

Cambridge Education
Demeter House
Station Road
Cambridge
CB1 2RS

Direct Tel 01223 578500

Direct Fax 01223 578501

Email – risp.inspections@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs L Wakeford
Angel Road First School
Angel Road
Norwich
Norfolk
NR3 3HR

Dear Mrs Wakeford

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ANGEL ROAD FIRST SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Ann Taylor, Additional Inspector, to your school on 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 February 2006.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you as acting headteacher and with two senior teachers, the subject leader for English, a local authority (LA) school improvement teacher, the chair of governors, a group of pupils and the school's link adviser and a senior education adviser from the LA.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit in December, two teachers absent on that occasion have been re-inducted into the school. The LA has promoted action after due consultation to reorganise the school for the smaller infant age range with effect from September 2007. The governors and acting headteacher have begun planning with the LA the changes necessary for a smaller school for pupils of age 4 to 7 years.

Achievement and standards

Pupils enter the Foundation Stage with skills that are below average. They make progress that is at least satisfactory in response to generally satisfactory teaching. Previous assessments have overestimated the pupils' attainment and progress. The school's arrangements are being consolidated and improved so that their progress can be assessed more accurately.

In Years 1 and 2, pupils' progress has been inadequate. Their attainment has been below at the end of the key stage and this is likely to be so also this year. The pupils are making better progress in lessons, especially in English and mathematics, because teaching is improving.

The school's assessment arrangements have been slow to develop and do not play the part they should in raising standards. Assessments currently carried out by the staff do not enable them to gauge how much progress pupils are making and to direct additional help to pupils who have underachieved. Since the previous monitoring visit, understanding of assessment has become more widespread across the staff. Currently, however, the principal method of assessing attainment and tracking progress is by measuring pupils against the school's half-termly intensive support programme (ISP) targets. Senior staff are aware that this provides only a partial insight into pupils' attainment. They plan to expand the range of these assessments so that National Curriculum attainment and progress can be measured more reliably. Considerable urgency is attached to achieving this, not least by the school's reorganisation which means that in the summer two cohorts rather than the usual one will transfer to other schools.

The subject leaders for English and mathematics have continued to promote appropriate improvements in provision. The recent ISP initiatives are leading increasingly to helpful specific advice for the pupils, for example in the form of criteria for skills in writing or with numbers. Further resources are being acquired and plans for further work are expanding to cover the full range of work for these subjects.

Judgement

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

- raise standards in English and mathematics and particularly in writing – satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. In the main the pupils' attendance and behaviour are good and most show interest in their work. Older pupils show a growing awareness of matters that affect their health and safety. They participate with some enthusiasm in physical education and increasingly make thoughtful decisions about their actions. When required, the pupils make willing contributions to the work of their class or of the school.

Quality of provision

The school is steadily building more effective teaching and learning. Monitoring and coaching by the acting headteacher and LA school improvement teachers have focused more of the teachers on promoting learning, including through fuller use of display to enhance the learning environment in many classrooms.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved further. The school's staff are working hard. Good practice is becoming well established in some of the classes and, overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

In the main, the teachers have good control of the direction and pace of lessons and make sound use of resources to capture pupils' interest. Good use was made of interactive whiteboards, a particularly engaging example being in display of a video recording of the class pretending to go on a bus journey. The better lessons built well on a sound start by using resources further to promote learning with both pace and some depth for many of the pupils, for example in practising skills for number work or for writing complex sentences.

As last term, lessons are at times less effective. None of those observed were inadequate. However, the youngest pupils do not always receive sufficient help to learn what is intended from child initiated activities. More generally, and as a result of the weaknesses in assessment described above, the teachers' information about the pupils' attainment is not yet sufficient to enable all of them to identify the next steps in National Curriculum achievement. As a result, some work is not accurately enough matched to pupils' different individual needs and does not provide suitable challenge for the most capable pupils. Greater use is being made of classroom assistants, though their impact is not yet all it should be. They could play a greater role in some parts of lessons, and at times too little of their time is devoted to the Foundation Stage. Their work with pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) is sometimes good but not always focused sharply enough.

The revised structure of the day is working well and classrooms provide an increasingly stimulating learning environment. The curriculum is improving. The school has checked that the required subjects are taught and is taking steps to correct important omissions. The quality of physical education has improved with the arrival of new climbing bars and large equipment. However, the school is not doing enough to exploit the potential for greater learning through linking different subjects together, for example by using other subjects to build pupils' skills of speaking and listening, or their ambition to read and write. Although there has been substantial investment in new resources, there remain deficiencies that still limit the potential and impact of mathematics and literacy. Information and communication technology (ICT) cannot be properly taught and assessed until recently ordered resources are installed and in use. As a result the curriculum is inadequate.

Relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff are good. The pupils are happy and feel safe in the school. The school has improved its procedures for health and safety and recently identified risks have been minimised.

The staff have accurately identified deficiencies in the school's support for pupils with LDD. They have made a good start on reorganising these and are well placed to put more effective procedures in place. The quality and usefulness of individual educational plans (IEPs) varies. They have started to improve as teachers become more aware of what is needed. However, there is some way to go before the school is able to reliably identify pupils who need specific help, to write IEPs that are focussed on improving pupil's learning, to implement those plans with well targeted support and to measure the pupils' progress.

Staff are becoming more familiar with using targets to help pupils improve their work. The introduction of ISP targets has been a helpful first step as it has extended awareness across the staff of how pupils' progress could be measured. Some of the pupils' work is helped further when teachers provide step-by-step guidance about new skills. However, teachers' marking and other responses to pupils' work vary and with occasional notable exceptions there is not yet enough guidance and explanation for the pupils of how their work could be improved. The school plans a review of its marking policy.

Judgement

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

- ensure that teaching is consistently good or better – satisfactory progress
- review the planning, organisation and delivery of the curriculum to ensure better breadth and balance – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher and other experienced LA personnel are pursuing the strategy identified at the previous monitoring inspection. They are making generally accurate evaluations of teaching and learning, providing helpful advice and targets for the teachers and stimulating helpful professional discussion among the staff. Leadership and management of the school are becoming increasingly effective as subject leaders adopt a fuller role. Their advice to staff based on scrutiny of pupils' work is helping to improve teaching.

Six of the school's seven classes are taught by members of the school's staff. The school's considerable team of teaching and learning assistants is deployed to provide support in many classes, some of it focused on pupils who have LDD. The size of this team has come under review as the school plans for four classes from September 2007.

Recent evaluation by the acting headteacher is increasingly recorded in the school's self-evaluation record. This is informative, includes summarised judgements and leads to the identification of matters that need attention. However, some of the judgements require further evidence, particularly those that should reflect pupils' attainment and progress.

The wider range of improvements identified by staff has been drawn together into a fresh school improvement plan. This sets down broadly appropriate tasks. It includes details of how implementation is to be managed, with leadership roles resting significantly on senior staff and LA personnel. Success criteria are not all sharply enough defined; for example, few are numerical.

Attention is being focused where improvement is most urgent. Reviews for pupils who hold statements of special educational need have now been completed. Work is in hand on assessment and tracking arrangements, and to increase resources. In addition, the plan includes work towards the school's reorganisation, to build links to the wider community and to strengthen arrangements for performance management and school self-evaluation.

The governing body continues to support the school and its staff. Governors have collaborated with the LA to analyse the school's financial position and to model the staff of the new infant school so that it has a secure financial foundation. They continue also to promote the school's interest in building a bigger role in the community. They are close to agreeing with the governors of the neighbouring middle school on a form of close collaboration following the reorganisation in September. Their capacity to fulfil a constructive critical role alongside the staff is being increased through training by the LA. There are plans for individual governors to be assigned to particular strands of school improvement. Increasingly, the governors' strategic and supporting roles are becoming complemented by a role in monitoring the condition and progress of the school.

As before, the staff are working hard. Morale remains secure. Improvements in leadership and management are building the capacity of the school to continue improvement, though this remains significantly dependent on the LA.

Judgement

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

- ensure that the leadership team provides good strategic direction in order to improve the quality of education for all pupils and tackles the underachievement of pupils of average ability – satisfactory progress

External support

The LA has continued to provide a variety of forms of helpful support. In addition to the work of advisers and seconded personnel it has most recently provided governor support, financial advice and human resource services. These are all helping the school's improvement as well as its preparation for reorganisation. Additional funding has been provided so that the school can obtain more computers and other resources for learning. As the school improves, the LA is considering when to withdraw some of its support. Though its original and ambitious target date for the removal of special measures has past, the LA recognises the need for continuing support through a further period while the school is subject to special measures, and as it opens as an infant school. It is supporting emerging plans for collaboration with the new junior school and promoting the growth around the school of a more community focused campus to provide appropriate extended services and a Children's Centre. It remains important, however, that urgent short term needs are also met so that the school can reliably identify pupils' needs, track their progress and provide a curriculum with the required range and impact.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures– satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Priorities for further improvement

- Implement a manageable system for assessing and tracking pupils' attainment and measuring their progress
- Improve systems for supporting pupils with LDD
- Incorporate ICT into the school's curriculum

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children and Learning Services for Norfolk.

Yours sincerely

Deemed signed in absence of signature

Michael Madden
Additional Inspector