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Mr P Goulding
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Dear Mr Goulding

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ROWLATT'S HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Nada Trikić HMI, Nancy Walker and Clive Lewis, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 29 and 30 November 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 May 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 interim headteacher, nominated staff, a group of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Following the last inspection, the headteacher resigned. The interim headteacher started in September and has been appointed for two terms. The school hopes to make a substantive appointment for April 2007.

Achievement and standards

Standards of attainment remain too low and pupils' achievement is inadequate. The pupils' results in the most recent national tests, just after the last inspection, showed some increases, but there was no significant overall

improvement compared with the previous year. In Key Stage 1 assessments, there was a slight improvement in the proportion of pupils who attained the higher Level 3 in reading, writing and mathematics, although fewer than half of the pupils attained the expected Level 2 in writing. In Key Stage 2, more pupils attained the higher Level 5 in English and mathematics, although the proportion attaining the expected Level 4 in each subject declined compared with the previous year. Results in science improved overall. Standards by the end of Year 2 and the end of Year 6 remain below average.

Standards of work seen in lessons confirm this picture. With a few notable exceptions, the standard of pupils' work in numeracy and literacy is below age related expectations and often very low. The pupils' weaknesses in literacy, particularly in writing but also their skills in speaking and listening, act as a barrier to rapid progress across the curriculum. Standards of presentation are also poor in several classes.

The school has taken suitable steps to implement better systems for assessment and tracking of pupils' progress. As a result, teachers are beginning to develop a better understanding of where pupils are and the progress they are making and ought to make. However, these systems are very new and are yet to have any significant effect on teachers' planning or the quality of guidance for pupils. Although pupils have targets for literacy and numeracy, these are not properly used to plan work that is matched to their different needs, and little reference is made to these targets in lessons or in marking.

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

- set pupils challenging targets for attainment which are regularly reviewed – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

The interim headteacher has sensibly prioritised pupils' attitudes to learning and standards of behaviour as additional areas for improvement. Rewards and sanctions have been clarified and are applied much more consistently so that all pupils now know what is expected of them and the consequences of any transgression. Staff, governors and pupils agree that the clarity of the interim headteacher's expectations has greatly improved the school's ethos and climate for learning. Short term exclusion has been used effectively to set clear expectations and improve behaviour. Pupils say that the headteacher is 'strict but fair' and they are pleased and reassured by the fact that incidents are now dealt with promptly and effectively. Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They feel comfortable in what is now an orderly school community. Most pupils are engaged and interested in their work. They respond positively to the rewards system which reinforces positive learning, social skills, respect and behaviour. Despite these improvements, however, pockets of silly or inattentive behaviour still disrupt some lessons, but these are often linked with disorganised, dull or ineffective teaching. In the main, pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance and punctuality have improved when compared with the same term last year.

Some older pupils show a lack of urgency in getting to classes on time at the start of the day, but this is also linked with low teacher expectation.

The establishment of the school council has been a good development. The pupils now feel that their ideas are listened to and that they are included in helping to improve the school.

Quality of provision

Elements of teaching have strengthened since the last inspection but the overall quality of teaching and learning remains inadequate because too many pupils make insufficient progress in lessons and over time. Although some lessons observed during the inspection were good, too many were barely satisfactory and the pupils' progress in these sessions, and in lessons that were unsatisfactory, was too slow and too uneven.

Some improvements have been made in planning, particularly in the way that lesson objectives guide pupils' learning, and in the type and variety of planned learning activities. Opportunities to develop speaking and listening to address poor language skills have increased. This was a positive feature in many lessons and pupils clearly enjoyed the chance to participate and talk about their learning. The use of paired work and 'talking partners' in several lessons helped pupils to develop their language and confidence and engaged them well in their learning. The 'Philosophy for Children' initiative has had a positive impact by encouraging pupils to think in a more focused way and to strengthen cooperative learning.

In the most effective lessons, teachers planned good activities to stimulate the interest of pupils. When this work was well managed, the pupils' enthusiasm was skilfully channelled and careful questioning probed and assessed their understanding. In these lessons, the pupils collaborated well and worked hard. When the work of teaching support assistants was properly planned, they were able to make a very effective contribution to lessons, particularly when they skilfully promoted the pupils' learning with good questioning.

However, there remain significant weaknesses in planning and assessment, and in the way that learning is directed and managed in some classes. Short term planning is not sufficiently sharply focused on the new learning that different pupils will acquire, a problem that is exacerbated by the wide range of ability in mixed age classes. Poorly prepared work is a barrier to independent learning. One consequence is that pupils have to spend too long listening for information, or listening passively while others answer questions. In these lessons, too much time is wasted and the pedestrian pace occasionally results in distracted or disruptive behaviour. Systems for target setting and recording assessment have strengthened, but some teachers do not have strategies to routinely check what pupils understand so that they can guide what they need to do next. Furthermore, much of the hard work that teachers put into marking is ineffective because it does not result in improvement. Although some peer assessment was observed in a physical education lesson, the pupils' involvement in target setting and assessment is

underdeveloped. Most pupils have little idea what they need to do to improve. Support for academic guidance remains inadequate.

Significant changes have been made to the Early Years curriculum since the last inspection. Planning and assessment systems are now based securely on the Early Learning Goals for the youngest children. Organisation of the day has been revised so that a satisfactorily planned range of child initiated and adult led activities are organised under a 'freeflow' system which most of the teaching staff have taken on board.

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

- improve the effectiveness of teaching, especially by matching work to pupils' needs and capabilities and increasing the pace of learning – inadequate.

Leadership and management

Since his arrival in September, the interim headteacher has transformed the school's leadership and management. He has provided excellent strategic leadership and very effective day to day management at a difficult time for the school. He has brought rigour to school self-evaluation and clarity to improvement planning and has skilfully developed the previously neglected roles of other senior leaders. There is still a long way to go in developing leadership capacity at all levels. Key staff are beginning to understand their responsibilities within the school. The roles of assessment, literacy and numeracy coordinators have developed suitably, although their job descriptions have yet to be formalised. New procedures for monitoring the school's work give each of them a much clearer overview of standards and their own accountability for raising them. This has strengthened the process of self-evaluation.

In addition to focusing staff on key priorities for improvement, the interim headteacher has sensibly addressed developments on a much wider front, including improvements to the accommodation, learning environment, pupil behaviour and provision in the Foundation Stage. He has worked very effectively with the LA consultant to ensure that external support has been tailored to meet the specific needs of the staff and that it is used effectively to build capacity within the school. Peer coaching has been a positive development and there are sensible plans to appoint an additional member of staff.

The role of the governing body has been strengthened. Governors are much better informed about the quality of provision and progress and are therefore in a stronger position to hold the school to account. However, despite the recent appointment of an additional LA governor, there are several unfilled places on the governing body and much of the work rests with too few individuals.

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

- ensure all leaders monitor the performance of the school rigorously and follow this through to action where improvement is needed – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority's statement of action sets out an appropriate programme of support for the school and is good. Since the last inspection, the school has made good use of consultants from the LA. This advice and support has been sharply focused, timely and very well coordinated. Above all, the impact of this support has been properly followed through so that the expertise of external consultants is now maximised rather than wasted.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of the learning environment so that the school provides a stimulating place for pupils to learn and play.
- Focus teaching more sharply on what and how pupils with different abilities will learn.
- Assess pupils' progress more routinely in lessons and more rigorously in marking so that pupils are clear what they need to do next.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker HMI