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Mrs G Mantom
The Headteacher
Dogsthorpe Infants School
Central Avenue
Peterborough
Cambridgeshire
PE1 4LH

Dear Mrs Mantom

Special Measures: Monitoring Inspection of Dogsthorpe Infants School

Introduction

Following my visit with John Messer and Krishan Sharma, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 19 and 20 June, 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 January 2007.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, assistant headteacher, other members of staff, two representatives from the local authority, the chair of governors and groups of children.

Context

Since the inspection in January 2007 one teacher has left the school, and been replaced by a new member of staff. An additional teacher has also been appointed. The number of teaching assistants has been increased by one.

Achievement and standards

In the lessons observed, the progress made by pupils was inadequate overall but satisfactory in Foundation Stage.

However, the school's data for the recent Year 2 assessments show an improvement in standards, particularly in mathematics. This is partly the result of the additional lessons the school has organised for the pupils. The standards reached by boys have shown a decline. There has been a good increase in the proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels in reading and writing. Nevertheless, standards in writing for the majority, though showing some improvement, remain a concern.

Personal development and well-being

In almost all lessons, pupils continue to behave well and show their willingness to learn. Classrooms are orderly places. Pupils' attendance is showing improvement as a result of recent initiatives taken by the school.

Quality of provision

The overall quality of teaching and learning remain inadequate. This is because in lessons, the focus is often on completing the activities rather than on whether pupils are learning sufficiently. For example, in one lesson pupils were practising handwriting, but it was not leading to any worthwhile improvement. Long introductions in some lessons do not leave sufficient time for pupils to develop and practise their skills independently. Many lessons move at a slow pace and lack a sense of urgency. Although teachers have begun to show how they intend to take into account the differing abilities of pupils in their planning, its impact on learning is insufficient.

The accuracy of teachers' assessment of pupils' written work is improving, particularly in writing. Teachers have benefited from moderation activities and examples of accurately assessed work as guidance. Judgements about what National Curriculum levels pupils have reached are more accurate. However, an examination of a sample of assessments of pupils' writing showed that there is a tendency to grade some work too generously.

The management of assessment has improved. The assistant headteacher has led a whole school drive to develop a consistent approach. Pupils' progress is now measured more systematically and much more frequently. The identification of pupils who are underachieving is now much easier, enabling some steps to be taken to bring about improvement.

A good start has been made in Year 1 to inform pupils about the stages they have reached in their learning and what they need to do to reach the next levels. Discussions with pupils in Year 2 show that they are not aware of the stages they have reached and what they need to do to get to the next level. Teachers' marking still does not give pupils sufficiently clear guidance on what they need to do to improve specific pieces of work.

There is now a stronger emphasis in the curriculum on literacy. Much time and attention is being devoted to improving pupils' writing skills because this has been identified as the weakest area of the school's performance. However, many pupils do not have the necessary basic skills, such as a thorough understanding of letter sounds (phonics), to enable them to write accurately. There has been satisfactory progress in developing the outside learning area for children in the Foundation Stage. A major gardening project promotes interest in learning. Children enjoy outdoor activities but planning does not identify exactly what children are expected to learn in the outside sessions. In Years 1 and 2, there is still too little practical work and use of resources generally to stimulate learning.

Government requirements for the safeguarding of pupils are still not fully met. This is a concern.

Judgement

Progress in the areas of improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007

- Raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics as a matter of urgency by improving the quality of teaching and learning – inadequate progress.
- Improve the quality and accuracy of teachers' assessment and its use in planning the next steps in learning – inadequate progress
- Use assessment data effectively to check pupils' progress over time and to identify underachievement quickly so that action can be taken to halt further decline – satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The school's leaders and managers are still not providing the school with the necessary capacity to improve. They have not evaluated sufficiently the progress being made in the areas identified as needing improvement. Where evaluations are given, they are too often lists of the processes and policies that have been established. They do not provide a crisp analysis of their impact on the quality of the school's work and their effect on pupils' learning. Although lessons are now monitored more frequently, the information is not

being used to develop specific strategies for improving teaching. There is also insufficient systematic monitoring to check that policies are being carried out, for example the policy to do with the greater use of resources to aid learning. The governing body is still not fulfilling its role of holding the school to account. The weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation are partly a consequence of the school's plan for improvement. The plan contains too few quantitative targets for measuring improvement against; the means of monitoring improvement is not specified and nor are the approaches to evaluation. The strategies for improving teaching are too piecemeal. The relationship between the school's plan and the local authority's plan is satisfactory.

Subject and team leaders are not sufficiently well supported in their roles through, for example, there being frequent enough opportunities for them to discuss their work with senior leaders, seek advice on approaches and be held more to account. Teaching assistants are not placed often enough with the pupils who most urgently need help, as reflected in the school's assessment data.

Judgement

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- Improve the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation to identify strengths and weaknesses in the school's performance and prioritise the steps that need to be taken to secure improvement – inadequate progress.

External support

The local authority has provided training, for example to improve teaching and the monitoring of its quality. This work has not been sufficiently effective in improving generic teaching skills or for developing the teaching of numeracy. The local authority's action plan does not provide sufficient interim targets to measure progress against periodically where actions are likely to be spread over a long period of time. Its effectiveness is inadequate.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop the roles of middle leaders so that they have clear accountability for improving learning.
- Develop more effective strategies for improving the quality of teaching.
- Ensure that improvement plans include ways of frequently checking that adequate progress is being made.

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

Yours sincerely

Alan Alder
Her Majesty's Inspector