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28 March 2007

Ms S Machin
The Headteacher
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Dear Ms Machin

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF KING CHARLES PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Marian Harker, Additional Inspector, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 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, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, representatives from Education Walsall, and the consultant headteacher.

Context

Since the inspection in October 2006, the school has appointed two assistant headteachers following the departure of the deputy headteacher. The local authority is consulting the local community about a proposal to establish a formal federation with Bentley West Primary School. The headteacher of Bentley West is working as the consultant headteacher to King Charles.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are inadequate. The school has begun to systematically measure the attainment of pupils term by term. This data shows that standards remain well below the national average. Standards seen in lessons, and in the work of pupils, remain below average for their age. The weaknesses in spelling identified in October 2006 remain, although the school is devoting additional resources to try to tackle this problem.

The school now has sufficiently detailed and regular information about pupil performance. That data shows that the majority of pupils have made progress during this academic year, but also shows that too many have not, particularly in Key Stage 2. The shortfalls are most apparent in mathematics in Key Stage 2. In the early years, progress continues to be satisfactory. Key Stage 1 standards remain below average.

Personal development and well-being

The behaviour of pupils is satisfactory, although some minor misdemeanours are apparent when pupils' attention falters in lengthy class discussions. Pupils continue to enjoy school and their attendance remains satisfactory. They feel safe and supported and have confidence in being able to share concerns with staff.

Quality of provision

Regular monitoring by you, with the support of Education Walsall, suggested that teaching quality had improved since the inspection in October 2006. The teaching and learning seen by inspectors during this monitoring visit was inadequate. About one in five lessons was inadequate, and the rest satisfactory. This quality of teaching and learning is not yet good enough to cause standards to rise sufficiently. Weak lessons did not give enough opportunity for pupils to contribute to whole class discussion. Too long was taken up by teachers talking at the start of lessons. Eventually this led to some pupils fidgeting, chattering to one another and not concentrating on the teacher. The challenge for pupils of all abilities is limited by the lack of opportunity for pupils to think and act independently.

Good features seen in some lessons included excellent teacher pupil relationships, calm and brisk opening instructions, good response to pupils' learning from the previous lesson, and quick thinking to adapt the lesson plan in the light of emerging circumstances. Some marking of work was good, with the recently adopted 'focused' approach resulting in clear and extensive feedback to pupils. In the best examples, pupils are involved in ongoing written exchanges with the teacher as they correct errors and practise new skills. However, there are other examples where incorrect work is marked as excellent or faults are identified without an expectation that it is put right.

Curriculum was not a focus of the monitoring visit.

Although not a focus of this visit, the systems for safeguarding remain secure. Children are confident that they can seek help from adults in the school. Teaching assistants contribute to the satisfactory support of children with learning difficulties and disabilities and routinely have access to lesson plans. Despite some signs of improvement, however, marking and guidance is not yet consistently informing pupils of the next steps in their learning journeys. Tracking is identifying pupils who seem to be falling behind, but the impact of interventions is not evident.

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

- raise standards and accelerate the rate of pupils' progress by using time more effectively, raising teachers' expectations and ensuring that guidance for pupils, including marking, is more precise – inadequate.

Leadership and management

There is considerable investment by Education Walsall (EW) to try to help the school's own leaders and managers become effective in sustaining improvement. They have been working with governors and the school since January 2006. Recent new internal appointments to the senior leadership team have not had time to impact on standards. Regular monitoring of teaching and learning, however, appears to have overestimated improvements in teaching. Some of the written observation records show inconsistency between the text, and the judgements. Others simply recorded text, alongside developmental feedback points to the teacher. Clarity of purpose may help sharpen the focus of monitoring. The recently seconded consultant headteacher role is limited to supporting the headteacher in leadership and management duties but EW is specifically helping with the monitoring of teaching. The progress reports catalogue actions taken, but are not evaluative enough to drive through the necessary changes.

Governors have been supported by the appointment of two local authority governors. Recent minutes of the governing body show realistic appraisal of the strategic situation. The chair is now clear about the need for the school to deliver better standards.

The revised action plan now has more pupil related achievement targets. Good practice is evident in some strands that clearly separate the persons responsible for delivering the action from those evaluating its impact.

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

- with the full involvement of senior managers and coordinators, implement rigorous monitoring and evaluation that focuses clearly on pupils' learning in lessons and their progress over time – inadequate.

External support

Education Walsall has provided substantial support for the school, and was already working with the school prior to October 2006, albeit without significant impact to that point. Since then, additional resources of specialist and consultant staff have been provided. These have included staff training, advice and guidance for subject coordinators, and recently a consultant headteacher. There are frequent monitoring visits and systematic assessment of pupil performance. The procedural systems planned by Education Walsall in its statement of action are now fully in place, although their impact is, as yet, limited. Nevertheless, the quality of external support is satisfactory.

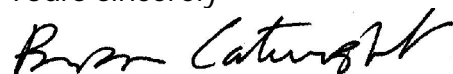
Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

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

Yours sincerely



Brian Cartwright
H M Inspector