



28 March 2007

Ms A Hennell James
Headteacher
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IP2 8PY

Dear Ms Hennell James

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HALIFAX PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 2005.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, pupils, staff, parents, governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The school organisation has changed since the last monitoring visit. Interviews for the vacant headteacher post were held during the second week of March. The acting Headteacher was appointed to the substantive post. This now enables the Governing Body to proceed with the appointment of a deputy headteacher. The temporary arrangements put in place last term will continue until a permanent appointment is made in May. Support from two advanced skills teachers has been used to strengthen teaching and learning in Key Stage 2. The newly qualified teacher asked to extend her

period of qualification has successfully completed her introductory year. A part time teacher who covers teachers' planning and preparation time will leave at the end of term. An additional teacher has been appointed for the summer term to teach a new group of Reception children.

Achievement and standards

The school is making increasingly more effective use of assessment and tracking data to regularly monitor pupils' progress. This is managed well by the acting deputy headteacher who has analysed and reported on the latest round of assessments for reading, writing and mathematics. The tracking data shows that pupils are now making better progress in most year groups. Fewer pupils are underachieving, although many still have some way to go to catch up to the standards expected for their age. The analysis reports which are written by members of the leadership team highlight which pupils are not progressing at the expected rate. Discussions take place between staff on how to accelerate progress. The school has identified that further emphasis is required on ensuring pupils make suitable progress in reading.

Although pupils are making better progress in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, children in the Foundation Stage continue to underachieve. The records of attainment for children in the Reception class indicate that they are making less than expected progress. Attainment in some aspects of learning is particularly low, for example in linking sounds and letters, writing and calculation. Weaknesses also remain in assessment and record keeping, despite considerable support from the deputy headteacher for establishing a systematic approach which includes electronic data collection.

Since the last monitoring visit, teachers' assessments of pupils' writing have been moderated. Assessments are now mostly accurate and this has increased the leadership team's confidence in the accuracy of tracking data. Teachers' marking is more consistent and used more successfully to inform improvements in pupils' work. The marking policy has been reviewed and updated and teachers know what is expected when they mark pupils' work and what a good piece of marking looks like. Curricular target setting, although improved, requires further refinement. There is still some inconsistency in how teachers apply the whole school learning targets. The subject leaders for English and mathematics are looking into the organization of curricular target setting with a view to establishing a workable system that all teachers can use effectively. Pupils generally have a better understanding of their writing targets than the targets set for mathematics. In some classes, teachers have provided useful exemplification to help pupils understand how they might use their targets to improve their work. In Year 4 this helps pupils to understand and apply them more successfully. Checklist targets are also found useful by Year 2 pupils to help them improve their writing.

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

- To use assessment data to regularly monitor progress – good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour around the school and in lessons has improved further and is now good. Pupils, parents and governors reported positively on the much calmer atmosphere in the school. Since the last monitoring visit, the behaviour policy has been revised and approved by the Governing Body. Staff continue to apply behaviour management strategies effectively when they are required, although they are required less often. This is because pupils are responding well to being involved in more interesting learning. Better behaviour is also helping teachers to teach more effectively. As behaviour has improved, the number of fixed and permanent exclusions has fallen. Fixed term exclusions are much fewer than they were in the previous two terms, although one pupil was permanently excluded this term.

The behaviour support assistant is very effective in quickly picking up on any unacceptable behaviour and his influence on the overall improvement is notable. The latest behaviour report indicates that the overwhelming majority of children are meeting the school's expectations for good behaviour. The behaviour of the small number of children still causing concern is closely monitored and good support is provided where necessary to ensure that this does not have an adverse effect on other pupils' learning. Outreach support for individual pupils is also received from staff from a pupil referral unit. To ensure the improvements in behaviour are sustained, additional funding has been allocated to the school by the LA for the appointment of a learning mentor. Older pupils will visit the Ipswich Town Football Club study support centre as part of the 'Respect' initiative.

The improvement in attendance has been maintained. Attendance rates are better than they were last year and are now just below the national average. However poor punctuality is still an issue and this is affecting the proportion of unauthorised absence which is higher than average. Systems and procedures for monitoring attendance continue to be managed effectively. Pupils with persistently low attendance are reported to the education welfare service and legal action is taken when required.

Pupils' personal development and well being continue to improve. The school council members reported positively on the improvements in behaviour and their enjoyment of more interesting lessons. They also remarked on improvements to the layout of the building and the contact they have with the headteacher around the school. Older pupils are taking more responsibility and enjoy supporting younger pupils with reading, taking the

role of friendship buddies and helping with the organisation of play activities. Pupils in Year 3 have strengthened their knowledge of healthy lifestyles through learning about healthy foods and farm produce.

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

- Secure consistency in the management of pupil behaviour – good progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is improving but there was still some inadequate teaching observed in the latest rounds of monitoring completed by the school and LA. The school is some way off meeting the LA target set for teaching to be 100% satisfactory and 80% good or better by July 2007. The LA recognises that the improvements made by some teachers are not fully embedded. The inspection confirmed the accuracy of the judgements made by the school and LA.

Action taken by the school has helped to strengthen teaching and learning in most classes. This includes the monitoring of lessons undertaken by the leadership team and the support provided from advanced skills teachers, senior staff and consultants for planning, assessment and the use of information and communication technology (ICT). The school's and LA's monitoring records identify improvements in teachers' planning, the effective use of teaching assistants throughout lessons, the sustained pace in lessons, effective behaviour management and more effective questioning and assessment. The best lessons also make effective use of ICT, higher order and differentiated questioning and engage pupils in more challenging learning. There are still weaknesses however, which include a lack of pace and purpose in lessons, inappropriate differentiation, ineffective behaviour management, and inaccurate assessments. Despite considerable support, the teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage is not improving and this continues to affect the progress children make.

Further steps have been taken to improve the balance in the curriculum and make learning more interesting and enjoyable for pupils. Classrooms have colourful displays of work undertaken across the full range of subjects and pupils have enjoyed the opportunities to make study visits as part of their learning. Year 6 pupils have also had the chance to work with High School teachers and pupils on designing, making and testing wheeled vehicles. Teachers continue to link learning across subjects more successfully, including giving pupils more opportunities to use ICT to support their learning. More work is planned on improving the curriculum further to include a greater emphasis on pupils developing their personal learning skills. Support from a LA advisory teacher is already underway in order to

strengthen teaching and learning in science. The emphasis on improving transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 has resulted in more tightly focused learning in Year 1. Weaknesses remain however in the Foundation Stage curriculum, for example in making the best use of outdoor learning.

The school has started to engage parents more in gaining an understanding of what their children are learning in school. Parents were invited to a mathematics evening to learn about how the school teaches calculation skills. Parents have also been consulted on lengthening the school day to increase curriculum time in Key Stage 2. This received a positive response and the decision to increase the day by 25 minutes was agreed by the Governing Body. Curriculum time for Key Stage 2 pupils will meet statutory requirements from September 2007.

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

- To improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that all lessons are well planned and sufficiently challenging to raise standards – satisfactory progress.
- To use time more effectively and improve the balance of the curriculum – good progress.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management have been strengthened further with the appointment of the headteacher. The school is now in a position to appoint a permanent deputy headteacher which governors intend to do in May. The strong complementary leadership partnership between the headteacher designate and acting deputy headteacher continues to spearhead the school's improvement. Staff and parents commented favourably on their positive style of leadership and on the impact their work is having on turning the school around.

There has also been good further development of the leadership team with more responsibility being shared for monitoring and evaluation. Key leaders now have a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in provision. Paired monitoring of lessons, including giving detailed feedback, has improved the leadership team's skills for judging the quality of teaching and learning. Subject leadership in English and mathematics continues to be effective. The mathematics subject leader led a curriculum evening for parents to explain the school's teaching of calculation methods and also made a presentation to the Governing Body on mathematics provision. The English subject leader is expected to follow a similar programme in the summer term.

Subject leadership in ICT is developing and along with subject leadership in science is the school's next target for improvement. These subjects require a detailed audit of their strengths and weaknesses. Improved leadership and management from other members of staff are also helping the school to move forward. The coordinator for pupils who are gifted and talented has drawn up a very detailed action plan to improve provision with the aim of enabling staff to challenge more able and talented pupils. The special educational needs coordinator and behaviour support assistant work well together to monitor and evaluate the impact of their support and intervention programmes. The success of the guidance provided by the acting deputy headteacher for improving teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage and Year 1, which was commented on positively in the last monitoring letter, has helped one teacher reach the standards expected to qualify at the end of her period as a newly qualified teacher. Securing sustainable improvements in the Foundation Stage has been less successful.

Governors continue to take a more active role in supporting and challenging the school to improve. Through the positive leadership of the chair of governors, the Governing Body terms of reference have been reviewed and a new governor induction pack developed. Governors are now making more regular and focused school visits to monitor improvements and report on any subsequent actions they may need to take.

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

- To improve the quality of leadership and management through the use of rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures – good progress.

External support

The LA continues to give the school good support. Regular visits are made to the school by LA inspectors to check on and evaluate progress. The school's link inspector has begun a series of professional development sessions to strengthen middle management. Support from consultants for English and mathematics has continued. This has been supplemented well by the support from two advanced skills teachers for improving teaching and learning. Useful support has also been received for enhancing provision for gifted and talented pupils and further guidance work is scheduled to improve provision in science. Additional funding has been allocated for the one year appointment of a learning mentor to support pupils and families.

Improvements to accommodation will continue with phase two of the school's internal redevelopment which is planned for and expected to get underway early next term. This will complete the changes due to be made in Key Stage 2. The school is already making plans for improvements in Key Stage 1.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Standards, achievement and provision in the Foundation Stage.

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

Yours sincerely

Rob McKeown
H M Inspector