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27 November 2006

Mrs Nicola Harwood
The Headteacher
Wolston, St Margaret's C of E Primary School
Brookside
Main Street
Wolston
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Warwickshire CV8 3HH

Dear Mrs Harwood

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WOLSTON, ST MARGARET'S C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Jeremy Royle, Additional Inspector, to your school on 8 and 9 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 was found to have serious weaknesses in June 2005.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, subject and phase leaders, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA), and spoke to some parents.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit one new teacher has been appointed and two have increased their hours. The new teacher is based in a Year 1 and Year 2 class. One of the teachers who increased her hours has taken on the role of lead teacher for the Foundation Stage base with Reception year and Nursery pupils.

Achievement and standards

Standards and achievement are satisfactory. Children start at the school with overall attainment at the level expected for their age and reach average levels for their age at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. Pupils make good progress in the Nursery and Reception year across all the areas of learning. The new lead teacher for the Foundation Stage has ensured a good focus on learning. There has been particular attention given to early reading, writing and mathematics, providing children with good skills upon which teachers can build in Key Stage 1.

Pupils made satisfactory progress in Key Stage 1 across the academic year 2005 to 2006. More focused teaching in ability groups for English and mathematics, combined with higher expectations from teachers, helped to accelerate progress after the February monitoring visit. Pupils reached standards expected for their age by the end of the year. Girls performed better than boys, except in higher levels of writing and mathematics. Standards presently in Year 2 are at the expected level and the progress pupils are making is satisfactory.

Pupils in Years 3 to 6 make satisfactory progress but this is improving. In 2006, pupils' results in the national tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6 were broadly average. Boys performed better than girls in higher levels of mathematics and girls performed better than boys in literacy and higher levels of science. During inspection observations progress made by pupils in Key Stage 2 was always satisfactory and often good. Setting in mathematics has helped teachers to target all ability groups more effectively and progress is improving as a result.

Improved procedures for tracking achievement have helped teachers to identify quickly pupils at risk of underachieving and the necessary targeted support and focused teaching is put in place for pupils of all abilities.

Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) remain lower than expected but are rising rapidly as a result of the new resources and an increase in the teachers' skills. Pupils are beginning to use ICT across the different subjects but this is not sufficiently embedded in all planning. Pupils' progress in this area is satisfactory.

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

- raise levels of achievement in the Foundation Stage (Reception Year) – outstanding
- improve standards of attainment in writing, mathematics, science and ICT by the age of seven, particularly for those pupils who are higher attaining – good.

Personal development and well-being

The personal development and well-being of pupils continue to be strengths of the school. Pupils behave well and good or better behaviour was observed throughout the monitoring visit. In all lessons, pupils were attentive and they were usually well

motivated. The pupils interviewed stated unanimously that they enjoyed school because learning was fun and the staff are always willing to help. They were particularly complimentary about the way in which staff try to 'catch you being good'. One pupil felt this had very effectively helped him change his whole attitude to school. Cooperation amongst the pupils is encouraged and pupils rise to these high expectations. Some very good teamwork was observed in a science lesson where pupils supported and questioned each other, thereby improving the investigations being carried out. Pupils at the school take on a wide range of responsibilities. They take these seriously and behave in ways which provide excellent role models for younger pupils. The school council is well organised and pupils feel that their views are valued and acted upon.

Pupils are well aware of how to stay healthy and many are involved in additional sports, exercise and arts activities. The majority make healthy food choices when in school and pupils are involved in trying to develop a healthier reward system. The increase in progress being made by pupils alongside their increasing responsibilities prepares them well for future education and life outside school.

Attendance in 2005/06 was similar to the national average for primary schools. However, absence due to family holidays during term time has had a significant effect on the progress made by some individuals.

Quality of provision

Teaching is satisfactory with an increasing proportion of lessons being good. Some lessons have outstanding features. No inadequate teaching was observed during the monitoring visit. Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive, helping to create a purposeful atmosphere with a sense of fun.

There has been outstanding improvement in the Foundation Stage since the last monitoring visit and practice is now good. Children make good progress as a result of effective assessment and all staff having a keen awareness of the next steps for pupils. The planning keeps child initiated activities and adult led activities in a suitable balance and there is a good focus on learning.

Good assessment informs the teachers' planning and work is usually effectively matched to pupils' abilities. Teachers' questioning across the school has improved and pupils are more often challenged in their thinking and required to explain their answers. Good or better teaching is characterised by teachers checking if pupils understand what they are learning throughout the lesson and adapting the teaching accordingly. Expectations of what pupils can achieve have been raised and pupils are usually rising to the challenge.

