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Mr D Anderson
The Headteacher
Sir Francis Hill Community Primary School
Bristol Drive
Lincoln
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Dear Mr Anderson

Special Measures: Monitoring Inspection of Sir Francis Hill Community Primary School

Introduction

Following my visit with Sheelagh Barnes and Martin Newell, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 4 and 5 July, 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, senior staff, groups of pupils, three governors and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

The building programme at the school continues with some classes, especially Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, housed in temporary accommodation and limitations on other facilities.

Achievement and standards

At the time of the inspection in January 2006, standards were judged to be broadly average and pupils' progress inadequate, especially in Key Stage 2 English. Standards, based on the recently received results of the 2007 National Curriculum tests, are above average in mathematics and science by the end of Year 6 and pupils have made at least satisfactory progress in these subjects since Year 2. The school's

focus on raising standards in reading has contributed to improvement and national test results are now at least in line with the national average. The well-planned initiatives such as guided reading sessions and 'reading journeys' have had a positive impact in this improvement. However, writing standards have not improved and too few pupils reached or exceeded the nationally expected level by the end of Year 6.

In the lessons seen on this visit, pupils made good progress and achieved well when the quality of teaching was good but, overall, progress in reading and writing remained too variable. The school's own assessment data indicates that in Year 3 to Year 6 classes, up to a third of pupils are making less than expected progress in either reading or writing. Although the data show improvement in most classes since the last recording point, there is still more to do to ensure that all pupils make sufficient progress in English.

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

- improve progress in English, particularly in Years 3 to 6 – satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils behave well and have good attitudes to learning. They play and work together well and say that they enjoy school. This is demonstrated in their regular attendance and willingness to help and take on extra responsibilities. In discussions, pupils valued the 'bookmarks' which they use to help them understand their targets in English. They said that they enjoyed the guided reading group work. They also understood the importance of looking after themselves and staying safe.

Quality of provision

Improvement in teaching and learning is satisfactory with approximately half of the lessons observed being good. No inadequate teaching was observed on this visit. Across the school, relationships are good and pupils are managed well. In many lessons, teaching assistants make an effective contribution to the quality of pupils' learning through close guidance and support for individual pupils and small groups.

In the better lessons, teachers have a lively approach which engages pupils' interest. These lessons are delivered with pace and teachers set high expectations. Pupils are only too ready to rise to the challenges. Activities are closely matched to the individual needs of pupils and a range of well-planned activities maintain their interest. Incisive questioning and the setting of strict time deadlines keep pupils alert and they are encouraged to take initiative and responsibility for their own learning. As a consequence, pupils make good progress.

However, these strong features are not present in enough lessons. Although teachers recognise that pupils are working at different levels and have different targets, there are too many instances where activities are the same for all pupils. As a result, work is not matched well enough to pupils' differing needs and, therefore, some do not make the progress of which they are capable. Some teaching lacks a sense of urgency and the objectives for learning are not referred to regularly enough to keep pupils focused. Often, pupils listen for too long to the teacher before having the opportunity to complete work themselves. They are asked questions but without the opportunity to discuss their ideas before answering. When the pace of learning slows, some pupils lose concentration and do not listen carefully enough. Pupils have an increasing awareness of the targets and levels they are working towards but the good practice, evident in the better lessons, of pupils assessing their own work is not consistent across the school.

The school has recognised the need to link the information gathered from assessment more purposefully to the planning of the curriculum and lessons. Pupils are assessed regularly in English and mathematics and this information is collated and monitored by class teachers and year leaders. Subject leaders also analyse this data to identify trends overall, any strengths and areas for improvement. This is a laborious task as the analysis has to be completed manually, although a new computerised system is to be introduced for next year. There are currently some inconsistencies in the format and interpretation of this data across the school. This has contributed to the delay in responding to some of the issues raised by the information.

The school has begun to vary the curriculum to respond to key priorities and introduced planned guided reading sessions into the timetable for all classes. These have already had a positive impact on pupils' progress in and enjoyment of reading.

