

16 April 2007

Mr Sean Connor
The Headteacher
Siskin Junior School
Nimrod Drive
Rowner
Gosport
PO13 8AA

Dear Mr Connor

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SISKIN JUNIOR SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Jo Curd, Additional Inspector, to your school on 20 and 21 March 2007. I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 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 the school's work including 9 lessons, a visit to the school's nurture group and 1 registration, scrutinised documents, met with a range of staff, representative groups of pupils, the chair of governors and an adviser from the local authority.

Context

One part time teacher left the school at the end of the spring term and another full time teacher has been appointed. During the afternoon sessions the three Year 5 and 6 classes have been merged into two teaching groups. One teacher has been absent from the school since our last monitoring visit due to illness. A nurture group has been established in the school to provide additional support and care for a small number of young children with emotional and behavioural needs. One new governor with a business background has joined the governing body.

Achievement and standards

Pupils enter the school with well below national average standards. The school has developed good systems to assess the attainment of pupils and track their progress over time. The analysis of recent test results indicates that pupils in Year 6 are now making satisfactory progress in their learning. The progress made by pupils in Year 5 has also improved since the last monitoring visit. This reflects the improvement in teaching that has taken place in the school. The progress made by pupils in English is better than that seen in mathematics. Standards in Year 6 remain well below the national average. This reflects both the pupils' attainment on entry to the school and the poor progress they made in Years 3 and 4. The recent improvement in progress means that pupils in Year 6 are now on track to get close to the targets set for them by the school.

The progress made by pupils in Years 3 and 4 has also improved since the last monitoring visit to the school. However, there is unevenness in the progress made by pupils in different classes. The progress seen in reading in these years is better than that seen in writing.

The quality of pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their work remain inconsistent across the school.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2005:

- Raise standards of achievement in all subjects with a specific focus on basic skills – satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

The personal development of pupils is now satisfactory. The vast majority of pupils behave well in and out of lessons. There are fewer exclusions and letters to parents about poor behaviour. Fewer pupils are also sent out of class for being disruptive. Better attitudes and the employment of additional adults at lunch and play times have improved behaviour and safety outside. Although a few pupils still behave roughly towards each other there is far less aggression and those involved are corrected and guided appropriately by adults. Pupils enjoy using the ample space outside and play safely in well organised zoned areas. Older pupils enjoy the responsibility of looking after play equipment and acting as monitors.

Behaviour and attitudes in lessons have improved because the curriculum and some aspects of teaching have improved. Eight vulnerable or challenging younger pupils are now taught in a nurture unit each morning. They are successfully 'learning through play' and developing more positive attitudes to work, adults and peers in the calm and caring atmosphere of this small class. Lessons in the rest of the school are also calmer. Pupils say they feel safe because they are confident that staff will support and help them if they need it. Some pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are occasionally frustrated because activities are insufficiently varied to

meet their needs but most remain calm and try hard. A few pupils, notably older boys, sometimes have negative attitudes at the beginning of lessons. However with the encouragement of staff they usually engage well with practical activities.

The school has introduced and developed many initiatives since September to improve attendance. These are having an impact. Attendance, although still below the national average, is higher than a year ago. Initiatives introduced include meetings with parents, rewards for pupils who attend each day for seven weeks and visual displays showing rates of attendance in each class.

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

- Improve the pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning – good progress
- Improve rates of attendance – satisfactory progress

Quality of provision

The overall quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last monitoring visit. A higher percentage of lessons were judged satisfactory and good during this inspection. However, arrangements for covering the lessons of the teacher who is on long term sick leave are not secure, leading to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching experienced by this class.

Lesson objectives are now routinely shared with pupils and are visible at the front of the class. In the best lessons pupils are also clearly told the success criteria against which their work will be judged. In some lessons pupils are engaged in interesting activities that capture their imagination and make learning fun. They are also provided with opportunities to share their thinking and learning with each other. Pupils respond well to practical activities that actively involve them in their learning. Good use is made of interactive white boards to support pupils' learning.

In many lessons, however, the pace of learning is only satisfactory. During the last monitoring visit it was identified that teachers were not always pitching the work at the right level for all pupils in the mixed age classes. Although progress has been made on this issue it has still not been fully addressed. The level of challenge for more able pupils is sometimes not appropriate and at times the work is too hard for the least able and not enough structured support is provided for them. In most lessons learning support assistants provide good support to pupils, however, this is not yet consistently the case in all lessons.

Possible risks to safety due to some pupils' inappropriate and aggressive behaviour were raised as an issue during the inspection in 2005. Behaviour and attitudes have now improved and pupils report feeling safe in lessons and outside. Levels of supervision outside at lunch and play times have also increased and all pupils are well supported and cared for. The school's atmosphere throughout the day is calmer and more settled.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and the use of assessment procedures – good progress
- Improve the quality of care – good progress

Leadership and management

The leadership team have worked effectively together since the last monitoring visit to improve teaching and learning and the personal development of pupils. The behaviour management strategies introduced by the new deputy headteacher have had a positive impact on the climate for learning in the school. Behaviour in lessons and at breaktimes is now satisfactory.

Joint lesson observations during this and previous inspections indicate that the leadership team is accurate in its evaluation of teaching. The task of improving teaching and learning is now being approached with greater urgency and rigour. Effective training has been provided to staff by both the school and external consultants. Good strategies have also been put in place to share good practice, such as opportunities for teachers to observe each others lessons.

Effective use has been made of an external consultant to develop middle leadership within the school. The mathematics co-ordinators continue to lead developments in their subject well. They are now involved in tracking pupil progress, observing teaching practice and monitoring the quality of work produced by pupils. They are using these monitoring and evaluation processes well to improve teaching and pupil progress in their subject area. Their good practice provides a model for the development of subject co-ordination within the school. The deputy head continues to lead developments in English effectively during the long term absence of the English co-ordinator. All subject co-ordinators are now beginning to be held more accountable for the quality of provision and pupil outcomes in their subject area. The capacity of middle leadership within the school is improving but is still an area in need of development.

The governing body has continued to become more effective in its role. It has been strengthened by the addition of a new governor with a business background. The governing body is aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. It provides the school with good support and an increasingly effective level of challenge.

The headteacher has made satisfactory progress towards the development of an annual cycle of self evaluation. An overview of key monitoring and evaluation activities throughout the year has been produced. A detailed management plan which timetables specific activities during each term is in the process of development. These activities are beginning to feed into a document that identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the school and areas for development.

Each term the school writes a raising achievement plan. This plan specifies the

actions that it intends to take with clearly defined success criteria. This plan has had a positive impact on improving the rate of pupils' progress and raising standards.

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

- Strengthen and develop the roles and impact of senior and middle managers as well as that of governors – good progress
- Develop robust systems of self evaluation, which identify weaknesses and the necessary strategies to bring about improvement – satisfactory progress
- Ensure the success criteria are sharply focused on improving the rate of pupils' progress and raising standards – good progress

External support

The local authority has provided the school with a range of well targeted support since the last monitoring visit. This has included support for specific subjects, teaching and learning, pupil behaviour, leadership and management and governance. This support has played an effective role in developing the school's capacity for improvement.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring that all activities are appropriate for the full range of abilities in mixed age classes.
- Continue the development of robust systems of self evaluation, which identify strengths and weaknesses and the necessary strategies to bring about improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson
H M Inspector