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Mrs Simmonds
The Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Simmonds

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HOLBROOK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Garth Muton, Additional Inspector, to your school on 13 and 14 March 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 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, the deputy headteacher who is also one of the science subject leaders, subject leaders for literacy, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT), the special educational needs coordinator, a group of Key Stage 2 pupils, pupil representatives from the school council, and the chair of governors. There were informal discussions with staff and pupils and a telephone discussion with the local authority (LA) appointed advisory headteacher. Inspectors also observed ten lessons or part lessons, playtime and lunchtime, and talked informally with staff and pupils.

Context

Since the last inspection the school has temporarily appointed an experienced headteacher who took up her post in January 2007. She will remain in post until the recently appointed substantive headteacher joins the school in September 2007.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Standards in Key Stage 2, as shown by national test results in 2006, are broadly average. There was no significant difference between girls' and boys' attainment in these tests. In Key Stage 1, tests in 2006 indicate that standards are below average across the board. Boys' attainment was below that of the girls' and below national averages for boys in reading, writing and mathematics. Autumn born pupils achieved results in line with national averages. A third of the pupils in the year group were summer born. Their results were below average and also below national averages for summer born.

Pupils' progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 has improved. In 2006 it was in line with national expectations rather than below, as was the case in 2004 and 2005. School data currently show that pupils are on track to reach their targets in mathematics indicating that they are making satisfactory progress. In writing, progress is satisfactory but still inconsistent. For example, in some classes too many pupils are falling back in their learning before making rapid progress to catch up. Improvements to the curriculum and teaching are helping pupils make improved progress in science. Children's attainment on entry to the Foundation Stage is well below average. Children are making good progress in the Foundation Stage, although this varies as some make excellent progress and some make limited progress. Pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress, although this remains inconsistent. In lessons seen, pupils made good progress as a result of improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.

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

- increase the rate of progress in raising standards, particularly in mathematics and science for pupils in Years 1 to 6 – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils behave well. Attendance is above average and pupils in the main enjoy their lessons. In particular they are effectively engaged and enthused by practical activities. The school council provides pupils with a strong voice which they exercise by making decisions and recommendations on a range of matters. These include aspects of the school uniform and improvements to the school environment.

Most recently, the school council made a contribution to the selection process for the substantive headteacher.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons seen was good. This is an improvement from the last monitoring visit. Pupils' progress over time, however, remains satisfactory rather than good. This is because the quality of teaching at this level has not been in place long enough, or sustained consistently, to bring about more accelerated progress.

Teachers explained the purpose of lessons consistently so pupils understood what they were trying to achieve. The last part of lessons was often used effectively to review and extend learning, but this was not consistent practice. Planning for literacy and mathematics lessons provided different activities for groups of pupils with different abilities. However, work in pupils' books indicates that pupils with different abilities sometimes still do activities with the same or similar level of challenge. This inhibits their ability to make rapid progress. Teachers have a clear understanding of the National Curriculum levels at which each pupil is working as a result of more effective assessment in literacy and mathematics. This information is not always used to plan sufficiently closely matched activities to meet individual pupils' needs and enable them to work more rapidly towards the next level.

An important improvement in teaching is the provision of more opportunities for active learning where pupils 'learn by doing'. Pupils benefit from this approach because it helps their understanding and also enables them to develop their ability to work together in teams. For example, in a good mathematics lesson groups of pupils worked well together. They used different techniques to take measurements in the playground to help plan possible improvements. As a result, some pupils worked with considerable energy and gusto and made outstanding progress. Much of the learning in the Foundation Stage is good because the pace of lessons and the different activities help maintain the children's interest and concentration.

