently clear and coherent approach to this process, particularly how best to evaluate the impact of changes in relation to raising achievement.

Curriculum targets in English and mathematics have recently been introduced for each pupil. These are linked to National Curriculum attainment levels and have the potential to help teachers and pupils know what needs to be taught and learned in order to raise achievement. Currently many pupils are unaware of their targets and there is a lack of clarity about how the targets should be used alongside the wealth of assessment data which the school has collated.

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

- improve the quality of teaching by requiring all teachers to use assessment information properly to assist their planning and target setting – inadequate.

Leadership and management

Since joining the school you have undertaken a range of initiatives to improve the quality of education. The provision for pupils who have specific learning difficulties has improved, additional resources have been purchased to raise standards in reading, subject leaders have received training to improve their role, and procedures have been introduced to track the pupils' progress and their achievements. These are all important actions and have helped put the school on a firmer foundation for further improvement. However, there has not been enough emphasis on tackling the school's most pressing priorities, namely the key areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006.

You and other senior teachers have monitored the quality of teaching and learning by visiting lessons, scrutinising the pupils' work, and checking

teachers' planning. These are appropriate actions but have not been pursued with sufficient rigour and sense of urgency. There have been too few checks on the quality of teaching and the link between good teaching and raising achievement has not been given enough emphasis. The written feedback to teachers about their work does not provide sufficiently clear guidance about what they are expected to do to improve. Whilst areas for development are identified these are not translated into clear and unambiguous targets for improvement. Similarly there is very little indication of how senior staff will follow up the improvements that need to be made.

Self-evaluation is weak, particularly evaluating the impact of actions in relation to eliminating the school's weaknesses. An assembly did not meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship.

There is a range of assessment information which has been collected to track the pupils' progress and their achievement. This information is currently presented in a number of different formats which is not helping the senior management team have a sufficiently clear overview of the pupils' performance. Similarly some assessments, for example in writing in Year 2, are inaccurate and contradict previous teacher assessments. Not enough use is made of assessment data to hold teachers to account for the standards achieved by the pupils in their care.

The action plan provides a broad framework for improvement but does not give sufficient emphasis to measuring the impact of various actions in raising achievement in each year group. There is not a coherent short term plan which shows how the actions of senior staff, governors and the local authority will be coordinated and how the impact of actions will be measured against the urgent need to raise standards and achievement in reading, writing and mathematics.

Teachers' job descriptions and responsibilities are currently being reviewed. This is very timely as many staff have management responsibilities which have not been revised since the school went into special measures. You and the governors are rightly determined to ensure that better value for money is achieved from the school's collective leadership and management than is currently the case.

Governors' committees have been reviewed and there is a clearer focus on raising achievement and monitoring the quality of teaching. The LA has strengthened the governing body by appointing two additional governors. However, there is still much to do in order that the governors might carry out their statutory duties more effectively, particularly to hold the school to account for the standards achieved by the pupils.

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

- improve the quality of leadership and management by establishing greater rigour in the checks made on teaching and learning to ensure that they are always strongly focused on raising standards – inadequate.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is satisfactory. There is a secure programme of monitoring, intervention and support with a clear commitment to regular and frequent evaluation of the school's progress. Although the LA has provided an outline of action against each of the school's areas for improvement, there are very few short term success criteria to measure the impact of actions in raising achievement. Similarly the progress indicators set for each term do not give sufficient priority to pupils' rates of progress and whether the school's actions are making a positive impact on raising achievement.

The school's link adviser, literacy and numeracy consultants, and other advisory staff are providing a range of support to improve the quality of teaching and learning, leadership and management and to raise achievement. Whilst the school's leadership is now on a more secure footing than previously and strategic planning is improving, the overall impact of the LA's work in raising pupils' achievement has been limited.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

There are no further priorities for improvement. The school should address the key areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006 with greater rigour and an increased sense of urgency.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Watters
Her Majesty's Inspector