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Ms Sophie Allen
The Acting Headteacher
Stonebridge Primary School
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Dear Ms Allen

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF STONEBRIDGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit, with Susan Gregory HMI, to your school on 14 and 15 March 2007, 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 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, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, all members of the senior leadership team, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA). They spoke with other staff and pupils during the course of their work.

Context

The acting headteacher, in post at the time of the last inspection, left at Christmas as planned. She was replaced in January by another acting headteacher who has since been appointed as the substantive headteacher from Easter. A class teacher left at Christmas and another has taken ill-health early retirement during this term. Both have been replaced.

Achievement and standards

Achievement remains inadequate. Too many pupils make slow progress. The school's data show that many pupils are not on track to meet their end-of-year targets. In some classes, there is a particularly bleak picture of pupils' progress from September to February. However, the acting headteacher knows that not all the assessments made by teachers are accurate and this calls into question the reliability of the data. The quality of pupils' work in books is of a low standard but does show some signs of progress over time. Presentation is poor and pupils do not take pride in their work. This is because clear expectations are not set by teachers. Progress in lessons is patchy. It depends on the appropriateness of the task, the match of work to pupils' abilities, the level and quality of the support for pupils, and the sharpness of the planned learning outcomes.

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

- Raise the achievement of all pupils, especially average and lower attaining – inadequate progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' behaviour in lessons is generally good, even when teaching is not satisfactory or sharply focused to their needs. They have positive attitudes to learning although their enthusiasm and motivation wanes slightly in overlong sessions. Movement around the school is orderly, and pupils are polite and friendly. Attendance has not improved since the last inspection and this is having a negative impact on pupils' progress. Absence is very high in the Foundation Stage where good habits need to be established. The high number of fixed-term exclusions in the autumn term, of 13 pupils, related to five incidents. This term, one pupil has been excluded for a fixed term. All have been dealt with appropriately with no repetition of the behaviour that led to the exclusions.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is still inadequate although the profile is changing slightly with an increasing proportion of satisfactory teaching. Elements of teaching are improving as a result of the acting headteacher's focus. An example is planning which is now satisfactory and using a consistent format. Teachers generally like the new planning format, and some correctly identify that it helps to focus their teaching. Learning objectives are sharper and planning for the different learning needs of pupils is improving, though there is a way to go to ensure that tasks consistently match pupils' abilities. A few teachers do this well. All teachers are evaluating their lessons and, although some evaluations are not sharply focused, this is another positive step forward. Some teachers are encouraging pupils to evaluate their own learning

by using a traffic light system. At times, teaching is lively and energetic. It engages pupils and offers them opportunities to explain what they know and be actively involved in learning. Lessons clearly build on learning from the previous lesson. Examples of satisfactory and sometimes good practice in lessons mask some underlying weaknesses notably in assessment, including marking. Teachers' assessments of pupils' levels of work are not always accurate because they are not firmly rooted in a shared understanding of National Curriculum levels. Consequently, not all teachers know precisely how to build systematically on what pupils already know, understand and can do. Although there are examples of helpful comments in pupils' book, marking is not consistently thorough and rigorous enough to set clear expectations of pupils' learning and to help them improve. The organisation of time through the day is not sharp and affects the balance of the curriculum. Small chunks of time are sandwiched between longer lessons, in which time is not used efficiently. Lessons lose their focus and pupils lose motivation. Time is wasted on copying learning objectives into books.

In the Foundation Stage, there has been clear progress since the last inspection. Staff are working incredibly hard and deserve much credit for the improvements they have made. New systems for planning and assessment enable staff to focus on what children know and understand and what they need to learn next. Provision has improved considerably; a good range of activities cover all areas of learning and are securely linked to intended outcomes. Staff know which children they need to target for certain adult-led activities. The teaching in these activities is generally satisfactory. The environment is calm, and children are settled and happy because routines are well-established. However, staffing levels remain too low and there are not enough adults available to provide teaching input to different groups of children during child-directed activities. Consequently these children are being supervised but not taught. Too many children have unstructured learning opportunities and too many opportunities, especially to develop children's language skills, are missed. As a result, overall, the provision is still inadequate.

Support for pupils, for example, through structured intervention programmes is satisfactory, and often good, but their needs are not met consistently in lessons. This is because the quality of support from teaching assistants remains variable. There is not a clear link between the targets in the individual education plans of pupils with learning difficulties and the activities in lessons. The acting headteacher has plans to tackle the issues about the support for pupils who speak English as an additional language, raised at the last inspection. However, at present, support is patchy and not organised systematically.

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

- Ensure that the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory across the school and share the best practice more effectively – satisfactory progress
- Improve the quality of the curriculum and management in the Foundation Stage – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The new acting headteacher is providing good leadership. She has built effectively on the work of the previous acting headteacher and the staff are working together as a team. Staff, governors and the LA have confidence in her ability to make changes. Evaluation of the school's progress so far recognises that there is still a great deal to be done. All agree that there is a long way to go, but there is a sense that the journey has begun. Satisfactory progress has been made in building the capacity of senior staff but there is still a heavy workload for the acting headteacher. The school's improvement plan has been extended and identifies the right issues with appropriate steps to address them. However, there is a danger that energies are focused on too many priorities and this is jeopardising the leadership's ability to focus on raising standards and the quality of provision. Data management is satisfactory. Significant steps have been taken to put in place a data tracking system so that pupils' progress can be measured more accurately. This highlights for senior staff those pupils who are not making sufficient progress so that support can be targeted. It also highlights inadequacies in teaching and the curriculum.

There is a clear acknowledgement that satisfactory teaching is not good enough to narrow the gap between current standards and what they should be. The monitoring of lessons is satisfactory; it provides a secure baseline for improvement by identifying aspects of strength and areas for development. Common areas for improvement are tackled through staff training. The positive impact on staff practice is beginning to show but it is too early to have an impact on standards. Judgements on the quality of teaching are accurate. However, although observations focus on the characteristics of teaching they fall short of identifying their impact on pupils' learning and progress. Teachers' assessment, marking and samples of pupils' work are not subject to the same level of scrutiny. Observations are not focusing enough on these fundamental building blocks of teaching. There is not yet a common agreement or shared understanding of what makes teaching good.

The governing body is developing into an effective group with a role in day-to-day management which is appropriate at this stage. They have a strategic overview but also a clear focus on what needs to be done now. They are beginning to establish themselves so that they are less reliant on LA support and are starting to ask the right questions of the school's leadership team.

They have identified where their support can help to reduce the workload of the senior team, for example, in dealing with the poor state of the premises.

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

- Devise and implement a school improvement plan – satisfactory progress

External support

The LA continues to provide a high level of support at both a strategic and operational level. The support is rightly targeted to those areas that will have the most impact on improving teaching and learning to raise standards. Staff regard the support from consultants as helpful and there are signs that it is beginning to have a positive impact, especially in the Foundation Stage. The LA is responsive to the changing needs of the school and flexible in adapting the focus of its support. For example, support from the Education Welfare Service will increase to help the school tackle the issue of attendance.

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

- Develop teachers' expertise in making accurate assessments so that the information can be used to plan the next steps in learning and to track pupils progress
- Improve the management of the provision for pupils learning English as an additional language
- Work with the Education Welfare Service, and with parents, to improve pupils' attendance.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the School Improvement Services for Brent.

Yours sincerely

Jane Wotherspoon
Her Majesty's Inspector