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Mr K King
The Headteacher
Hurst Hill Primary School
Paul Street
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Dear Mr King

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HURST HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Phil Martin and Barry Wood, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 20 and 21 June 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 November 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, deputy headteacher, the vice-chair of governors, a parent governor and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

You have been in post since 5 January 2007. An advanced skills teacher has been appointed who will take up post in September 2007. Two teachers have recently returned from a period of extended absence and are on a phased return to work. Three teachers are leaving at the end of this term, one of whom is a member of the senior leadership team.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement is beginning to show signs of improvement. From a low starting point, the rate of pupils' progress is increasing. Since the previous monitoring visit, the proportions of pupils at Key Stage 1 reaching the level expected for their age has increased in mathematics and writing. The school's own assessment information shows that more pupils now make satisfactory progress, most notably in English. Some pupils do better than this, particularly in writing in Reception and Years 2, 4 and 6. Standards in mathematics remain well below average at the end of Year 6 but are now rising in other year groups. Although these are welcome improvements, this should not hide the fact that pupils make much less progress in science, attaining well below average standards especially in Years 5 and 6. The gap between what the pupils are currently achieving and what they are expected to achieve for their age is too wide. This is because science is not systematically taught throughout the school. Consequently, there are gaps in pupils' skills and knowledge. Well conceived plans are in place to rectify these omissions, but it is too early to see any discernible impact.

Personal development and well-being

As previously reported, the pupils behave well in lessons and around school. Relationships are good in lessons, especially in small groups and 'talk partner work'. Pupils generally listen attentively and strive to do their best. The pupils' positive attitudes contribute well to their enjoyment of school.

Quality of provision

There is marked improvement in the quality of teaching since the previous monitoring visit, with a greater proportion of satisfactory and good teaching. Teachers have received intensive training and support to improve the quality of lesson planning and have responded well. They show increased competence and confidence in planning and teaching interesting lessons. Following an evaluation of pupils' learning, some teachers are adapting their planning on a daily basis, leading to improved achievement in a greater proportion of lessons. However, evidence from lessons observed and the work in pupils' books indicates that achievement remains variable, particularly for the higher attaining pupils.

Where teaching is good, progress quickens. Teachers make it clear what pupils are going to learn and give clear guidelines about how their success will be measured. In these lessons, the work is stimulating and well matched to the pupils' different learning needs. Despite this positive picture, a small proportion of teaching remains ineffective because some pupils do not make enough progress. In these lessons, work for higher attaining pupils is not challenging enough, particularly in mathematics and science. These weaknesses need to be addressed if the gap between what pupils are attaining and what they are capable of is to close.

Marking is more regular with some that is evaluative. Nonetheless, it remains inconsistent in quality and frequency across the school. Pupils are becoming increasingly involved in evaluating their own work and setting targets for improvement. A simple 'two stars and a wish' system that all pupils understand is being well used to provide praise and a point for improvement.

There has been improvement in the analysis and use of assessment data. Teachers are beginning to use the information to plan the next steps in pupils' learning and to ensure that effective support is given to pupils where needed. However, the tracking of progress of vulnerable pupils is not as robust as it is for others. Nevertheless, the newly appointed special needs coordinator, in conjunction with the assessment coordinator, has made a good start in improving provision. This includes the review of individual education plans and tracking procedures.

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

- involve the children more in assessing their own work and setting targets for improvement – satisfactory
- improve the management systems for tracking the progress of the children as they move through the school and ensure that decisive action is taken where progress is not good enough – satisfactory
- raise standards in English, mathematics and science throughout the school, but particularly at the end of Key Stage 2, by improving all aspects of assessment to ensure the teachers plan lessons that provide work at the right level for children of all abilities – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Since your appointment, you have undertaken a number of worthwhile initiatives to improve the quality of education. As a result, there has been a marked change in the atmosphere in the school. The school's leadership is now on a more secure footing and strategic planning has improved. In making timetable and staffing changes midyear, the leadership team has demonstrated its sound judgement in decision making. The school has made good progress since the previous monitoring visit, having established systematic monitoring of teaching and learning. Lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work are more frequent and the resulting feedback to staff is clear. Teachers are more aware of their accountability in ensuring that pupils in their class make at least satisfactory progress. The senior leadership team have begun to refine their evaluations of the school's work and are acquiring an increasingly accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. The team understands that further professional development is required to ensure that all staff have the necessary skills to accelerate pupils' rates of progress. It is particularly aware of the need to improve some teachers' subject knowledge and teaching skills in mathematics and science. Furthermore, the leadership team know that pupils' attainment in science needs to improve.

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

- improve the overall quality of teaching by setting clear expectations of what the school wants to see happening in classrooms and establish robust systems to check that all staff are following guidelines – good.

External support

The local authority provides a high level of support through its consultants for English and mathematics. As a result, teaching and learning within the school have markedly improved. There is a secure programme of monitoring, with regular evaluation of the school's progress. The school development adviser provides the school with effective support. He has a good grasp of the school's strengths and areas for further development. His support to the headteacher in developing a more cohesive leadership team has been valuable.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

The school should continue to focus on its identified priorities.

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

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
H M Inspector