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Mr P Goulding
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Dear Mr Goulding

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ROWLATTS HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Tony O'Malley HMI on 20 and 21 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 May 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, nominated staff and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last visit, the school has faced problems with staff absence. However, since January, the LA has provided additional support for the school with a lead professional on teaching and learning for two days a week. A substantive headteacher has been appointed for April 2007.

Achievement and standards

The standards of pupils' work across all subjects are generally below age related expectations, although a small number of pupils produce work that is of a high quality. Moreover, the school's monitoring indicates that, whilst pupil progress remains uneven, there is overall improvement. Changes in

teaching strategies, alongside targeted interventions, are beginning to accelerate the pupils' rates of progress. This impact is evident, for example, in the rapid gains that Key Stage 2 pupils have recently made in writing. There has also been a marked improvement in the quality of the presentation of pupils' work in response to teachers' higher expectations.

The school's assessment systems are becoming properly embedded. Teachers have a more accurate overview of the standards of pupils' work in literacy, numeracy and in science. The regular half termly assessments enable class teachers to analyse and track the progress of pupils, to target support, and to consolidate weaker areas of learning. Target setting has developed well and better underpins learning. Teachers make regular reference to targets that are displayed on walls and in books, and this encourages pupils to assess for themselves what they need to do to improve.

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

- set pupils challenging targets for attainment which are regularly reviewed – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

The improvements noted at the time of the last visit have been consolidated and extended. Pupils' attitudes to learning and standards of behaviour are better and are often good. In most lessons, pupils listened attentively, worked cooperatively, and were keen to volunteer answers. Around the school and in the playground, pupils showed consideration for others and behaved responsibly. They recognise and appreciate many of the school's material improvements, such as in the playground, in the library and classrooms, and the new interactive whiteboards. Several pupils commented on how they feel more involved with improving the school and others said how much they now enjoy their lessons. This strengthened personal development reflects the school's more settled and positive climate, and improvements in teaching. These improvements are, however, uneven, reflecting variable improvements in teaching. When the pace of lessons is slow, older pupils do not show enthusiasm for learning and some quickly get restless.

At 93.2% for the year to date, attendance remains below average but is better than the previous academic year. The school continues to work hard to improve the attendance and punctuality of the most intransigent families.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has strengthened since the last inspection, particularly in terms of presenting pupils with more interesting and challenging work. Most lessons have good features and a greater proportion is good. These improvements are based on sharper short term planning. Teachers have higher expectations and a clearer understanding of what pupils should achieve, and plan a better range of learning activities. Lessons are guided by learning intentions that enable teachers to review and assess the pupils'

progress. The new interactive whiteboards are used well to structure and support learning, and better displays also enhance the learning environment. The visual literacy project has provided a considerable stimulus for the creative writing of older pupils. Pupils enjoy opportunities to work in groups and pairs, particularly when they are given exciting practical activities. For example, children in the Foundation Stage follow up the Jack in the Beanstalk tale in writing, climbing, planting, counting and measuring activities which they enjoy and are keen to talk about. This practice reflects improved teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage, where carefully planned choices for children steer them successfully towards achieving the early learning goals.

The work of the lead teacher has strengthened the teachers' capacities for self reflection, and this has helped to secure improvement in several classes. However, the quality of pupils' learning varies too widely and, in some lessons, too many pupils make inadequate progress because of weak teaching. In the less effective lessons, assessment information is not used well enough to plan work that meets the pupils' learning needs. Too much time is spent consolidating previous work, restricting the amount of new learning that takes place. When activities are dull or lack challenge, pupils become passive or restless.

The majority of pupils receive regular feedback on what they have done well and guidance on how to improve future work. There are good examples of pupils acting upon this advice. However, in some classes, oral feedback and marking are not specific or regular enough to help the pupils to improve quickly.

The work of learning support assistants is often good, but is too variable. This is a concern because the responsibility for teaching literacy and numeracy to pupils with learning difficulties is delegated to assistants.

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

- improve the effectiveness of teaching, especially by matching work to pupils' needs and capabilities and increasing the pace of learning – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The interim headteacher has successfully maintained the pace of change by prioritising developments judiciously and tailoring support to meet the individual needs of staff. His excellent leadership has accelerated the school's recovery by increasing the impact of these changes on the quality of the school's provision and the outcomes for pupils. A key factor in the school's improvement has been the very effective work of the lead teacher. She has guided whole school developments in order to achieve greater consistency and has provided very good coaching and modelling for individual staff. This has strengthened classroom practice and promoted an open and honest dialogue that has helped teachers to be more reflective about their teaching and leadership roles.

Subject leadership is developing well. Curriculum coordinators have a clearer understanding of their roles and are beginning to take responsibility for monitoring their subject areas. However, they do not yet confidently evaluate or guide the work of other staff.

School self-evaluation has been strengthened. Whole school monitoring is developing well. It engages more staff and has provided developmental action points to secure improvements. There is now a professional dialogue between teachers, a wider acceptance of the areas that need improvement, and a determination from most staff to implement agreed changes. Opportunities to observe effective practice within the school and outside have been well supported by professional development activities. The school is well placed to consolidate and extend its recent improvements.

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

- ensure all leaders monitor the performance of the school rigorously and follow this through to action where improvement is needed – satisfactory.

External support

The school continues to receive very good support from the LA. The guidance of the interim headteacher and the lead on teaching and learning has been a key factor in securing sustainable improvement. However, the school has been frustrated by the irregular support for improving attendance and punctuality.

Main Judgements

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that the recent improvements in teaching are properly consolidated in all classes.
- Review the in-class support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, so that they make more rapid progress.
- Further develop the strategic leadership roles of subject coordinators.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector