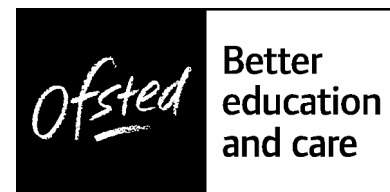


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26 January 2007

Mrs Kendra Allen
Associate Headteacher
Seven Stars Primary School
Peacock Hall Road
Leyland
Lancashire
PR25 1TD

Dear Mrs Allen,

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SEVEN STARS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Sara Morrissey HMI to your school on 24 and 25 January 2007, 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 September 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 associate headteacher, the chair of governors, a representative of the local authority, members of staff and pupils. Sixteen parts of lessons, two registration periods and an assembly were observed.

Context

The headteacher has been absent due to ill health since December 2006. Initially the deputy headteacher led the school. The local authority has arranged for the associate headteacher, who had previously been supporting the school on a part-time basis, to take over the management of the school from the start of the spring

term. Two new temporary teachers are in place in Key Stage 2, including one with a responsibility for the curriculum who has been seconded from the school of the associate headteacher.

Achievement and standards

Pupils enter the school with skills that are well below those found nationally. They make good progress in the Foundation Stage, but on entry to Key Stage 1 their attainment remains below the national average. In 2006 the results in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 1 improved, but remained just below the national average. However, results in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 declined further in 2006 and were exceptionally low in English and mathematics. The progress pupils made was inadequate. However, although standards remain below those expected for pupils of a similar age in both key stages, the progress seen in lessons was satisfactory overall, but was not consistent in all year groups. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is in line with that of other pupils.

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

- Improve standards in English – inadequate progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' behaviour is improving both in class and around the school and is satisfactory overall. In response to concerns identified by staff, a new code of behaviour has been implemented. This has raised pupils' awareness of their teachers' expectations and of what behaviour is unacceptable. Pupils say that behaviour is better and also report that there are few incidents of bullying. The number of exclusions has fallen this year. Around school, pupils are courteous to visitors and willing to talk about their work. They enjoy the range of activities available at break times, especially the "huff and puff" equipment, play co-operatively and are well supervised by staff.

Pupils' attitudes to learning vary and reflect the quality of teaching. They say that they learn more when they are doing something, making something or using their imagination. The school assembly was used well, setting a positive start to the day; pupils enjoyed singing together and participated enthusiastically. The great majority of pupils attend regularly and certificates are awarded to celebrate class and individual attendance.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved, but is inconsistent. Systematic monitoring of lesson planning by the associate headteacher has ensured that teachers plan their lessons more consistently. Most plans outline a range of activities to meet learning objectives that are linked to the curricular targets for different ability groups. However, activities are not always well matched to the intended learning outcomes. This is because teachers do not routinely use available assessment information to

tailor activities to meet the needs of individual pupils. For example, the challenge for the more able pupils is not consistently as great as it should be. Furthermore, most plans do not make clear links to assessment criteria or identify how activities will extend pupils' learning and increase their rate of progress. Consequently, pupils are not clear about the level at which they are working or exactly what they need to do to improve.

The associate headteacher has an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. A scrutiny of pupils' work, supported by the local authority consultants, has enabled co-ordinators to identify strengths and weaknesses in the teaching of English and mathematics. Plans are in hand to share the good practice that has been identified and there is a programme of staff development for systematically tackling areas for improvement.

In the great majority of lessons, routines are well established to promote a positive climate for learning and good relationships exist between pupils and adults. Teaching assistants are used very effectively in some lessons to support the learning of a significant minority of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. The best lessons are characterised by briskly paced activities that engage and involve pupils actively in their learning. Pupils are able to explain what they are learning because instructions are clear and activities are sequenced to build confidence, and ensure good progress towards learning outcomes. In lessons that are satisfactory overall, activities are not sufficiently challenging to help pupils overcome a legacy of underachievement. Teachers talk for too long and opportunities are missed for pupils to become actively engaged or reflect on what they have learned. As a result, pupils lose concentration, become passive and the rate of progress slows. Expectations of pupils in some lessons remain too low. Where teaching is inadequate, activities do not match pupils' needs, explanations are unclear and as a result, pupils do not make the expected progress. Although there are some good examples of marking, its overall quality is too variable. Comments are often brief and do not tell pupils how they can improve.

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

- Raise pupils' achievement by improving teaching and learning through the sharing of good practice and the elimination of unsatisfactory teaching – satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The appointment of the associate headteacher to the full-time leadership of the school has resulted in accelerated progress in addressing the issues. There is a clear action plan for tackling the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report; work is on track and is being monitored closely. However, the existing school improvement plan identifies too wide a range of priorities and the planned activities lack the precision needed to bring about improvement. A new senior leadership team has been established and roles clarified. There are now co-ordinators for all subjects.

There are robust systems for the monitoring of teachers' planning and to review the quality of work produced by pupils. Teaching is monitored and there is an appropriate programme of staff development planned to bring about improvement. A revised system has been introduced to record pupils' attainment each half term, but the accuracy of these assessments has not yet been confirmed by moderation. It is too early for these monitoring systems to have become fully embedded and to have made a significant impact on standards and achievement. However, the impact on the overall quality of teaching is clear, although there remains much more to be done. The governing body is supportive of the school and the chair has a clear awareness of the strengths of the school and the areas for development. The governing body knows that it has not sufficiently held the school to account for the underachievement of pupils. There are plans to develop the necessary skills to improve this function and there is a determination to fulfil the role.

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

- Strengthen management and monitoring systems to ensure that initiatives are embedded in practice – satisfactory progress

External support

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose. It complements the governors' action plan and ensures the co-ordinated provision of additional support. There are established systems to monitor and evaluate progress and regular reports are provided to senior officers and to the governing body. The local authority has acted promptly to strengthen the management of the school with the appointment of the associate headteacher. The support provided by the adviser from the monitoring and intervention team and the school's link adviser is effective, and the support of the primary strategy consultants is valued by staff.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that teachers have accurate data on the current level of pupils' attainment so that challenging targets can be set.
- Ensure that teachers' planning focuses on learning outcomes that enable pupils to make good progress.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education and Cultural Services at Lancashire County Council.

Yours sincerely

Garry Jones
H M Inspector