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Mrs D Williams
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Dear Mrs Williams

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ROSKEAR SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Charlotte Roberson, Garth Mutton and Peter Kemble, Additional Inspectors, 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 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 and senior managers, the school council, the chair and vice chair of governors, and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

At the time of the inspection the substantive headteacher had been seconded to work with the Cornwall Association of Primary Heads. The deputy was acting as headteacher and remains in that role. At the start of the academic year the LA seconded an experienced teacher from another school to work in Roskear. He has experience of data management and has joined the senior management team as an assistant head for a period of one year.

Achievement and standards

Standards are significantly below the nationally expected levels and far too many pupils are underachieving. An increased focus on achievement has resulted in the first tentative signs of improvement. The percentage of pupils who are on track to reach expected levels of attainment has increased since the time of the inspection.

Good progress has been made in gathering data from the last four years and ensuring that it is now entered into the school computer system. Teachers are following a new programme of assessment where reading, writing and mathematics are regularly assessed and the results entered into the tracking system. The setting and review of pupils' targets have improved. Pupils are assessed half termly to check progress towards their targets and this information is also added to the overall tracking system. As a result of these changes, senior managers are now able to identify groups of underachieving pupils. Analysis of the assessments is carried out to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Senior managers are beginning to make use of this data when they observe lessons and scrutinise pupils' work. However, the data is not being used to review the progress of pupils with class teachers, hold them to account, and identify the actions which need to be taken.

The class based system for recording pupils' progress is being used more consistently by teachers but is still in the process of being developed. The most effective way of using this system has yet to be evaluated. Teachers now know pupils' current attainment levels and the progress pupils are expected to make during the year. They are organising their classes into groups on the basis of ability, but there is still much to be done to ensure that appropriate activities are planned to meet the needs of all pupils. An audit of the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities has been carried out. Changes to the allocation of support for these pupils are to be made in order that provision more accurately reflects and meets the needs of the pupils.

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

- improve systems for gathering assessment information so that teachers have a better understanding of the pupils' progress and the pupils know what is expected of them – good progress in terms of gathering information, satisfactory progress overall.

Personal development and well-being

Overall, this aspect of the school remains satisfactory with some improvements in attendance and punctuality. Most pupils are thoughtful and sensible and are able to express themselves politely and honestly to visitors.

Pupils do enjoy school. Members of the school council are very keen to be given the opportunity to become much more involved in planning for change and improvement, for example to the playground.

Children in the Foundation Stage behave very well and are happy and settled. They have very positive attitudes towards each other and towards school. Pupils with hearing impairment relate particularly well to the adults who teach them and also have very positive attitudes. Pupils across the school are generally well behaved and have satisfactory attitudes. However, in some lessons there is low level disruption because pupils are not sufficiently engaged in their learning. Where teaching is lively and interesting, pupils are keen to do well, but where teaching is less effective pupils do not concentrate for long, misbehave and disrupt learning for all. Pupils of all ages are very keen to talk about this 'naughtiness' and 'showing off' which they would like to see better managed.

Improved systems to record and monitor attendance have recently been put in place. For the first time in several years, the school is seeking support from the education welfare service. Levels of unauthorised absence have nearly halved because the school is working more closely with parents, who are better informed about expectations. Rates of attendance overall are still lower than those found in similar schools, but the school has made a satisfactory start in improving attendance and a good start to improving punctuality.

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

- work more closely with parents to improve pupils' punctuality and attendance – satisfactory.

Quality of provision

There has been a significant reduction in the amount of inadequate teaching since the inspection and teaching is now satisfactory overall. For example, helpful improvements have been made to the way teachers plan lessons and teachers of classes with similar age groups now plan lessons together. This approach makes more effective use of teachers' expertise and time and pupils in each class receive similar learning experiences. Most lessons are characterised by good relationships between adults and pupils and a wide range of good quality resources. In the best lessons activities are interesting and challenging and pupils make good progress as a result.

However, the rate of improvement in the quality of teaching and learning is too slow. Too much of the teaching is no more than satisfactory and so the progress made by many pupils is not as good as it should be. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough. Improved procedures for gathering assessment information are now in place and these are leading to a better understanding and awareness of the progress pupils

make. However, teachers have some way to go in using the information to plan activities that consistently stimulate and challenge pupils. Too many activities are not matched closely enough to pupils' capabilities and so pupils often tackle tasks that are either too hard or too easy for them. Higher attaining pupils, in particular, are not sufficiently challenged by the work set for them.

A review of the curriculum has taken place since the inspection and has led to a more planned development of skills across year groups and between key stages. The school is aware that basing lessons largely upon national guidelines may not always be what individuals and groups of pupils really need to extend their learning. This is one of the reasons why lessons are often no more than satisfactory, because what pupils are learning is not sufficiently relevant or adjusted to meet their needs. Some lessons do not contain enough variety and stimulus to maintain and sustain pupils' concentration and effort and promote good progress.

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

- improve teaching and the curriculum so that learning is suitably challenging for all pupils, especially the more able and those in Years 3 to 6, so that it enables them to achieve as well as they can – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher is a reflective practitioner and is planning for long term improvement rather than simply reacting to the current situation. She has the confidence of her staff and the support of an enhanced and developing senior management team. The members bring differing, yet complementary, skills to the team and are clear about their roles and the vision they share for the future improvement of the school. The balance between long standing and new members is recognised as a strength in terms of balancing stability with challenge. The team is working very hard to embed basic systems which have had a significant impact on the day to day running of the school. There is a calm atmosphere and one member of staff described how she now feels safe and supported in her work. Communication throughout the school and between key stages has improved significantly and is open, purposeful, and encourages staff to work together.

Senior managers and governors have arrived at a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school as monitoring systems have been put in place and are being used consistently. However, these systems will need to be rigorously followed through in order to provide effective evaluation which can lead to, and demonstrate, impact.

The headteacher recognises that the school still has a long way to go, but she is undaunted and prepared to challenge weak performance. However, the

pace of change needs to be increased, particularly with regard to improving the quality of teaching. At present, teachers are not held sufficiently to account for pupils' progress or for the standards that pupils ultimately reach.

Governors are better informed, involved in monitoring, and more able to hold the school to account than they were at the time of the inspection. They recognise that there is a job to be done and understand the part that they are charged to play. The governing body is not at full complement as there are vacancies for three community governors.

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

- improve leadership and management to strengthen self-evaluation so that managers have a clear view of the school's strengths and can identify and remedy any weaknesses – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has provided a comprehensive and effective package of support to the school. It has recognised the relative inexperience of the acting headteacher and her deputy. As a result, an appropriate mentor, who is supportive but also has the experience to act as a critical friend, has been found to work with the headteacher. This good practice has yet to be replicated for the deputy. There is regular contact from the school adviser and objective termly monitoring by the county inspector. This enables the school to judge its progress against the key areas for development.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Conduct regular reviews of pupils' progress between the headteacher, or appropriate senior manager, and class teachers in order to raise standards and achievement and hold staff to account.
- Allow the school council to take a more active role in the developments for their school.

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

Yours sincerely

Pauline Robins HMI