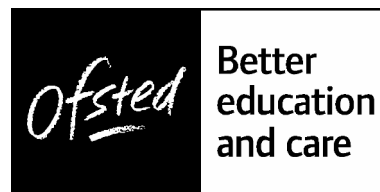


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12 December 2006

Mrs H Pickin
The Headteacher
Joiners Square Primary School
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Dear Mrs Pickin

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF JOINERS SQUARE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Christine Field and Anne Johns, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 28 and 29 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 June 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, senior leaders, the school council, the chair of governors, members of the governors' review committee, a representative from the local authority and the advisory headteacher working with the school.

Context

Since the inspection in June 2006, the school has appointed a deputy headteacher. Three teachers left the school in July which led to substantial change in the staffing of year groups at the start of this term. A newly qualified teacher was appointed from September 2006 without formal sanction from Ofsted. This teacher left in October. One other teacher is due

to leave at the end of the current term. The school will start the spring term 2007 in its new premises.

Achievement and standards

The trend in the improvement of achievement and standards has been inconsistent and is inadequate overall. Achievement has been improved satisfactorily in the two Foundation Stage classes and the children clearly enjoy their learning and work well. From the evidence of lesson observations and the school's profile data, it is evident that this term the children are making good progress in all six areas of learning, although standards remain below average.

There has been satisfactory improvement of achievement in Key Stage 1. In Year 1, the improvement has been satisfactory and the teacher, who joined the school at October half term, has settled the class following the unsatisfactory start they had with the newly qualified teacher in September. Pupils in Year 2 are making increased progress due to the improved quality of teaching since the start of this term. Lesson observations show there is much improved attention to the match of work to the different abilities and needs in the class. The Key Stage 1 results at the end of last school year were higher in reading and mathematics than in 2005, although they were below average. There was still a significant weakness in writing, where standards were much too low. At present, this is a continuing weakness.

Improvement to achievement in Key Stage 2 has been inadequate. Since September, pupils in Year 3 have benefited from improved teaching, although fussy behaviour sometimes slows their progress. In Year 4, achievement has been accelerated well over the last few months because of the effective use of targets for achievement in literacy and numeracy. In Years 5 and 6, there are significant periods in lessons where progress grinds to a halt due to the disenchantment of pupils because the work lacks challenge and they find it boring. Standards in Year 6 at the end of last year were broadly average in English and science, but well below average in mathematics. This year, it is unlikely that Year 6 pupils will meet their targets because of the serious inadequacies in teaching. This impacts negatively on their readiness for secondary education and life outside school.

Personal development and well-being

The evidence from the inspection of lessons, discussion with the school council, and observations at break and lunchtime shows that pupils' personal development and well-being is satisfactory, which is similar to the situation last June. Behaviour is satisfactory overall and can be good at times, especially in assembly and at lunchtime. Behaviour of pupils in Years 5 and 6 lessons is unsatisfactory and staff spend too much time sorting out arguments and managing poor conduct. The older pupils quickly lose

enthusiasm for work which slows progress considerably. Children in the Foundation Stage are keen learners who enjoy school. Pupils know the need to keep safe, taking sensible action to avoid accidents, even though the poor condition and cramped size of the buildings present several potential hazards.

Quality of provision

The improvement of teaching quality has been inadequate overall. There has been some useful improvement to the quality of teaching in Years 1 and 3, although support is still required to ensure the improvement is sustained. Additionally, the need to reassign some teachers to other classes in January 2007 presents several problems. In Year 2 there is ample evidence to show that there has been good improvement in teaching in the last three months.. The arrangements made for Year 5, with the departure of their teacher at the end of term, are precarious due to the weaknesses observed in lessons taken by the incoming teacher. Year 6 are experiencing inadequate teaching at present, although there are planned changes to improve this.

The school has set a target of 75% good teaching. At present it is nowhere near this level. Of the lessons observed, just 40% were judged to be good. There are too many inadequate lessons, especially in Years 5 and 6. Inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work this term showed the weaknesses clearly. The pace of learning, challenge in the work and match to pupils' ability levels are too inconsistent to be satisfactory. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching lack rigour and focus on pupils' achievement which means that the strengths observed at present in the Foundation Stage and Years 2 and 4 do not extend beyond these classrooms. There has been a lack of urgency in improving teaching and learning which has significantly affected pupils' achievement.

