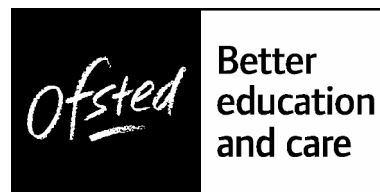


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11 December 2006

Mrs P Fuller
The Acting Headteacher
St Catherine's Catholic Primary School, Littlehampton
Highdown Drive
Littlehampton
West Sussex
BN17 6HL

Dear Mrs Fuller

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ST CATHERINE'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL, LITTLEHAMPTON

Introduction

Following my visit with Gavin Jones, Additional Inspector, to your school on 29 and 30 November, 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, observed lessons, scrutinised documents, and met with the acting headteachers, other staff in positions of responsibility, a group of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the inspection the headteacher has been on long term sick leave. He has been replaced by two acting headteachers appointed by the LA, one employed by the LA who is in school for three days per week and one seconded on a full time basis from another local school. The LA has also appointed three additional governors.

Achievement and standards

Children enter the Reception class with broadly average ability, although for about a third communication and language skills lag behind other areas. Whilst overall progress is satisfactory, children's language skills remain below average when they enter Year 1. The 2006 teacher assessments of reading, writing and mathematics for pupils at the end of Year 2 showed standards had fallen substantially, after rising in 2005. The 2006 national tests for Year 6 pupils indicated that standards in English, mathematics and science were well below average. However, the proportion of pupils exceeding national expectations increased in all three subjects.

Standards and achievement are improving in mathematics and English although they remain inadequate overall. Standards seen in lessons were below average. However, the pupils made satisfactory progress in these lessons due to developments in teaching, assessment and in their attitudes. Nevertheless, there is insufficient evidence that pupils are making satisfactory progress over time. Standards and achievement in science remain unsatisfactory as insufficient action has been taken to improve this subject. Pupils with learning difficulties, and those for whom English is not their first language, make progress in line with their peers.

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

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science and improve pupils' achievement, taking swift and effective action when they do not make enough progress – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour has improved since the last inspection as a result of better management and more consistent expectations by all staff. This new approach is beginning to have an impact on pupils' attitudes to their work, which in turn is having a positive effect on the progress they make. Pupils contribute to lessons with growing confidence. They are ready to answer questions, work in groups, explain their calculations in mathematics, and most can discuss ideas sensibly. However, there are still instances where pupils misbehave or lack concentration. This occurs when teaching is less purposeful. At playtimes there is no evidence of harassment or bullying and pupils agree this is the case. Pupils play well together and their safety and care is well supervised. Only one temporary exclusion has been made since the last inspection.

The school has been effective in tackling the issue of attendance, especially that of extended holidays in term time. It has written to parents, sent out leaflets, and taken a rigorous stance in contacting parents when children are

absent. As a result, attendance is now broadly in line with the national average and is being kept under scrutiny by the school.

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

- improve attendance by taking firm action to discourage absences for holidays in term time – good.

Quality of provision

Effective work by the acting headteachers and LA personnel has improved teaching and learning in mathematics and English. However, teaching and learning remain inadequate overall because pupils make too little progress in other areas of the curriculum, for example in science.

Achievement in mathematics and English has been strengthened through the construction of long and medium term plans that ensure knowledge and understanding build progressively. Lessons in these subjects now include a number of positive features: a satisfactory range of activities; clear learning objectives; planning for pupils of differing abilities; and opportunities for pupils to develop speaking and listening skills. Nevertheless, where lessons are less effective, teachers do not assess pupils' progress regularly enough, for example, through the use of questioning. They do not explain tasks clearly so that pupils know how to meet learning objectives or involve pupils enough in assessing their own progress. Appropriate work is underway to ensure the curriculum meets national requirements and to strengthen learning by making links between subjects, including literacy and numeracy. However, these steps are in their infancy and have not made a consistent impact on pupils' learning.

Satisfactory progress has been made in addressing weaknesses in the assessment and tracking of pupils' progress. Accurate levels have been established for each pupil in writing and mathematics and challenging termly targets set. This enables progress to be measured and underachievement to be identified in these subjects. The school is well aware that these procedures are insufficiently rigorous, not, for example, identifying long term underachievement or extending to reading and science. The acting headteachers have an appropriate strategy to address these deficiencies.

Marking is inconsistent. Whilst it is regular, its usefulness varies widely. It is more comprehensive in mathematics and English, but in other subjects it sometimes gives too little guidance for improvement and ignores literacy errors. Pupils know their targets for mathematics and writing but do not understand well enough how these relate to National Curriculum levels.

Changes in staffing have re-energised the school's approach to pupils with learning difficulties and those for whom English is an additional language.

Assessment of these pupils is better and consequently there are now many more pupils having their needs recognised. However, a lack of data on reading and science means the assessment picture is incomplete. Individual education plans have been updated and are beginning to make an impact on learning. However, the quality of support provided in lessons is inconsistent.

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

- ensure that in all lessons the pace of learning is quick, that behaviour is managed consistently and that work builds on what pupils of differing abilities already know – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Good steps have been taken by the LA and the governors to bolster leadership and management at senior level, although leadership and management overall remains inadequate. The acting headteachers work well together and with the LA, setting high expectations, providing a good measure of stability, and building staff morale. They have acted decisively to draw up an improvement plan to move the school forward in most of the required areas. The impact is evident in the enhanced environment for learning, better pupil behaviour, higher attendance and improved teaching in mathematics and English. However, the improvement plan leaves actions intended to raise standards in science until too late and gives insufficient consideration to developing the school's long term leadership and management capacity. Consequently, the roles of other staff in positions of responsibility remain underdeveloped. Job descriptions for those with responsibilities do not always relate closely enough to outcomes for pupils and are, in the case of subject coordinators, not adhered to.

The acting headteachers have begun to develop their understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses as a result of data analysis and lesson observation. Good assessment of writing and mathematics means they monitor, evaluate and improve these areas well. However, monitoring and evaluation contains weaknesses and remains inadequate overall. Comprehensive assessment data on pupils' progress, for example in reading and science, has yet to be produced and lesson observations are confined to mathematics and English. The acting headteachers are aware of this and there are appropriate plans to extend observations and the collection of assessment data.

Governance is satisfactory and has been strengthened by the additional governors. They receive a good range of information from the school and are receiving appropriate training in fulfilling their role. They are beginning to ask searching questions about pupils' achievement but recognise that they do not understand assessment information well enough to allow them to independently challenge the school.

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

- ensure that the school improvement plan has measurable targets that relate to pupils' progress, and make better use of monitoring information to improve teaching and learning – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority support is satisfactory. It relates well to the needs of the school overall although too little emphasis is given to raising standards in science or developing leadership and management capacity at all levels. Support is well coordinated and the LA works effectively with the school in measuring the impact of what is provided.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the emphasis on raising standards in science and developing leadership and management capacity at all levels.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long
H M Inspector