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Mrs L Banks
The Headteacher
Redhill Primary School
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Dear Mrs Banks

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF REDHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with David Westerall, Additional Inspector to your school 6 and 7 March 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 the headteacher, representatives of the governing body, groups of pupils, all staff and some parents. A further meeting was held with representatives from the local authority. All teaching staff were observed.

Context

The governors are continuing their recruitment campaign and are in the process of attempting to appoint a deputy headteacher. They have confirmed the appointment of a headteacher on a permanent basis. The number of pupils on roll has settled at around 250 and the decline has been halted.

There remains above average proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and who are entitled to free school meals.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards continue to improve but the improvement is inconsistent across the school. Standards remain inadequate overall and slow progress in some classes is a cause for concern. There are also some encouraging signs, however. For pupils age 11 in 2006, for example, standards improved significantly on previous years and are in line with national expectations, although too few reached the higher levels. This is a considerable achievement. However, the school were rightly disappointed with the 2006 test results for seven year old pupils, where standards were well below average.

In the Foundation Stage children enter school with lower than average levels of literacy but make satisfactory progress as a result of good teaching. Whilst this good start is not maintained consistently in Years 1 to 4, a closer focus on improving reading and writing skills is starting to raise attainment slowly in Years 1 and 2. Improvement elsewhere is much better.

However, the pupils' speaking and listening skills, although improving, are doing so more slowly. Similarly, despite the recent welcome changes, writing standards, especially handwriting, spelling and sentence construction remain poor. Thanks to more specific teaching strategies, pupils show a growing enthusiasm for using a richer vocabulary when asked but this is not yet applied in all subjects. In the pupils' workbooks there is growing evidence of progress in key areas, such as an understanding of grammar and a more precise use of terminology. In one example a six year old pupil was able to show her granny how many 'high frequency words' there were in a newspaper article. This attention to detail is welcomed by pupils and families alike and is a key reason why standards are starting to improve.

The difference in performance between girls and boys is now analysed more accurately by the school. This is showing that there is a narrowing of the gap in some year groups but that girls still generally outperform boys, especially in writing. The higher levels of monitoring are also showing that some groups of pupils now progress more rapidly than others. As an example, more able pupils do not make progress as well as they could.

Standards in mathematics continue to improve, especially in the older classes. Pupils in these classes can now use fractions and decimals and show a good range of problem solving strategies alongside greater security in basic number work. Here, as in science, a legacy of inadequate literacy skills is still limiting their performance however. There remain too few opportunities for pupils to use this increased understanding, especially in other lessons. In one information and communication technology lesson (ICT) for example, pupils

who showed a misunderstanding of how to measure angles were allowed to carry on with their misunderstanding because the lesson was about shape. As a result, improving standards in mathematics remain capped.

Pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported and are making average progress. This represents an improvement. However, some groups are capable of achieving more, for example more able boys and girls.

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

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science by ensuring that boys do as well as girls, and speaking and listening and writing are developed well in all subjects – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory overall. There are some areas, however, where the improvement is too slow and other aspects which the school acknowledge could be improved. Attendance is well below the national average for primary schools at 92.4%. Here, an accurate analysis completed by the school shows in which year groups pupils attend less well and where term time holidays are still too common. There are appropriate plans to tackle this involving closer working with other agencies and organisations.

The behaviour and attitudes shown by the majority of the pupils are good. Indeed, in some lessons, pupils are keen to contribute, help each other well, and maintain an enthusiasm for working even when the tasks they are given lack challenge or interest. Although the pupils say there are occasional incidents of bullying, it is not widespread and any incidences are dealt with promptly by the school. Pupils say they enjoy school but also that they feel they could work harder. They are brimming with good ideas about how to enhance the learning environment which they shared through a recent school survey. The school council and 'playground pals' contribute well to an improved sense of purpose and community amongst the pupils.

The rate of exclusions has recently risen significantly and is now too high. The school has recorded some incidents of racism. The school is also aware that they could do more to build pupils' understanding of the multicultural world they live in. Pupils are more aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and say that they feel safe and well looked after.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is improving and remains satisfactory overall. In particular, teachers now use a more precise range of assessment activities

and plan more appropriately. The use of individual pupil targets, which are then shared with pupils, has helped sharpen the understanding of what pupils need to do next to improve their work. In the Foundation Stage and Years 1 to 4 the school has started to use a new scheme for improving basic literacy skills and, although new, this is showing signs of promise. In particular, there is an agreed consistency across year groups about what to teach and this is improving provision.