Assessment, target setting and tracking procedures are now in place for the whole school, which marks satisfactory progress from the situation last June. It is in the Foundation Stage where the impact has been the greatest, with good use now being made of the profile of achievement in matching work to the children's needs. In other parts of school the use of assessment and target tracking is inconsistent. There is some promising practice in Years 2 and 4 but elsewhere lesson planning still makes the match of work to pupils' abilities imprecise. The quality of guidance on academic matters is hampered by the weaknesses in assessment for learning. Pupils have too few opportunities to evaluate their own work and marking does not show them where improvement can be made.

The curriculum has been maintained at the satisfactory quality shown last June. Nonetheless, provision for pupils learning English as an additional language is of concern. In discussion, teachers admitted to a lack of training and insufficient qualified and experienced support staff to enable them to implement anything more than a basic level of provision for these pupils.

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

- improve the accuracy and use of assessment information to ensure all pupils are suitably challenged and shown how to improve – inadequate
- develop efficient tracking and target setting procedures in order to rectify shortcomings in pupils' achievement more quickly – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The chief shortcoming of leadership and management is the lack of concerted drive for improvement. The leadership team shows an understanding of the school's performance that matches its newness. However, the members have good expectations and, individually, work hard for improvement. The headteacher knows what needs improving but the sense of urgency in taking effective action is still missing. The headteacher does not provide leadership that is focused squarely on driving up standards and achievement. Too much trust is placed on what people say rather than on the effectiveness of what they do.

School improvement planning does not contain firm enough statement of, or focus on, the key priority of pupils' achievement. There is imprecise identification of individual responsibility and deadlines for completion. Over the last six months, many deadlines have come and gone with little or no advancement. Improvement to provision and achievement has not been consistent enough. This is due to the slow progress made in introducing a rigorous programme of monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. Where monitoring has taken place, it is often descriptive rather than evaluative. At present, school self-evaluation is not rooted in compelling evidence and is based more on hope than actuality. The move to the new school is seen as the answer to many of the weaknesses and in some respects has diluted work to bring improvement to essential systems and procedures for maximising achievement. The school has not demonstrated the necessary capacity to improve in the future.

There have been some helpful improvements, however. The leadership and management of the Foundation Stage is now much more securely based on data about children's achievement. Governors are alert to the need to ask questions about the school's performance and to enquire about trends in the data. Since September, senior leaders have ensured that the procedures to set and track targets have been introduced into all parts of the school.

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

- strengthen leadership and management at all levels by having a more rigorous approach to the evaluation of teaching and its effectiveness in raising pupils' achievement – inadequate.

External support

The local authority has provided significant support for the school during the past six months. The advisory headteacher has given intensive support. At the start this was focused on the plugging of gaps in school management systems and in overall provision. More recently, attention has turned to the introduction of long term solutions, although these have had to be planned in considerable detail to ensure the headteacher will implement them effectively. The guiding hand of the local authority has been very necessary and the impact of its work has been satisfactory. Local authority advisory staff recognise that their work will only become fully effective when the school takes full responsibility for its improvement.

The local authority's statement of action is satisfactory. It meets the requirements to

- assess the scope for the school to be federated or closed. This is not to be the case in this instance
- set an appropriate target date for removal of special measures, June 2008
- identify the detailed action by the local authority to support the school. This includes resources and is quantifiable, but not all milestones have timings against them.
- explain the extent of local authority services and partners to support the school
- indicate that the local authority has chosen not to appoint additional governors and that the SDA is to attend governors' meetings.

Main Judgements

The progress made since the school was made subject to special measures has been inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that there is resilient and focused leadership that brings rapid improvement to provision and pupils' achievement.
- Use rigorous monitoring and evaluation and target tracking procedures to make significant progress towards the school targets of 75% good teaching, especially in Years 1, 3, 5 and 6.
- Speed the pace of learning, increase the challenge for pupils and match work more precisely to their ability level.
- Plan determinedly for improvement of the quality of provision for pupils learning English as an additional language.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Stoke-on-Trent.

Yours sincerely

David Carrington
Additional Inspector