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Mr T Ireson
The Headteacher
St Barnabas C of E First and Middle School
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Dear Mr Ireson

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF DRAKES' BROUGHTON ST BARNABAS C OF E FIRST AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Peter Isherwood and Sally Hall, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 27 and 28 February 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 January 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 you, the deputy headteacher, the subject leaders for English, mathematics and science, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, the chair of the governors' curriculum committee, and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the previous inspection, one teacher resigned and left the school at the end of the autumn term 2006. One other teacher has resigned and will be leaving the school at the end of the spring term 2007. The governors have been successful in recruiting an assistant headteacher who is expected to join

the school at the beginning of the summer term 2007. Two members of the local authority's advisory staff have been deployed in the school to support improvements in teaching and learning, subject leadership and the analysis of assessment information.

Achievement and standards

Following the successful implementation of a range of measures to tackle the considerable levels of underachievement in Key Stage 2 and Year 7, the overall decline in standards and pupils' achievement has been arrested. Rates of progress have increased significantly and are currently satisfactory for the majority of pupils. The school has been particularly successful in raising achievement for those pupils who previously made little or no progress at all. Whilst the gap between what the pupils are currently achieving and what they are expected to attain for their age is closing more rapidly than previously, the legacy of underachievement continues to present a major challenge for all teachers. There is a significant proportion of pupils, almost a third in each year group in Key Stage 2 and Year 7, who are still too far behind in their work and are not making progress at a fast enough rate.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' behaviour and attitudes are consistently good and often outstanding. Pupils are mature, confident, courteous and good humoured. They enjoy talking about their work, are friendly, and show respect to each other and to the adults who they work with. Relationships between pupils and between adults and pupils are very good. The introduction of 'peer assessment', where pupils in Years 5 and 6 assess their own and each others' work, is making a very positive contribution to their independence, self reliance and responsibility.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching ranges from outstanding to inadequate and is satisfactory overall. This represents a significant improvement since the previous monitoring inspection. There has been an increase in the proportion of good and outstanding teaching and a fall in the number of lessons judged to be inadequate. This is having a positive impact on pupils' achievements and their rates of progress.

Good and outstanding teaching is reflected positively in the pupils' good achievements. Improvements in planning, where pupils' work is matched more effectively and accurately to their different learning needs, a faster pace of learning, and rising teacher expectations, all contribute positively to pupils making better progress than previously. Nevertheless, the persistence of a minority of weaker teaching continues to have a negative impact on rates of progress for some pupils. This is shown particularly where expectations are

unrealistic, there is a lack of challenge and adequate support for different groups of pupils, and important concepts and objectives are not explained sufficiently.

Short and medium term planning in Key Stage 2 and in Year 7 has improved and is satisfactory. The deputy headteacher has successfully led an important initiative to revise teaching timetables in these year groups in order to maximise the pupils' learning opportunities, particularly in literacy and numeracy. This has led to a more coherent and structured approach to raising standards in these subjects and ensured that potential distractions caused by timetabling are kept to a minimum and do not impact negatively on pupils' achievement. Important changes have also been made to pupil groups in English and mathematics and these have contributed positively to the better progress made by pupils in these subjects. The deputy headteacher has also reviewed the school's collective worship policy and introduced a coherent programme for all year groups.

The provision for outdoor play in the Foundation Stage has improved considerably and is satisfactory. The youngest pupils in the school have a safe and secure outdoor learning environment which adds positively to their learning and play experiences. The school is making good use of the limited space available and good progress has been made to introduce a range of stimulating and interesting areas for children to explore.

The school has made satisfactory progress in developing and improving the use of individual pupil targets. These are, however, variable in quality and impact. Some targets are clear and concise and readily understood by the pupils, which helps them know exactly what they are required to do to improve their work. This is particularly strong in Year 6, where the pupils check their progress against their own targets and evaluate how well they are doing to achieve them. However, many pupils do not understand their targets and are often unclear whether they have reached them or not. Since the previous monitoring inspection pupils' work has been marked consistently using a new marking system. This is much appreciated by the pupils. The amount of work recorded in pupils' books is satisfactory, although only just adequate for some pupils in Years 3 and 4.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2006

- improve the quality of teaching in Years 3 to 6 in English, mathematics and science in order to challenge all pupils effectively, particularly the most capable, and to raise standards – good.

Leadership and management

Since the previous monitoring inspection, there has been a considerable improvement in monitoring and evaluating the school's performance. You are

providing firm, clear and decisive leadership and have successfully refocused the school's energies into raising standards and eliminating underachievement.

Assessment information is used effectively to identify rates of progress for different groups and cohorts of pupils. For example, the school can demonstrate that those pupils who were previously standing still or falling further behind are beginning to make better progress. Similarly, assessment data is used well to set a higher level of challenge for the more able pupils. Whole school targets for improvement are challenging and teachers are being held to account for the standards achieved and the progress made by the pupils in their care. Similarly, the arrangements for checking and improving the quality of teaching and learning are far more robust and rigorous. There is a systematic and coherent programme of lesson observations, checking teachers' planning and the pupils' written work. Targets for improvement generally show what teachers are expected to do to improve their work and when improvements should be made. Some of the written feedback usefully shows the focus for the next observation, although this is not yet a consistent feature. Similarly written feedback does not always give enough priority to the impact of teaching on the pupils' learning and achievement in lessons.

Self-evaluation is satisfactory and strategic planning is good. You have produced rigorous and helpful evaluations of progress against the key areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2006 and by previous HMI visits. Revisions to the action plan are appropriate, focused on the school's most pressing priorities, and emphasise the importance of evaluating the impact of initiatives. The role of the governors in holding the school to account for the standards achieved by the pupils is developing well. Under the careful and dedicated leadership of the chair of governors, the governing body is keeping a watchful eye on the school's progress. Governors are making good use of assessment data to monitor pupils' achievements and their progress. All these actions ensure that the school is building secure foundations for further improvement and progress.

Subject leadership is good in English and mathematics. It is satisfactory in science, where the subject leader has received considerable and significant support from LA advisers and inspectors.

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

- Improve leadership and management at all levels by implementing more rigorous procedures for evaluating the school's effectiveness in eradicating underachievement – good.

External support

The local authority provides a good level of support, monitoring and intervention. The work of the LA link adviser, advisory teachers and subject inspectors is having a very positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning, leadership and management, and the analysis of assessment information.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no significant priorities for improvement other than the key areas for improvement identified in the inspection of January 2006.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Worcester and the Director of Children's Services for Worcestershire.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Watters
Her Majesty's Inspector