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Mrs A Kipling
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Kipling

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BERKELEY JUNIOR SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Andrew Bennett, Additional Inspector, to your school on 6 and 7 March 2006, 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 July 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

Lessons in all the classes and four assemblies were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed at break and lunchtime. Discussions were held with senior staff, the headteacher designate, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority. A range of documentation was examined.

Context

The acting headteacher's secondment has been extended until Easter, when a new substantive headteacher takes up post. Staffing has remained relatively stable; newly qualified teachers are taking the classes of two teachers who are on unavoidable long-term absences.

Achievement and standards

The national data that has become available since the monitoring visit in November underlines the school's weak performance in the national tests for 2006. The pupils' results were well below what might have been expected, on the basis of the levels they reached at the end of Key Stage 1.

The thorough systems that have been introduced to track pupils' progress have been sustained. The most recent assessments were made in January. Overall the data represents a positive picture, but there are some concerns. The proportions of Year 6 pupils on track to reach the target Level 4 in the forthcoming national tests are no better than last year, although the school is hopeful that strategies such as booster work will make a difference. The pupils in younger year groups, especially Year 5, appear better placed. In all year groups, the pupils' attainment in writing is markedly weaker than in reading and mathematics.

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

- Raise the pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science – inadequate

Personal development and well-being

The pupils have continued to benefit from the consistently firm routines that have been established across the school. They were well behaved, attentive and organised their materials and equipment without fuss. They were keen to please adults, relished a challenge, such as finding different facts from atlases, and collaborated well. There were occasions in some classes, however, when time was lost through wasteful chatter and when few pupils volunteered to answer the teacher's questions. The pupils' attendance, at 95.9 per cent to date this year, is above average reflecting their continued enjoyment of school.

The assemblies were well-conducted occasions in which the acting headteacher's approach exemplified the school's higher aspirations for its pupils. A large group of pupils gave choral recitals of poems exceptionally well, entertaining their schoolmates and showing the pleasure to be gained through performance.

Quality of provision

As a result of the changes to the systems for tracking progress, the teachers know in detail how well each pupil is faring. The information is being used judiciously to place pupils into groups, to provide extra support where necessary and to set the pitch of work in lessons. The pupils themselves have targets, although they do not always know the level they have reached.

The improvements to teaching have been maintained. The quality of teaching was good in four lessons and satisfactory in nine. The positive attributes to the teaching, as noted in November, have been sustained and the teaching assistants were better used, especially in leading small groups. All the lessons were well prepared, planned

and organised, and learning objectives were clear and shared with the pupils. The teachers employed a range of strategies to involve the pupils and retain the momentum of learning. In this respect the use of individual whiteboards was particularly successful. The need to eradicate wasteful chatter, however, remains in a few classes.

Two relative weaknesses in the teaching were more widespread. There was sometimes a failure to pick up the detail in pupils' answers, rather than the general level of understanding across the class; at times there was too much reliance on the pupils' own judgement about what they had learned. The lessons were generally challenging and the objectives were achieved but there was sometimes too little demand in more basic matters, particularly in requiring pupils to write their answers in accurate English.

The move to draw subjects together, where appropriate, has continued. In one English lesson, for example, pupils learned to take notes on the wives of Henry VIII, a topic they were studying in history. A recent residential stay for the older pupils and an artist in residence reflect the school's aim to enrich provision. Similarly those who show an aptitude for science are joining pupils from other primary schools for additional lessons with secondary teachers.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and the curriculum – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher has continued to lead and manage the school well. The actions that were planned have been fulfilled on schedule and they have been appropriate to the school's needs. In particular, there has been further work to strengthen teaching, more analysis of assessments and a considerable number of lesson observations, followed by feedback to teachers.

The management structure promotes teamwork and good communication. The year leaders present good role models as teachers and organise weekly meetings to share in planning and resolve issues. Through first-hand observations, they know the strengths and weaknesses in their years. In discussion, they spoke of raised morale and frank professional dialogue.

What has been achieved by the acting headteacher represents a secure platform on which to build. The deputy headteacher, who began in September, has developed her role to include important responsibilities. She is already working with the incoming headteacher, who is spending a day each week in school to prepare for next term. The leaders have a clear idea of their priorities.

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

- Improve the leadership and management including governance – good
- External support

The local authority has maintained its effective support for the school, modifying actions to reflect the school's progress. Consultants have helped with analyses and with teaching, and there have been paired observations of lessons to verify the school's view of the quality of teaching. The local authority has also, and importantly, facilitated a smooth transfer of headship through negotiating an extension to the secondment of the acting headteacher.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Priorities for further improvement

The priority, as recognised by the school, is to raise standards. The quality of teaching has been at least satisfactory on this and the previous visit. More attention should now be paid, in lesson observations and feedback, to the pace of pupils' learning and which of the teachers' strategies are most effective in raising progress. Given the new leadership and the school's progress, it would be appropriate to set out broader strategic plans and self-evaluation. These are matters with which the governors need to be fully involved.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Head of Education, Learning and Achievement, North Lincolnshire.

Yours sincerely

Steve Hardwick
H M Inspector