The key characteristics of most lessons are good relationships with pupils, improving use of ICT to maintain interest and enthusiasm, and increased pace to the sessions. In some classes, there is also a noticeable increase in the level of challenge as evident in teachers' planning and in workbooks. Teachers now ask questions more frequently to check pupils' understanding and knowledge and share the lesson's objectives routinely. Paired talk and the use of brisk timings are also more commonplace.

However, these strengths are not evident in all classes and, where teaching was less effective, there were too few opportunities for the pupils to write or speak at length. In some lessons, introductory parts to lessons took too long and expectations, although raised, could be considerably higher in some classes. The use of questioning has improved, although some of the questions did not encourage more detailed thinking. In some classes, for example, a quick one word answer is too readily accepted. Inadequate spellings and handwriting are tolerated in some other subject areas and some basic misunderstandings, especially in mathematics, go unchecked.

One considerable improvement, however, is how teachers much more routinely share targets with pupils and parents. As a result, pupils are much clearer about what is expected of them, especially in literacy. There remain too few examples of marking which helps pupils know what level they are working at and what they need to do to improve, although this is evident in the older classes. For too many of the younger pupils standard practice relies too heavily on worksheets which are then marked only with a tick or a stamp. This is not helpful to pupils.

The curriculum is satisfactory. There is a growing range of extra-curricular activity and visits which are helping to enrich the pupils' experiences. The good support of classroom assistants has helped improve the progress made by pupils with particular needs.

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

- improve the quality of learning through raising expectations of what pupils are able to do, ensuring challenging activities are matched to their needs and improving the pace of learning – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The school's leadership and management are going through a period of sustained change which is likely to continue for some time yet. This has hampered more rapid progress. There remains some important decisions to be made about key appointments in the senior management team. For example, some subjects lack a coordinator and others, including English, have more than one person sharing the role.

However, there are also some significant changes to practice that are starting to shape an encouraging new ethos amongst the school's leaders. For example, the regular assessment of pupils' progress in English and mathematics is helping to improve standards in these subjects. There is an increasingly regular monitoring of the quality of teaching that is starting to secure greater consistency, although the school also recognises that there is some way to go in this regard yet. For example, the increased level of monitoring is still too informal at times and lacks a sharp evaluation of what works well. In particular it focuses too much on what teachers do and not enough on what pupils are achieving.

The newly appointed headteacher continues to promote improvements through her direct decision making and an increased sense of urgency. She has gained the confidence of the parents, governors and staff in a short period of time, has an accurate view of what needs to be done to maintain improvements, and offers a clear vision for the school's future.

There is an emerging team approach with an increased focus on raising standards. Parents are supportive of the new ethos and especially appreciate the new reporting system whereby they know the levels their children are working at. This is because of the much improved monitoring and tracking of pupils' progress.

One area of significant improvement is in the quality of the school's self-evaluation and long term planning. Although not yet complete, the school improvement plan now has precise dates, timetables and actions. It is based on full consultation with parents, pupils and others, and is closely linked to the outcomes of the previous inspection. This is a welcome document.

Governors are increasingly acting as critical friends and report that school discussions are now much more focused on standards. Although there remain some vacancies, all committee structures are maintained well.

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

- strengthen the leadership of the school by improving existing monitoring and evaluation systems so that the information gained is used rigorously to raise standards – satisfactory.

External support

The school continues to receive considerable support from the local authority. However, this support is inconsistent at times due to changes in personnel. As a result, although the advice received has been of at least satisfactory quality, there remains the need for a sustained and coherent package. Despite the changes, some of which were unavoidable, overall support is judged to be satisfactory.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Plan monitoring activities to match the school's own priorities more closely.
- Increase the opportunities for improving basic literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.
- Improve the rate of progress being made in Years 1 and 2.
- Ensure greater consistency across the school in the use of pupil targets and marking which shows pupils how to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Ceri Morgan
H M Inspector