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Mrs P Martin
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Martin

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BRAUNSTONE FRITH INFANT SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Mary Davis and Robina Tomes, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 14 and 15 May 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 November 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 acting headteacher, headteacher, subject leaders, a group of pupils, chair of governors, the National Leader of Education (NLE) and representative from the local authority (LA). Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and pupils.

Context

The school was placed in special measures following its section 5 inspection in November 2006. The LA assessed the scope for the school to be closed or federated and decided that further exploration needed to be undertaken with a view to amalgamation in the future with the nearby junior school. The LA statement of action stressed its commitment to providing quality primary schooling within the local community. In January, the headteacher suffered an accident which prevented her

from attending school. Initially, the deputy headteacher was released from her Year 1 and 2 class teaching commitment for three days a week to manage the school. When it became apparent that the headteacher would be unable to return to work for some time, the deputy was released full time. In the first instance, her class was taught by a newly qualified teacher already employed at the school. This teacher left the school at Easter to be replaced by a second newly qualified teacher.

A National Leader of Education (NLE) from the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) is working in partnership with the school and the LA. She has provided valuable support for the acting headteacher and staff. Since the inspection, the school has reorganised its teaching approach in Key Stage 1. Year 1 and 2 pupils are now placed in ability groups in an effort to focus teaching more on their specific needs. Three additional teaching assistants have been employed since April 2007 to work in specified classes. As part of the planned rebuilding programme, Nursery and Foundation Stage children have been relocated into the main building with some Year 1 and 2 classes moving into temporary accommodation. Four recently appointed parent governors are increasing their involvement in the school.

Achievement and standards

Standards of attainment remain below average at the end of Key Stage 1. However, inspection findings and the school's own assessment data confirm an improving picture. Increasing numbers of pupils are now reaching higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics. The attainment gap is beginning to narrow with standards closer to the national average, but the school knows there is still much to do, particularly in writing. This improvement, particularly for the higher attaining pupils, is due to a number of factors. Staff are assessing pupils' work in reading, writing and mathematics more regularly and making better use of the data gathered to identify and target pupils for support. Information is increasingly being used to track progress against targets set. Teachers are working together in teams to plan work that more precisely meets the individual needs of pupils. The setting of pupils for literacy and numeracy in Years 1 and 2 is leading some teachers to increase their expectations of what pupils are capable of. The quality of some teaching is improving and beginning to accelerate the rates of progress pupils are making. A number of strategies, such as those to support speaking and listening, have been successfully implemented. These are beginning to increase pupils' confidence. Despite this positive picture, inconsistencies remain throughout the school. The quality of some teaching is not good enough because it is not yet at a consistently high standard. Some work continues to be inaccurately matched to pupils' needs. Some pupils remain unclear about what they need to do next to improve further. This variability needs to be addressed if the gap between what pupils are attaining and what they are capable of is to close.

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

- make better use of assessment information to challenge the more able and ensure that pupils in Year 1 have suitable opportunities to practise and consolidate their learning, particularly in writing and mathematics – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

The school has worked closely with pupils, parents and staff to develop a range of strategies to raise levels of attendance and improve punctuality. These include celebrating high levels of attendance by awarding weekly certificates and making it fun to come to school on time by introducing the 'Cool Cat' programme. The new breakfast club enables pupils to take part in physical activities and have a healthy breakfast to ensure they can make a good start to the day. Absences are swiftly followed up and the unacceptability of being late is reinforced at the start of school. Latecomers now have to report to the school office. As a result, more pupils want to come to school on time. Attendance levels are improving. However, there is still some way to go to have a sustained impact on reducing absence rates. Opportunities are currently being missed to communicate to individual parents the link between the poor attendance of their children and their lack of progress. Pupils work and play together well. Their behaviour is good and they listen attentively to their teachers and to each other. They respond well to instructions both in the classroom and in the playground.

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

- work more closely with parents and carers to promote good attendance – satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are of variable quality. The majority of lessons seen during the monitoring visit were satisfactory or better with a small minority that were inadequate. Although this is supporting improved progress, it is not yet good enough to catch up on the previous underachievement. In the better lessons teachers' effective planning and good subject knowledge enable staff to deliver well paced stimulating lessons which completely engage pupils. Pupils' learning is extended by the use of open questions, careful explanations, and the opportunity to work with a partner to share ideas. In these lessons, nursery nurses and teaching assistants effectively support and involve pupils. In less effective lessons there is insufficient challenge for pupils, especially the higher attainers. Previous learning is not built on to increase understanding. This, together with a lack of organised resources, including teaching assistants, leads to confusion for learners. Support for pupils with learning disabilities is well organised with clear support from teaching assistants. Effective support from a speech and language project has increased pupils' confidence. In addition, further training and development in this area have been provided for teachers and teaching assistants.

