



5 February 2007

The Headteacher
Riddings Junior School
Church Street
Alfreton
Derbyshire
DE55 4BW

Dear Mrs Littlewood,

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF RIDDINGS JUNIOR SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Mark Hitch, Additional Inspector to your school on 24-25 January 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 November 2005.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with a group of children, the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, the chair of governors and a representative from the Local Authority (LA).

Context

The headteacher who was the acting headteacher at the time of the last visit was appointed on a permanent contract on 8 December. The deputy headteacher has been absent due to illness since 3 October. A teacher was seconded by the LA from 1 January.

Achievement and standards

The school has now begun to build up assessment data which is providing reliable information about how much progress children are making. Although standards generally remain below average improving rates of progress are helping children to move towards achieving the standards expected for their age. Evidence to support this view can be taken from assessments carried out at the end of October and December. This information shows that Year 6 are now making the expected rate of progress in reading, writing and numeracy. There is also similar evidence to show that Year 3 are making the expected rate of progress. However, the headteacher has identified some concerns in mathematics and writing in Year 5 and writing in Year 4 where a number of children are not making satisfactory progress due in part to the legacy of under achievement of these particular children. In all year groups teachers are aware of which children are underperforming and this is helping to inform their planning and preparation.

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

- Raise standards, particularly in mathematics and writing – satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Children's behaviour during the visit was good. In classrooms children shared resources and co-operated. The relationships between adults and children were good. In a number of lessons adults effectively used praise and encouragement to help children feel confident to have a go.

Since the last inspection the school has improved the curriculum by having a number of activities that have enriched children's experiences of learning. Visits to places of interest, a poetry workshop and a musical production at Christmas have all contributed to motivating children to have positive attitudes about their work. Good displays around school also highlight the recent emphasis on improving children's cultural development.

Quality of provision

Teaching has improved since the last visit. Almost half of the lessons seen were good with one lesson judged to be outstanding. There was no inadequate teaching seen and many of the satisfactory lessons had good features.

It was very evident that all teachers have refocused on how they use targets, make assessments of how well children are doing throughout lessons and aim to match questions and work to children's different abilities. When lessons were good all of these features of teaching were used well so that lessons flowed, had a good pace, and children made progress. In these lessons teachers were picking up and responding to how well children were learning and adapting lessons as they went along. In an outstanding lesson expectations were high and the teacher did not miss an opportunity to keep children learning by being on task, challenged and supported by very good relationships.

One good improvement in teaching since the last visit has been the effective way children have been asked to evaluate their own work. In one lesson where children were working on performing poetry they were asked to evaluate their progress, for example, the clarity of their voice and the use of expression. Children were keen and able to do this and this helped them to realise how much they had improved.

When lessons were satisfactory not enough was done to ensure that children were constantly challenged. For example, teachers followed their lesson plans too rigidly and did not always spot that they could have moved on more quickly because children were already confident in what was being taught. In many of the satisfactory lessons there was too much time taken up with the teacher teaching the whole class. Although this teaching was satisfactory it dictated the pace of the lesson, often matching the average ability in the class, and failed to provide all children with enough challenge. Using such a significant proportion of the lesson in this way prevented children from being able to produce sufficient independent or group work a weakness identified during the last visit.

The use of targets in English and mathematics has improved since the last monitoring inspection. Targets are clearly displayed and children are aware of them. Additional to the main targets a number of teachers have developed other more short term targets for children. There is some good practice emerging in this area but the school has yet to adopt a common way of working. The use of assessment has also improved since the last visit and there is now more reliable data being built up to track how much progress children are making. Teachers use this information to pitch work at the right level and to organise children into ability groups.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring lessons are well planned and have good pace and challenge for all – satisfactory.

- Develop a rigorous target setting, assessment and tracking procedure to inform planning and regularly monitor pupils' progress through school – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management have improved significantly since the last visit. In a short time the new headteacher has ensured the school has a clear direction with plans that detail the step by step actions that need to take place to make the improvements needed. Improvements in teaching and the rate of progress children make have followed and there is a much more positive feel to the school. Her determination and leadership skills have facilitated other leaders to become more confident and effective in their roles. This includes the assistant headteacher who has a good overview of how children's individual targets for English and mathematics are being used and has identified areas for development.

The school is now making regular checks on lessons, teacher's plans and children's work. Some lesson observations have been too brief to capture the full impact of teaching on children's learning. Monitoring has identified areas where progress has been made and also where teaching is too often satisfactory and children do not make satisfactory progress. Having made general improvements to teaching the school is aware that it now needs to focus on more specific features of teaching or year groups where teaching is not yet consistently good.

The leadership and management of the literacy and numeracy subject leaders has improved and is now beginning to have a greater impact across the school. Lesson observations, monitoring of children's work and planning have all taken place in the last four months and some good points for improvement have been identified. Subject leaders speak more confidently about standards and there is a more strategic view of how to improve them. This work has been effectively supported by the headteacher and LA consultants who have provided direction, guidance and good role models.

Working with the new headteacher, the governors now have a greater sense of purpose. They have re evaluated their role and have identified areas where they need to become more effective. Using the information from this evaluation they have generated plans of action. They now have a timetable of meetings and are more informed in order to challenge the school. Governors have begun to visit the school to see for themselves how things are.

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

- Improve the quality of leadership and management at all levels so there is a clear direction – good progress.

- Use rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures to identify areas where improvement is needed and take effective action to remedy the shortcomings – good progress.

External support

LA support has effectively supported the school since the last inspection visit especially in relation to the improvements made to the leadership and management of the school. Lessons have been monitored and suitable guidance has been given. The LA recognises the progress the school has made in the last four months and plans to continue to support proportionate to need.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Share good practice in assessment and agree on common formats for recording in order to improve consistency in ways of working.
- Further develop the way teaching challenges' children of different abilities especially in English and mathematics lessons.
- Ensure that effective support further improves standards in year groups where achievement is below expectations.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Strategic Director Children and Younger Adult Services.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Cook
H M Inspector