Rigorous tracking has ensured pupils who are at risk of underachievement are identified quickly and additional support is put in place. Similarly, pupils who have the potential to achieve higher standards than average are identified and additional work and expectations are well embedded in Key Stage 2. Occasionally some pupils in Key Stage 1 do not achieve as much as they could and are satisfied with doing

'just enough'. Teachers are aware of this but more strategies need to be employed to stop this occurring. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to the progress of all pupils. Work and the role of support staff to help pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) are usually very well planned and based on a good understanding of the needs of the pupils. Occasionally, strategies to help pupils with LDD need to be carried out more consistently by all staff.

An emphasis on improving curriculum planning for literacy, numeracy and science has contributed to the increase in progress made by pupils. The planning structures are satisfactorily embedded in everyday practice and, as a result, opportunities for developing a more creative approach are now available. There are some good examples of developing creative work across subjects and this has been extremely motivating for pupils. Resources are now satisfactory, and particularly good for reading. The use of the new mathematics resources that have been purchased has helped to improve planning but this is yet to be fully embedded in practice. ICT resources have improved significantly since the previous inspection and monitoring visit. Teachers' competence has improved but they are sometimes lacking the skills and organisation for teaching whole groups in the ICT suite.

Pupils' knowledge of how they can improve their work has improved since the last monitoring visit. Marking is good, it occurs regularly, and provides a detailed assessment of work. In some classes the guidance offered to pupils is extremely good and it is clear that pupils respond to this and are motivated to improve their work. This type of help is not consistent in Key Stage 1. Class teachers have very effectively raised their expectations of pupils and pupils have a good understanding of their targets. The high expectations are not always shared by supply teachers who spend less time with the classes.

Support from staff to help pupils' personal development is excellent and there is very good attention given to raising self esteem as a way to help pupils make more progress in other areas of learning.

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

- improve teaching in the Reception Year to Year 2 in particular by matching it to pupils' individual needs so that they all do as well as they should – good

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

- improve the quality of hardware and software in ICT and its use by all pupils in their subjects – satisfactory
- improve the levels of learning resources in English and mathematics, particularly in relation to reading and a structured scheme of work – good.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The headteacher has developed the staff team so that there is the necessary drive to

continue to take the school forward. All staff recognise the need to improve on current practice and are becoming more skilled at identifying how they can do this. As a result, standards rose in 2006 and progress made by pupils is now often good.

Monitoring of teaching and learning is more regular and rigorous than at the last monitoring visit. The headteacher has a very good knowledge of individual staff and their capabilities. The LA system used to give clear written feedback to teachers on areas of strength and aspects of their practice that could be developed is good. This not only gives individuals a clear indication of how to improve but also enables the headteacher to identify whole school issues that need further development work.

Literacy and numeracy subject leaders have had suitable training and are now involved in monitoring standards and progress in their subjects. This has involved some lesson observations. The school has rightly emphasised a joint approach with all staff helping to assess the level of work completed by children. Staff have been given opportunities to observe in other schools to ensure expectations are high enough and this has contributed to the raised expectations across the school. Improvements in ICT have been effectively established by the introduction of new resources alongside carefully targeted training for staff but the school recognises that development in ICT is in its infancy.

The lead teacher in the Foundation Stage has ensured outstanding progress since February 2006. New systems for planning and assessment, alongside a clear focus on what children need to learn, have been well led. The lead teacher has rightly identified the need for further training to ensure all staff recognise the same level of achievements by children across Nursery and Reception. The provision in the base is good and pupils are making good progress.

There are clear action plans and the school, with the support of the LA, has effectively evaluated what has helped it to improve so far. After a slow start, following the inspection in June 2005, the pace of change has increased. The good progress made since February 2006, alongside clearly identified priorities for development, demonstrates the school has a good ability to improve further.

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

- provide more opportunities for subject coordinators to monitor teaching and learning in their subjects – satisfactory.

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

- increase the frequency and rigour of the monitoring of teaching and learning so that all teachers fully understand what improvements are necessary and take effective action – good.

External support

There has been good support from the LA since the last monitoring visit. A coordinated approach with subject consultants, officers and the link inspector has

helped the school make significant progress. The support has helped some staff make difficult decisions which have given the school opportunities for further development. The last LA review provided an accurate picture of the progress made by the school. The action plan is well designed to meet the needs of the school and the link inspector has a very good understanding of the priorities for future support. The action plan contributes to the school having a good ability to improve further.

Main Judgements

The school has made good progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no further areas for improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, and the Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families Services for Warwickshire.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Janet Thompson', written in a cursive style.

Janet Thompson
H M Inspector