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Mrs B Herszenhorn
The Headteacher
Chadsmoor CE (VC) Junior School
Burns Street
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Dear Mrs Herszenhorn

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CHADSMOOR CE (VC) JUNIOR SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with David Westall, Additional Inspector, to your school on 25 and 26 April 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 December 2005.

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 headteacher and senior staff, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

There have been no significant changes in the school's context since the last visit.

Achievement and standards

At the time of the last monitoring visit the legacy of significant underachievement was beginning to be dealt with and children were starting to make up lost ground. During the autumn term Year 6 children made rapid gains. Since then, although

those gains have been sustained, the rate at which children are catching up has slowed and particularly so for the most able. The school's tracking system predicts that middle and lower ability Year 6 children will mostly achieve the nationally expected Level 4 in this summer's national tests. The proportion of more able children predicted to achieve Level 5 is about half what it should be, given their starting points. The school is predicting that overall standards will remain below average in the 2007 tests, largely because of underachievement amongst the most able. The school's predictions were confirmed by a scrutiny of children's written work.

Children in Year 5 are making better progress and are on course to achieve the expected levels in the 2008 tests except in English. In both Years 5 and 6, standards have improved most in mathematics. Progress in Years 3 and 4 is mostly satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Children's personal development and well-being are established strengths in the school. The school is a happy and harmonious community where children generally get on well together. Relationships between adults and children are positive. Children like and respect their teachers and it is clear that these feelings are reciprocated. Consequently, children feel valued and know that the adults have their best interests at heart. 'The teachers are really kind and do all they can to make sure you are happy,' commented one child. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that attendance is good and that children enjoy school and behave well.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching seen was mainly good and no inadequate teaching was observed. However, teaching was only satisfactory in a significant minority of lessons. This variation is reflected in children's overall progress since the last visit, which is satisfactory, rather than better. Elements of the teaching still require attention to increase children's progress and raise standards further.

Across the school, teachers plan their lessons carefully and manage children's behaviour well. They know what they expect children to learn and their explanations are clear. As a consequence, children are confident about tackling their work. 'You know teachers will help you if you get stuck,' one child told inspectors. Teachers usually know just when to provide children with support and when to stand back and let children work things out for themselves. Teachers' knowledge of the subjects that they teach is secure. Teaching assistants are well briefed and provide good support, particularly for children with learning difficulties.

Nevertheless, there is scope for improvement. Teachers' expectations for the most capable children are not always high enough and this means that these children sometimes make slower progress than their classmates. Occasionally, teachers talk

for too long. This limits the time available for children's independent work and means that the attention of some children wanes. Teachers do not always use questions effectively to probe children's understanding and develop their learning. This is most apparent in English where the more capable children are not sufficiently encouraged to express and refine their ideas verbally. This restricts both their oracy skills and the quality of their subsequent writing.

In the previous academic year, educational visits were rare. The school has sensibly rectified this situation and regular visits now enrich the curriculum. These are popular with children and benefit their learning. After reflecting on a visit to the Black Country Museum, one child commented, 'I learned lots about how Victorians used to live. It was much more fun than learning from books.'

The school is a caring community and has maintained its effective support for children's personal development. Children feel safe and secure and know that the staff will listen if there are any problems. Recent improvements in assessment have been sustained, and children's knowledge of their standards and next steps in learning is now securely embedded. 'Before, we didn't know how well we were doing but now we do,' said one child. Teachers' marking is thorough and provides children with useful feedback.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by inspectors in December 2005:

- improve the quality of teaching by ensuring activities are better matched to the pupils' level of understanding – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Good systems for evaluating the work of the school are in place. Senior staff have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning which has informed plans for restructuring leadership and management responsibilities later on this term. The new structure will be strongly focused on raising standards and particularly those of the more able in English and mathematics. Leadership and management, together with good support from the local authority, are impacting on the work of the school to bring about improvement. The progress being made by older children in mathematics has improved. Parents and children are well informed about what they have achieved and what they need to achieve next by the new assessment system.

The progress being made by the school is monitored by the governors' strategic group. Systems are in place to ensure governors receive the information they require. Governors are aware of the general trends of improvement in children's progress but are not certain about the precise levels results need to rise to for achievement to become satisfactory. They recognise that continued vigilance is required in checking children are catching up quickly enough.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2005:

- improve the quality of leadership and management by making monitoring and evaluation more rigorous in identifying weaknesses and pursuing improvement – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has continued to provide extra funding to release teachers to work with consultants. As the school develops the capacity to improve by itself, the nature of external support is being modified accordingly. The school is now managing its own improvement plan and the local authority is beginning to reduce the degree of support the school receives. The governors believe the local authority's external support to the school has been invaluable in bringing about improvement.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

Inspectors have identified no priorities crucial to the school's further development.

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

Yours sincerely

David Anstead
H M Inspector