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Miss Riggs
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Dear Miss Riggs

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF GLOUCESTER ROAD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Rodney Braithwaite, Additional Inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 October, 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 November 2005.

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 lessons, attended an assembly, observed lunchtimes and playtimes, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher and staff. In addition, discussions were held with groups of pupils, the recently appointed chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last visit there have been some changes of staff, including new teachers in Reception and in the Year 4 and 5 class. The deputy headteacher led the school following the resignation of the headteacher in May 2006. The deputy headteacher was appointed to the headship in mid September and

started officially immediately afterwards. The vacancy created in the Year 3 and 4 class is covered for one term and another teacher will replace her from January for two terms. The appointment of a new deputy headteacher is planned for September 2007.

Achievement and standards

The steady decline in results for the Year 6 pupils has been partly reversed, as reflected in this year's national tests. In English for example, the results have shown a marked rise but in mathematics the decline has continued. Science results dropped slightly as not all pupils reached the expected level this year. In contrast, more pupils gained the higher Level 5 than last year in all three subjects. Standards in Year 2 dropped slightly in reading and writing, but rose in mathematics. The number of pupils reaching the higher levels dropped slightly in all three subjects. The mixed pattern of results indicates that there is still too much inconsistency between subjects and year groups, but the focus on improving English in Years 3 to 6 has succeeded in raising standards. The school's efforts are now rightly switching to mathematics.

Children in the Foundation Stage are making better progress, particularly in their language and number skills, due to general improvements in the teaching. In Year 1 pupils continue to make satisfactory but uneven progress. The lower attaining pupils have weak number skills, due partly to their slower rate of learning in the Reception class last year. The pupils in Year 2 are making satisfactory progress. Their writing skills are approaching those expected and the pupils are using a wider vocabulary in their work. The pupils' weaker speaking skills show some signs of improvement, but pupils are still not sufficiently clear or confident. In Years 3 to 6, standards are still generally lower than expected particularly in Year 5. Pupils' progress and standards of writing in Years 3 to 6 are improving. Pupils use a wider vocabulary and are more skilful in arranging their thoughts. In Year 5, pupils have much weaker writing and number skills. This has been identified by the school and this age group will be a focus for improvement.

Planning is generally more closely matched to pupils' needs, particularly for those with learning difficulties and disabilities, but some weaknesses remain. In the Reception class for example, planning promotes fun and effective learning activities in number and language but does not yet sufficiently promote pupils' independent learning. In Years 1 to 6, the school has reviewed its curriculum to be more creative and link learning between subjects more effectively. This is at an early stage and not all staff are confident about how to devise activities which extend pupils' learning. However, the planning is helping teachers to devise more motivating topics, for example one called 'what a load of rubbish' explores environmental issues.

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

- raise standards and improve achievement by making sure that learners of all ages are given work to do that meets their needs and capabilities – satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' well-being and personal development continue to be satisfactory. Around the school and at playtimes most pupils behave well, but there were some instances where pupils did not readily respond to the direction of non teaching adults. In some lessons in the junior classes, there was some low level disruption which hampered the flow of the learning. Lunchtimes are generally orderly, although pupils waiting to be dismissed or who have responsibilities became restless and some misbehaved. In contrast, children in the infant playground, aided by some junior pupils, behaved very well. Pupils comment openly and positively about the recent changes and appreciate they have a part in bringing about improvement. The school council members spoke with enthusiasm about their roles, but these have not been fully developed or clarified. This reduces the council's effectiveness and the pupils were unclear about the ways in which they could communicate their suggestions. The school has developed good links with the community. These include links with the local church and both sporting and academic activities out of school.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning was good in two lessons observed and satisfactory in the remainder, which is an improvement since the last visit. Good features of teaching were seen in most lessons. In the Reception class, there are good relationships fostered between adults and children and teaching is showing a steady improvement. Good teaching in the school was highlighted in a French lesson in the Year 3 and 4 class which reflected the teacher's high levels of subject knowledge. Teachers are beginning to develop exciting visual and verbal situations which stimulate pupils' imagination, such as the teacher role playing a character in the Year 4 and 5 class. Teamwork to discuss good practice is beginning to help improve aspects of teaching and pupils' learning. Nevertheless, some lessons still have overlong introductions and teachers are still developing their expertise in adapting teaching to pupils' different learning styles. Day to day assessment of pupils' progress is more effective in identifying the next steps in learning and this is often reflected in the marking of pupils' work. In a minority of comments, the teachers are too positive about work which is of average quality and do not follow up the advice they give in relation to earlier work.

In the Foundation Stage, the classroom is generally better organised than at the time of the last visit, but there are still some weaknesses. For example, the new outside area is helping to promote children's physical development but some limitations in the quantity and quality of resources are still hampering the children's progress.

The care, guidance and welfare of pupils remain satisfactory but have improved in some aspects. Staff have a much clearer knowledge of pupils' progress through the increasingly effective use of assessment and monitoring information. Target setting for pupils is now in place in all classrooms. Pupils say that they have a good idea as to how they are doing because of their discussions with teachers and also through reading the marking comments in their books. Not all pupils know what their targets are without reference to their target cards, but those that do are honest in assessing their progress in meeting them. Governors now have all statutory policies in place relating to child protection.

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

- improve the quality of marking in Years 1 and 2 – satisfactory
- improve the quality and provision of accommodation and resources within the Foundation Stage – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The progress made in improving the leadership and management has increased considerably since the last visit. The deputy headteacher has managed to improve morale and her appointment as the substantive headteacher has enabled good continuity of leadership. For example, the school improvement plan has been refined to a more manageable set of action plans. This gives a clearer sense of direction and better use of resources. The day to day management of the school is effective and staff comment positively about the difference. For example, they appreciate that the headteacher responds quickly to resolve issues and queries. The focus on English last year has been successful in remedying weaknesses and is now switching to mathematics throughout the school. Better use of assessment is providing a clearer idea about which year groups to tackle more urgently.

The school's monitoring is becoming more effective. For example, teaching is regularly observed and this is leading to a clearer view of its quality. Some observations are not always clearly focused on the pupils' learning, although general strengths or weaknesses do emerge. The new teaching and learning policy gives staff a clear view of the characteristics of effective lessons, but falls short of giving practical ideas to use. The school has surveyed the parents to gain a clearer view of their concerns. However, most have been positive with few issues raised. The reforming of the parent and teacher association to develop closer links with parents is nearing completion. The governors have also reviewed areas of their work, led by the recently appointed chair of governors, who took over the role just before this visit. The outcomes of these reviews have the potential to improve the quality of the governors' support, particularly the self-evaluation processes, but the proposed changes have not yet had time to be adopted or take effect.

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

- rectify the weaknesses in the leadership and management of the school – good
- improve the rigour and robustness of the self–evaluation and monitoring process – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has provided a good range of support during the changeover in headship and in helping the school to tackle the issues raised from the first visit. The link adviser has provided good support in management issues such as developing the role of governors and in suggesting improvements to the process of school self–evaluation. A range of other external support which has focused on improving English, mathematics and general teaching has been regular and well focused.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the planning in the Reception class in order to promote pupils' independent learning.
- Improve the pupils' mathematical skills and confidence, particularly in Year 1 and Year 5.

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

Yours sincerely

Kevin Hodge
Additional Inspector