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Mrs V Cranton
The Headteacher
Gorse Hill Community Primary School
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Worcestershire
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Dear Mrs Cranton

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF GORSE HILL COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Don Mason and Charlotte Roberson, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 13 and 14 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 March 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 English and mathematics coordinators, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, an additional governor, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the previous inspection and following a staffing review of fixed term posts, the governors have been successful in recruiting two full time teaching assistants. One teacher continues to be absent because of long term illness and one other teacher is absent on maternity leave. The deputy headteacher has been deployed to teach a class of pupils in Key Stage 2. Ongoing building

work in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is disrupting provision in these areas of the school.

Achievement and standards

Whilst standards remain low and often well below the levels expected for the pupils' ages, achievements in English and mathematics are beginning to show signs of improvement. From a very low base, the rate of pupils' progress is increasing. This is clearly a welcome improvement but should not mask the fact that a third of the pupils continue to make no progress or are falling further behind in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's assessment information, some of which has been moderated, shows that more pupils are making at least satisfactory progress and some are doing better than this. A majority of pupils are generally doing well in Years 5 and 6 and some are doing reasonably well in Years 2 and 4. Their progress in Year 3 continues to be unsatisfactory and is slow in Reception and Year 1.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- improve achievement and raise standards in English and mathematics by accelerating the rate of pupils' progress in both subjects – broadly satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

As reported previously, the great majority of pupils behave well. They are polite and welcoming to visitors. The quality of relationships between pupils and between adults and pupils is good. Most pupils have positive attitudes to their work, except when they are asked to complete tasks that they do not understand or are confused by teachers' questions and instructions. On these occasions pupils are easily distracted and become restless and inattentive. Some of the younger children in Reception and Year 1 are very boisterous when entering and leaving classrooms and are easily distracted during whole class sessions. This behaviour is not managed well enough by the teachers.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is beginning to improve but is inconsistent and far too variable. It is generally good in Years 4, 5 and 6 and for some of the pupils in Years 1 and 2. However, persistent weaknesses remain for too many pupils in Reception and Years 1, 2 and 3. The local authority target of 95% satisfactory or better teaching in the school by March 2007 has not been met.

Where teaching is good learning objectives are used effectively to guide the pupils' work, which is matched well to their different learning needs. Teaching assistants give good support particularly to explain and extend the tasks set

for different groups of pupils. Relationships are very good and teaching styles are lively and enthusiastic. Where teaching is having too little impact on the pupils' achievements it is because their work is either too difficult or too easy, teachers' explanations and instructions are confusing, and teaching assistants are not deployed effectively to help the pupils improve their work.

Assessment information is beginning to be used more effectively to influence teachers' planning and set targets for the pupils to achieve. Teachers have identified different ability groups in their classes and are starting to evaluate the impact of their lessons on pupils' achievements. Some teachers make changes to their planning based on what the pupils have learned and use this information well to make sure that their lessons are clearly focused on raising achievement. However, this is not yet a consistent feature in all classes and year groups.

The teaching of reading has improved and, as a result, some of the pupils are making much better progress and showing more enthusiasm for reading. Group reading sessions are generally positive, particularly for the pupils who are working with the teacher or another adult. When pupils are asked to read independently for enjoyment this work is not always sufficiently well planned, for example one group of pupils who were asked to sit outside a classroom and read a range of magazines, comics and newspapers made very little progress.

The use and helpfulness of curriculum targets for each pupil remains variable. In Year 6 pupils talk very positively about their targets and how they are helping them improve their work. In other year groups pupils are less sure about their targets and many cannot remember them. Plans to revise the curriculum have been suspended.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- improve the quality of teaching by requiring all teachers to use assessment information properly to assist their planning and target setting – broadly satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The school's senior leadership team has successfully refocused priorities and is tackling the key areas for improvement more effectively than previously. You are giving a sound lead in improving the quality of monitoring and evaluation. Your self-evaluation of progress since the previous monitoring inspection identifies what is going well and what needs to be done to ensure improvements are sustainable and embedded across the school. This is a welcome development. The seconded deputy headteacher has introduced a systematic and coherent programme to track pupils' progress and measure their achievements. This has the potential to play an important part in raising

standards. The subject leaders for English and mathematics have become more involved in monitoring their subjects and helping their colleagues improve the quality of teaching. These actions are starting to have a positive impact, although much work lies ahead to secure the school's capacity for further improvement.

Self-evaluation and monitoring are satisfactory, although some weaknesses remain in checking and improving the quality of teaching. Whilst the monitoring programme is more focused on raising standards, there is a lack of rigour and sense of urgency in the written feedback and the targets set to eliminate persistent weaknesses in teaching. Some targets remain far too broad and do not indicate exactly what teachers need to do to improve their work. Similarly, many of the checks on teaching do not show how or when senior teachers will follow up the targets to secure improvement. There is not yet a sufficiently coherent and sequenced programme which shows how the different monitoring and evaluation activities should be coordinated and linked to ensure improvement. Similarly, the written feedback to teachers does not always identify how well the pupils are making progress, and their achievements are sometimes confused with their attainment levels.

Assessment information is beginning to be used to hold teachers to account for the standards achieved by the pupils in their care. The senior leadership team is in a much stronger position to evaluate the impact of teaching on the pupils' learning and recognises that there is more work to be done to moderate teachers' assessments to ensure that they are consistently reliable and valid.

The action plan has been revised to give greater emphasis to measuring the impact of actions in raising achievement. The school is well placed to build on this further and, in the coming months, expects to set achievement targets for all pupils and year groups. Short term development planning has been improved and is broadly satisfactory.

The governors have improved their role in holding the school to account for the standards achieved by the pupils. Governing body minutes indicate that there is a strong focus on raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching. Governors are actively involved in checking pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and are in a far more secure position to ask challenging questions about the school's performance. These are all welcome developments.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- improve the quality of leadership and management by establishing greater rigour in the checks made on teaching and learning to ensure that they are always strongly focused on raising standards – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority continues to provide a satisfactory level of support and intervention. Regular reviews of progress identify important areas for further improvement and show how the school should be supported to evaluate the impact of its actions. It is expected that by the time of the next HMI monitoring inspection the LA statement of action will be revised to take account of comments made in the previous monitoring letter of 15 December 2006. The LA is now in a position to do this because of improvements in the school's collection and analysis of assessment information. Local authority consultant teachers continue to provide a systematic programme of support, although this is not having a sufficiently positive impact in eliminating persistent weaknesses in teaching.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – broadly satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Sharpen further the quality of monitoring and evaluation by setting more precise targets for teachers to improve their work and making sure that there is a greater sense of urgency about eliminating persistent weaknesses in teaching.
- Ensure teachers' assessments are reliable, valid and subject to rigorous moderation.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Watters
Her Majesty's Inspector