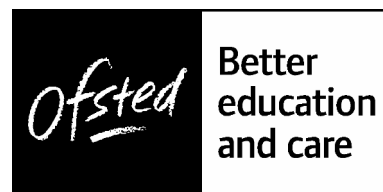


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Mr Simon Martin
The Headteacher
Huish Episcopi Primary School
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TA10 9RW

26 September 2006

Dear Mr Martin,

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HUISH EPISCOPI PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Peter Kemble and Sally Hall, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 13 and 14 September 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, including 12 lessons, and scrutinised a range of documents. They held discussions with pupils and undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work. Inspectors also met the headteacher, teachers, teaching assistants and governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Owing to falling rolls, the school reduced the number of classes from seven to six at the beginning of the autumn term 2006. This involved creating mixed age classes including one class with some pupils in Key Stage 1 and others in Key Stage 2.

Achievement and standards

The standard of pupils' work varies from class to class throughout the school. It is at least satisfactory and often good in the Foundation Stage and in Years 5 and 6. Pupils make at least satisfactory progress in these classes. In Years 1 to 4, variations in the standards attained by pupils reflect the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, too many pupils are not doing as well as they should. The rate at which they make progress is inadequate. Some pupils are beginning to improve writing skills as a result of a whole-school initiative on writing. The previous inspection highlighted good teaching in Year 6. Unvalidated results of the 2006 national tests and assessments show the impact of this on the standards pupils attained and are an encouraging improvement on the previous year. However, there is still underachievement in reading and writing at the end of Key Stage 1. The school's own assessment data shows that there is underachievement in writing and mathematics throughout the school. The initiatives taken to improve pupils' progress since the inspection in May 2006 have not yet made sufficient impact.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils are well behaved, courteous and friendly. They play amicably in the playground and move sensibly around the school, particularly when negotiating the steep steps to the playground and the narrow corridors.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are generally good and sometimes excellent. For example, pupils in Years 3 to 6 behaved extremely well and listened attentively in an assembly. Pupils enjoy their learning and are keen to contribute to whole-class discussions. Lessons are characterised by good teamwork and positive relationships between adults and pupils. However, when teaching does not appropriately challenge pupils, they are inattentive and lose concentration. Attendance is good.

Relationships between pupils and staff are based on mutual respect. Pupils willingly accept responsibilities. They enjoy contributing to the daily running of the school and members of the school council take their responsibilities extremely seriously. Pupils have a good understanding of what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Incidents of bullying are rare.

Quality of provision

Teaching overall is inadequate. There is not enough good teaching to ensure that pupils make appropriate progress in their learning. Inconsistencies in teaching reported in the previous inspection remain. The most successful teaching is in Years 5 and 6. In these classes, teachers are enthusiastic and confident. They have high expectations and are skilled in engaging the pupils in their learning. Good use is made of time and of resources such as interactive whiteboards. Pupils make good progress in these lessons.

In most classes, however, teaching is less successful. There is a lack of clarity about how to plan and teach lessons which match the needs of all the pupils. Although the new lesson planning proforma is being used by teachers, there is insufficient understanding of the principles underpinning it. For example, teachers now have access to more information about pupils' attainment and progress but they have a limited understanding of how to use this to plan effective lessons. This means that planning and teaching are not making enough impact on improving pupils' progress. Where teaching is less successful, lessons lack pace and challenge and, as a result, pupils often lose interest and concentration.

Throughout the school, relationships between teachers and teaching assistants and pupils are strong.

The school is at the early stages of reviewing its curriculum. Its focus on improving writing across the curriculum has resulted in some good practice, but is not yet fully embedded in all year groups. The school has not paid enough attention to the planning of the curriculum or to teaching and learning in the recently introduced mixed age classes.

Marking is inconsistent and not all teachers are using it as an effective tool to help pupils know how well they are doing or what they should do next to improve their work. Pupils are now aware of their targets in English and mathematics. Where planning is weak, however, learning activities do not sufficiently help pupils work towards meeting these targets.

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

- ensure that all pupils do as well as they should by matching teaching to their needs and covering the curriculum in sufficient depth in all classes – inadequate
- strengthen marking and target setting so that pupils know better how to improve – inadequate.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are inadequate. Although individuals and groups of staff express a determination to improve the quality of education, members of staff are struggling with too many issues at once.

Progress is being hindered by the lack of a strong drive from the headteacher. There is no shared sense of purpose and direction. Whilst individual teachers and teaching assistants support each other, there is no effective collaborative team work led by the headteacher. The benefits to be derived from working together are not being exploited.

The school action plan provides detail on actions to be taken to tackle identified areas for improvement. However, the lack of involvement of staff in formulating the plan and their consequent limited understanding of it prevent

it from being the key instrument for change. For example, a new schedule for monitoring teaching and learning has been devised and is at the early stages of implementation. There is, however, no common understanding of what constitutes good teaching and learning and the new criteria for judging the quality of teaching have yet to be discussed with staff. Similarly, scrutiny of pupils' work is scheduled to begin but there is no indication of how judgements will be made or how subject leaders and class teachers will be involved. Initiatives are insecurely rooted in understood processes. Implementation of the plan is not supported by systematic reviews and monitoring.

The school has taken the first steps in improving the analysis of data and tracking pupils' progress. Some good work in this area has been undertaken by the deputy headteacher. Senior members of staff are aware of the need to use data to identify underachievement and to act on this information. However, the implementation of strategies for using data more effectively to match work to pupils' needs is taking longer than it should.

Processes to evaluate the school's work lack rigour. There is no clear strategy for collecting the wide range of information needed to provide robust evidence for judging how well the school is doing and to inform effective improvement planning.

Senior leaders and subject leaders are uncertain of what is expected of them and how they are to be held to account. There are no coherent processes through which subject leaders can monitor and evaluate the areas for which they are responsible.

The work of the governing body is satisfactory. Governors understand their responsibilities to provide appropriate support and challenge to the senior leadership. They are clear about the quality of information required to meet these responsibilities. They are embarking on local authority training to enhance their understanding of their work. The headteacher and governors admit that differences in perspectives on the quality of aspects of the school's provision have led to a recent deterioration in relationships between them.

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

- improve the rigour of self-evaluation at all levels of leadership and management so that weaknesses in provision, particularly in teaching, are identified and appropriate action taken – inadequate.

External support

The local authority has provided good support to the school, particularly through the school's link adviser, and a range of appropriate further support is planned. The statement of action is good, reflecting a clear understanding of the issues facing the school. The local authority has established a core group which has a clear brief to monitor and evaluate the progress of the

school. Membership of this group includes the headteacher and deputy headteacher, governors and representatives of the local authority.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Quality of local authority's statement of action – good.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Secure effective leadership and management of the school.
- Improve the use of assessment in planning to ensure teaching matches the learning needs of all pupils.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education of Children and Young People for Somerset.

Yours sincerely

Valerie Pearson
H M Inspector