There has been a greater emphasis on the development of pupils' writing. Achievement in writing is celebrated in special assemblies and there has been a greater effort to provide opportunities for writing in different subjects. However, the school does not have a clear understanding of what should be achieved in writing across the curriculum for each year group. Consequently, the expectations for writing are not yet high enough so that standards often slip when pupils are writing in subjects other than literacy. There is a welcome focus on developing speaking and listening as an essential stage in developing good quality writing. In a good literacy lesson, for example, the use of drama improved pupils' understanding of what they had to write about and provided an interesting stimulus for their creative writing. In the

Foundation Stage children's early attempts at writing are encouraged and celebrated. There are good opportunities for children to write as part of their learning through play activities as well as in more formal literacy activities.

Pupils enjoy good relationships with their teachers. Teachers have high expectations of behaviour and classrooms are orderly and well managed. The small minority of pupils who are difficult to motivate are dealt with effectively without disrupting the learning of other pupils. Teaching assistants provide good support for more challenging pupils. They act quickly to improve pupils' involvement when their concentration wavers. Planned activities do not always meet the needs of more challenging pupils.

Target setting has improved. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 know their National Curriculum levels and the levels they are working towards. Teachers review progress towards targets and report back to pupils. Pupils also have learning targets to improve specific aspects of their work, although they are more aware of these in mathematics than in literacy. There is insufficient use of these targets in lessons to motivate and challenge pupils to work towards the standards they should achieve. The quality of marking has slipped. At best, marking gives pupils clear guidance for improvement and refers to their learning targets. However, there are too many examples of pupils' work not being acknowledged and of substandard work being praised.

Improvements to the curriculum include the introduction of different levels of skill expected in all subjects. The science curriculum has improved, with greater time and attention being given to investigational work. Planning for the use of ICT across the subjects has improved. The provision of 'snack time' in addition to playtime is not the best use of available time for Key Stage 2 pupils.

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

- raise the quality of teaching and learning to ensure all pupils are consistently challenged to make the progress of which they are capable – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The recently appointed interim headteacher, with the effective support of the LA, has made a good start. She has gained the confidence of the staff and is already beginning to improve the leadership and management of the senior team, who are gaining in confidence. She has made a quick and accurate assessment of the quality of teaching and learning and is working with colleagues to emphasise the many positive qualities of the school. Subject leadership continues to improve. Subject leaders for mathematics, literacy, and science have a clear and accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses, including

pupils' achievement, in their subject areas. Subject leaders report regularly to senior staff on developments in their area. They are trialling new procedures to bring about improvements in planning and target setting.

Monitoring and tracking of pupils' progress are improving. End of year targets are now included in the tracking procedures so progress towards targets can be evaluated more easily. A new system set up to monitor the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and other vulnerable groups is more comprehensive and detailed than in the past. These improvements are very recent and have not yet had time to have an impact on achievement and standards.

Governance is inadequate. Although governors, with effective support from the LA, worked well in the appointment process for the new headteacher they are not working adequately in other areas. Monitoring is weak and the work of the governing body is not effectively coordinated. As a result, the governing body does not have a clear enough understanding of the needs of the school. It is not in a position to provide strategic leadership nor able to hold the school to account effectively. This impinges on the school's capacity for improvement and its ability to operate without high levels of support from the LA.

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

- improve the rigour of monitoring and evaluation procedures to ensure rapid improvements in the curriculum provision, teaching and learning – satisfactory.

External support

The quality of support provided by the LA is good. The advisory headteacher provides high quality support for the headteacher and ensures support is provided for other aspects of the school's work. Improvements in literacy, mathematics, science, and ICT can be attributed to good work by the school in response to effective LA support in these areas. The school continues to work with the LA to plan support which it has identified and relies less on the LA to drive forward planned improvements. Support for the governing body has not proved to be fully effective as the governing body has made little progress in developing the capacity to fulfil its statutory duties.

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

- Make better use of assessment data and pupils' learning targets to inform planning so that activities are more closely matched to the needs of groups and individuals with different abilities and attitudes to learning.
- Improve the effectiveness of the governing body by ensuring it monitors the school's work systematically and rigorously.

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

Yours sincerely



Tom Winskill
H M Inspector