The current building work has offered good opportunities to enhance the curriculum and encourage pupils to take an active interest in their environment. Builders have visited assemblies and have enabled pupils to ask questions when they have visited the building site. This has raised awareness and understanding of the health and safety issues. In addition, the behaviour of some boys has seen an improvement following the introduction of the 'Bob the Builder' lunch time club. Pupils have enjoyed construction activities such as building robots. After school clubs, such as the gardening club, further enhance the curriculum.

There has been a considerable improvement in the analysis and use of data. Tracking procedures are now more focused and rigorous, and are used to ensure early interventions to support pupils where needed. These interventions are now being evaluated to ensure that they are effective, and being amended where necessary. The impact of these systems is still at an early stage and is just beginning to support pupils' progress. Pupils' targets are in place and are shared with parents. Where pupils know their targets they are not yet confident in understanding how they link to their day to day work. Scrutiny of work also indicates that progress is inconsistent across classes both in mathematics and literacy. There appears to be a lack of focus on the correct spelling of common words and correct formation of letters, and some work is poorly presented. Marking is now a focus within the school but remains variable. It does not always relate to the purpose of the lesson or clearly indicate to pupils how to improve their work. Where comments are made they are not always accessible to pupils. In addition, insufficient opportunities are provided for them to follow up and practise the advice given. Pupils are at the early stages of involvement of evaluating their own work. Staff have broken down literacy and numeracy targets into smaller steps. These need to be shared with pupils to ensure that they have a clear understanding of how to improve their work.

Management of the safeguarding of pupils is currently not robust enough and risk assessments need to be reviewed more frequently.

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

- ensure that all pupils have clear guidance about what they need to do to improve and get better – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The school has fully accepted the need for change. There is a strong team spirit and sense of accountability with regard to raising standards. The acting headteacher has provided effective strategic leadership and management during the long term absence of the substantive headteacher. She has taken a number of appropriate actions to improve the quality of education, supported by the NLE assigned to the school and the LA standards inspector. The school's raising attainment plan addresses all the areas for development from the inspection report. The proposed actions are carefully mapped out to provide a clear, detailed plan of action. The

implementation of this plan has been carefully evaluated and supported by regular monitoring. The school improvement group (SIG) meets regularly and actions and decisions are suitably recorded.

Staff have been receptive to a range of recently introduced strategies designed to bring about the necessary improvements. The introduction of improved assessment and tracking procedures has enabled staff to have an accurate view of pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Decisive action is beginning to increase rates of progress, but many strategies need more time to fully embed. Positive links have been established with the local partnership school. The opportunity to share good practice has benefited all staff. Good support has been provided by LA consultants. Subject leaders are increasing their understanding of strengths and weaknesses, but the impact of their work is at an early stage. Staff and governors know there is more to do in monitoring and evaluating the school's provision. Further development is required to ensure that everyone has the necessary skills to help accelerate the rate of learning. The appointment of additional governors promised by the LA to support the existing members in school improvement has not materialised. Currently, the governing body is not in a strong enough position to evaluate the school's performance effectively because it is too reliant upon information provided by the school. It does not check what is happening in school enough for itself and so does not have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Without this understanding, it cannot sufficiently hold the school to account.

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

- improve the way pupils' progress is tracked to provide a better understanding of how well they are doing and ensure that whole school strategies are implemented fully and evaluated carefully to check for their effectiveness – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has provided good support and challenge which has helped sustain the school's the impetus for change and improvement. The local authority's statement of action is satisfactory. It includes relevant judgements about the need for the school in the locality. It recognises the need to improve the quality of education rather than consider its closure and provide additional support for governors. Action taken to support the school to date is clearly identified. The plan identifies appropriate support for the school in each area of improvement. Regular monitoring and evaluation activities are planned throughout the period of support, but some timescales need to be more specific in terms of when actions will be implemented or completed.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Quality of the local authority's statement of action – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Eliminate inadequate teaching and increase the proportion of good teaching to improve further the rate of pupils' progress.
- Provide further opportunities for subject leaders to monitor and evaluate the quality of pupils' learning throughout the school.
- Provide training and support for governors in order for them to increase their confidence to monitor and evaluate the work of the school first hand.
- Ensure that the marking policy is consistently applied throughout the school and enables pupils to understand how to improve their work.
- Ensure child protection procedures are more robust and risk assessments are carried out regularly.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Weston
H M Inspector