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Mrs L Banks
The Headteacher
Redhill Primary School
Wrights Avenue
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Staffordshire
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Dear Mrs Banks

Special Measures: Monitoring Inspection of Redhill Primary School

Introduction

Following my visit with Peter Isherwood and Carol Parkinson, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 4 July 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in January 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 representatives of the governing body and local authority. Inspectors observed lessons in every class, met with pupils, and held several meetings with senior managers in school.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, there have been several changes to staff including the resignation of the manager of the Foundation Stage and the retirement of the acting deputy headteacher. The consequences of these and other actions force yet more changes within school. The governors have tried to appoint a substantive deputy headteacher on two occasions so far without success.

Achievement and standards

Standards remain low but have improved since the last monitoring visit and the pupils' progress is now satisfactory in most classes.

Children enter school with levels of attainment well below those that may be expected, and many have particularly low levels of language development. However, they are given a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes and standards by age five are much closer to those expected nationally, representing good progress. This improvement has been consolidated at Key Stage 1 and the school made significant strides in improving test results for pupils aged seven in 2007. Improvements were particularly marked in reading and mathematics, where over 75% of pupils reached the required level. A smaller proportion of pupils did so in writing and the school is aware that standards of boys' writing remain an area of concern.

The progress of the oldest pupils is less marked but, nevertheless, the results in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 have improved this year. They have yet to be analysed in detail but around two thirds of the pupils in English, and a slightly smaller proportion in mathematics, achieved the expected Level 4 or better. Pupils' performance in science is significantly better than in previous years and 85% reached the expected level. However, the number of pupils gaining the higher levels at ages 7 and 11 remains low. Improved pupil monitoring systems have helped ensure that pupils are now making satisfactory progress in all subjects and in most classes. The performance of boys compared to girls has improved in mathematics, reading and science but not yet in writing.

In English standards of presentation are poor with limited use of spelling strategies and extended writing, although this has improved recently. Opportunities for speaking and listening in other subjects are now more frequent and this is helping improve basic literacy skills. In mathematics a fragile grasp of basic number skills, especially division and multiplication facts, prevented some pupils from achieving better results in their tests.

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

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science by ensuring that boys do as well as girls, and speaking and listening and writing are developed well in all subjects – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory overall. Attendance remains well below the national average for primary schools but arrangements to improve it are now in place. These include raising awareness of the importance of good attendance on improving standards. Outside agencies are working closely with the school to improve attendance.

Most pupils behave well in class unless they are not fully involved in their learning. Occasional incidents of bullying such as name calling remain, but pupils say it is reduced. Pupils' good friendships and enthusiasm for teamwork are obvious and make a happy working atmosphere.

The school is working to establish a high standard of behaviour and to make clear what it sees as unacceptable. As a result, the rate of exclusions has been high. Pupils are very clear why other pupils have been excluded and they agree that violence and racism are wrong and should not be tolerated. Pupils are well informed and show clear understanding of the school's reasons for rewards and sanctions.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. There are lessons with good quality teaching but these are not yet consistent across the whole school. The use of individual targets continues to help pupils improve their learning but not all pupils understand what is required of them. The use of the new methods to improve basic literacy skills, introduced before the previous monitoring visit, is starting to pay dividends especially with pupils in the Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2.

There are good relationships with pupils in all lessons and most pupils are eager to learn. Work is set at different levels to meet the needs of different groups, but this is not always refined enough to challenge all pupils fully. In classes where teaching is good, lessons are brought to life by using a variety of different teaching methods and making learning fun, for example in the play reading on 'Stranger Danger' in Year 3.

There are still times when pupils are inactive in lessons because activities do not involve them enough. In good lessons 'paired talk' is used effectively to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of the subject. The pace of lessons, although now satisfactory, is variable and there are occasions when pupils, particularly the more able, do not produce the quality and quantity of work they are capable of doing. There is also some inefficient use of time, especially in the afternoon sessions where the pace of learning dips.

Marking is now satisfactory and helps pupils to improve their work when they are having difficulties in understanding the work set. It does not yet consistently challenge higher attaining pupils sufficiently and, occasionally, pupils are allowed to continue with some misunderstandings.

Teaching assistants provide levels of support which are at least satisfactory, and sometimes good, in group sessions. Their use in introductory sessions is inconsistent and there are missed opportunities for them to develop pupils' learning.

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

- improve the quality of learning through raising expectations of what pupils are able to do, ensuring challenging activities are matched to their needs and improving the pace of learning – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The headteacher continues to drive improvement. She has effectively led the introduction of many necessary changes, continues to secure improving classroom provision, and has the confidence of staff and parents. She has an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses but has been hampered by frequent staff changes beyond her control which means routine tasks take too much of her time. Despite her good work, wider leadership and management have become unsettled again through the recent departure of a key member of the senior leadership team. Notwithstanding the improvements made in the quality of teaching and learning and in pupils' progress, the fragility of the senior leadership team detracts from the school's capacity to improve.

The school still operates an overly informal system of decision making and does not always keep accurate records of meetings and decisions. As a result, key actions do not always get carried through with enough rigour. The regular and routine evaluation of school standards, although now taking place much more frequently, is not consistent enough to allow the school to set targets with confidence.

Subject leaders now monitor their subjects with the help of the local authority's consultants and consequently most have an accurate view of the relative strengths and weaknesses within their subjects. The information gained from this increased monitoring is not always used effectively. For example, the school improvement plan is a useful document but lacks detail which makes it more difficult to measure the progress the school is making.

Renewed uncertainty regarding middle management has reduced the capacity to improve. For example, some subject leaders acknowledge that they will require training in their new roles next year. This continued uncertainty, rather than the work of any one individual, is why progress on the area for improvement relating to leadership and management is judged inadequate

Governance is satisfactory and is now closely focused on school improvement.

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

- strengthen the leadership of the school by improving existing monitoring and evaluation systems so that the information gained is used rigorously to raise standards – inadequate.

External support

Frequent changes to personnel and a failure to carry out some of the plans in their own statement of action by the local authority have left the school unable to rely on the support on offer. Despite the good work of some individuals and generous use of consultant time the support is not consistent or coherent enough. Some of the changes have been unavoidable but have nevertheless impaired progress. As a consequence, the strengthening of the management of the school has been delayed. This has impeded progress and, as a result, the external support is barely satisfactory.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Urgently secure the school's capacity to improve through establishing stability within the senior leadership team.
- Strengthen middle management by clarifying what is required of subject leaders.
- Improve the pace of lessons by using lesson timings and assessment information more effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Ceri Morgan
H M Inspector