Senior leaders have disseminated to teachers the need for lessons to be planned more accurately to suit pupils of differing abilities and prior attainment. Monitoring of teachers' planning and lesson observations have been undertaken by a range of senior staff but still, on too many occasions, lessons are planned with the same learning tasks for all pupils. Inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' English work in some classes confirmed this view.

Teachers' marking of work is regular and gives positive messages to pupils as well as telling them what they could do to improve. However, the learning points raised are not always followed through into expectations of work set at a later date. The pointers given to improve writing in literacy lessons are not yet systematically reinforced in the teaching of writing in other subjects. As a result, there is not a consistent focus with pupils on the key aspects of their writing to be improved.

Care and welfare systems are in place to ensure that pupils are looked after appropriately. Systems for monitoring academic progress have developed in recent

months. Teachers and governors commented favourably on the use of more visual representations of progress for individual pupils and classes which have been produced recently. Older pupils understand the 'bookmarks' and reading journey booklets which help them to review their own progress. The school has adopted a wide range of intervention strategies for pupils who require additional help in literacy and numeracy. These are welcomed by pupils and data indicates early signs of improvement in standards.

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

- improve curriculum planning by making full use of assessment information to provide the highest level of challenge for all pupils – satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

The school has responded promptly to the issues raised by the last inspection in January 2007. The action plan is detailed and contains relevant strategies for improvement. There are clear responsibilities allocated to key staff but the success criteria by which progress should be assessed are not sufficiently measurable to aid the evaluation of impact, especially on pupils' achievement.

There is now a system for the regular monitoring of teaching, teachers' planning, pupils' work and achievement carried out by senior staff. Most lesson observations are conducted by the headteacher but other senior staff have completed some focused observations or walked through a range of lessons to assess overall approaches to learning. This monitoring of teaching has identified accurately the key areas for improvement but many of the recommendations are still to be implemented consistently.

Teachers' assessments of pupils are now collated and analysed for overall progress. Although some more detailed analysis is completed, for example by gender, as yet, evaluation is underdeveloped and there is no clear link to the targets for improvement set by the local authority in its statement of action. In consequence, the school has too limited an understanding of what has worked in raising achievement and what has not worked. Therefore, the adoption of good practice by all teachers is too slow. Structures are not yet fully in place to ensure that teachers learn from each other and apply policies and practices consistently.

The school's evaluation of its performance is more accurate than at the time of the last inspection. The headteacher and senior staff have identified the areas for improvement but, overall, there is still not a clear enough vision of exactly how the school needs to improve nor a concerted direction for the future. Individual Key Stage and subject leaders have conducted successful monitoring and evaluation of provision. However, this is not yet effectively collected together and co-ordinated to make the best use of the information gathered. The school's capacity to improve is

developing but the efforts of staff have not yet been maximised to achieve the improvements necessary.

Governors are increasingly aware of their role to challenge and hold the school to account. They have received effective training from the LA on how to question the performance of the school. Specified governors have oversight of each of the key issues from the last inspection. Key staff report to the governors on progress but this is not yet in a way which allows them to check easily against the targets set for improvement by the LA.

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

- improve school leadership to ensure more rigorous self evaluation focuses on the impact of initiatives to raise achievement – satisfactory progress.

External support

The local authority has provided effective support for the school. The school improvement advisor presented detailed briefings to staff and governors, linked to the LA's statement of action. Good training and support has been provided on the use of guided reading and assessing pupils' work. The school improvement partner has conducted joint observations of lessons with the headteacher to monitor the school's provision and clarify expectations for good teaching. This has led to the development of a new policy on teaching and learning. An additional governor has been appointed to assist in evaluating the school's performance, particularly in relation to data on pupils' achievement.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that assessment data are analysed and interpreted consistently and used by all teachers to improve their planning for pupils with different needs.
- Ensure that all pupils make at least expected progress in reading and writing.
- Provide clear vision and direction for the school, based on accurate identification of priorities, so that the skills and expertise of key staff are used to maximum effect.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg
H M Inspector