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Mrs V Cranton
The Headteacher
Gorse Hill Community Primary School
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Worcestershire
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Dear Mrs Cranton

Special Measures: Monitoring Inspection of Gorse Hill Community Primary School

Introduction

Following my visit with Barry Wood and Mary Usher-Clark, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 3 and 4 July 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 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 you, the English and mathematics coordinators, the coordinators for the pupils who speak English as an additional language and those who have special educational needs, a group of teachers in Key Stage 2, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been a number of changes in staffing. The deputy headteacher is absent on long term sick leave. At the end of the summer term three teachers will be leaving the school. At the same time, a senior teacher who has been seconded to work at the school is leaving to return to his own school. You and the governors have been successful in recruiting an assistant headteacher, a teacher for a class of pupils in Years 4 and 5 and a second assistant headteacher, all

of whom are expected to join the school at the beginning of the autumn term 2007. The post of second assistant headteacher is being funded for one year by the local authority. At the end of this week you are holding interviews for two other teaching posts.

Achievement and standards

Standards are rising and pupils' progress is accelerating. Currently most pupils are achieving well in reading and mathematics and satisfactorily in writing. The decline in pupils' achievements has been arrested. The number of pupils making no progress or slipping further behind in their work has halved, from 34% to 17%. A small proportion of pupils in some year groups, for example in Years 5 and 6, are making exceptional progress, particularly in reading. Rates of progress for the Reception and Year 1 pupils who are taught in the Young Learners' Unit are far too slow, reflecting weaknesses in teaching. Similarly, the progress made by pupils in Year 3 has been significantly impeded by the number of changes in teachers during the year. Whilst the gap between what the pupils are expected to attain for their age and what they are currently reaching is closing more rapidly than before, almost half the pupils are still not working at the level expected for their age. Standards remain low and are often well below average, particularly in writing. Current underachievement is reflected mostly in writing and in Year 3.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- improve achievement and raise standards in English and mathematics by accelerating the rate of pupils' progress in both subjects – good.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' behaviour and attitudes are satisfactory overall. Pupils behave well in lessons when teachers' expectations are high and their work is interesting and challenging. However, their behaviour deteriorates when they work independently without direct adult supervision. On other occasions, when moving around the corridors and when leaving an assembly, pupils' behaviour is too boisterous and noisy. In the Young Learners' Unit, the pupils' behaviour is not always managed well enough and pupils are not always supervised sufficiently by the teachers and other adults.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching ranges from outstanding to inadequate and is satisfactory overall. The teaching is strongest in the Nursery, for some of the pupils in Year 2, and in Years 4, 5 and 6. This is reflected in the school's assessment information which shows a close correlation between the impact of good teaching and the pupils' good achievements. In the better lessons teachers manage the pupils' behaviour well and expectations are high. Relationships are very good and questions are used effectively to probe the pupils' understanding and challenge their thinking. Teaching

assistants make a very good contribution to the quality of the pupils' learning experiences.

In the weaker and inadequate lessons there is far too little teaching of basic skills, explanations of important concepts and introduction of new vocabulary. The pupils' work is not matched well enough to their different learning needs and assessment is not used well enough to guide teachers' planning and set individual targets for pupils. On occasions pupils spend too long on the carpet during lengthy whole class introductions and teachers do not give enough thought to explaining how pupils are expected to achieve the lesson objectives. The quality of teaching in the Young Learners' Unit is inadequate and the pupils in this unit are currently receiving a poor quality of education.

The teaching of reading continues to improve, although the teachers' planning for the pupils who are expected to learn new reading skills when working independently remains inconsistent.

The quality of provision for the pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) and for the pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities is good. Each of these important areas of the school's work is well led and managed by enthusiastic teachers. Assessment information is used very effectively to track the pupils' progress and to inform planning for individuals and groups of pupils. Intervention strategies are monitored closely by the EAL and special education needs coordinators, who regularly evaluate the impact of their work in relation to how well the pupils are achieving. Whilst about a fifth of the EAL pupils make slow progress, particularly in Year 3, most achieve satisfactorily and a fifth of these make good progress. Standards, however, remain low and most pupils are a year behind in their work. The pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities generally make good progress and achieve well, although their progress in Year 3 is not as positive as in Years 2, 4, 5 and 6. Attendance rates for the EAL and learning difficulties and disabilities pupils are consistently satisfactory and sometimes good, reflecting their enjoyment of coming to school.

The use and helpfulness of curriculum targets for each pupil remains inconsistent. In Years 4, 5 and 6 pupils talk positively about their targets and the help they are receiving to achieve them. In other year groups pupils are not certain about their targets, particularly in Year 3.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- improve the quality of teaching by requiring all teachers to use assessment information properly to assist their planning and target setting – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

You and the senior leadership team have successfully led an important initiative to improve the reliability and validity of teachers' assessments. This has involved

meeting with individuals and groups of teachers to check that their assessments match the levels represented in the pupils' work. This process has been rigorous and challenging, for example, where generous assessments have been changed to more accurately reflect the current levels of the pupils' work.

You have produced a very helpful self-evaluation of progress, which clearly identifies what is going well and what still needs to be done to ensure improvements are embedded in all year groups. There are good plans in place to restructure the school's leadership team from 1 September 2007. Subject leadership in English and mathematics is good. Whilst you have continued to refine and further develop arrangements for monitoring teaching and learning, persistent weaknesses in teaching remain. The written feedback to teachers is not yet sufficiently challenging, sometimes avoids a judgement, and is not consistently focused on the links between teaching, learning and pupils' achievement. Some of the targets set for teachers are still too broad. Similarly, review dates for checking progress are occasionally not set and, when they are, they do not always reflect a sufficient sense of urgency. There are still too many inconsistencies in monitoring arrangements, which are not yet sufficiently coherent nor have enough impact on eliminating weak teaching.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- improve the quality of leadership and management by establishing greater rigour in the checks made on teaching and learning to ensure that they are always strongly focused on raising standards – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has amended its statement of action to include short term success criteria linked to raising achievement and to give a greater priority to pupils' rates of progress. A helpful action plan has been produced for the summer term. This will be revised to reflect improvements in the school and any changes in the focus for the LA's support in the coming months. The school's link adviser, literacy and numeracy consultants, and other advisory staff are providing a good range of support which is having a positive impact on raising pupils' achievement. The LA has given good support to help you and the governors recruit new staff. Nevertheless significant weaknesses in teaching remain, particularly in the Young Learners' Unit, and the efforts of LA staff have had less impact on improving provision in this important area of the school's work.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to further consultation with HMI before any appointments are made. This particularly relates to the school's selection of an appropriate mentor and induction tutor.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no significant priorities for improvement other than the key areas for improvement identified in the inspection of March 2006.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Watters
Her Majesty's Inspector