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Mrs Shirley Wellings
The Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Wellings

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WESTERN SPRINGS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Anne Johns, Additional Inspector, 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 second 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, including 7 lessons, scrutinised documents and pupils' work, and met with the headteacher, the senior leadership team, groups of pupils, members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority (LA), and subject and phase leaders.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit, the school had a period of staffing stability until recently when the two staff have been away. One is due to return in September and the other will retire at the end of term. The deputy headteacher has been appointed to headship elsewhere and takes up the post in September. As yet the school has not been able to confirm arrangements for his replacement in September.

Achievement and standards

Standards remain low but recent Key Stage 1 results show that they have risen this year. These results show satisfactory progress for children from the time they started school in Nursery but still poor progress for pupils during Key Stage 1. The records for children in the Reception class were not available during this visit, but work observed in writing books showed that standards were below that expected from children of this age.

The school system to track the achievement of pupils has been used well to track their progress across the year and shows that in some years, for example Year 5, pupils have made very good progress. This is particularly noticeable when it is aligned to good teaching. Progress remains variable and is still poor in some other years. Progress over time remains poor because pupils still have much to make up for previous low achievement. However, there are clear signs that achievement is improving.

In the majority of lessons observed progress was usually satisfactory and occasionally good. Expectations are higher and planning generally builds upon previous work covered by pupils. When progress was poor pupils were confused about what they have to do and were not able to complete tasks.

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

- ensure teachers set suitably challenging tasks for pupils and increase the progress made in lessons – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' attitudes are good. Pupils are polite, courteous and eager to speak to visitors. They like their school and are supportive of their teachers. Although the school continues to promote good attendance, it is slightly below average. This is mainly due to parents taking their children on holidays during term time, which also means that pupils miss valuable learning. Punctuality has slightly improved, although there are still too many pupils who arrive late or just on time.

Behaviour in lessons and the playground is generally good, with most pupils knowing right from wrong and clearly obeying the rules. Playground behaviour has improved at lunchtime. Pupils say that there is little bullying and that any incidents are swiftly dealt with by staff.

At lunchtime pupils enjoy playing with the new resources, which they helped select, and are sensible with them. Good relationships between the supervisors and pupils help to ensure that there is a calmer atmosphere. Pupils take their responsibility as a 'playground buddy' and supporting younger pupils in the quiet area seriously. The 'green gang' have worked hard to improve the physical environment around the

school and the improvement to the waste ground immediately the other side of the school fence is very noticeable.

There have been no exclusions this term. The behaviour policy has been reviewed and updated to help ensure consistent practice.

Pupils say they are aware of how to be healthy. They enjoy the range of clubs and after school activities that are available, including the session of 'Wake up Shake up' before school each day for all pupils and staff. This gets the day off to a good start. Many take part in sporting activities. The breakfast club provides a healthy breakfast for pupils and is very much appreciated by those who attend before school.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is improving and, although still variable, is satisfactory overall. It still is not good enough to overcome previous inadequacies and ensure pupils are achieving the standards expected of them. Middle managers have improved their role. They have begun to check teachers' planning and pupils' work. They are developing their understanding of standards and achievement through the school in order to provide greater consistency and challenge.

The use of the interactive whiteboards has improved and most teachers use them effectively in their lessons. However, there is an over reliance on the use of worksheets and this limits the opportunities for pupils to work independently. Pupils also have limited opportunities for extended writing in subjects other than English.

In the best lessons teachers use all opportunities to develop the pupils' speaking skills, for example, by giving them time to provide a thoughtful answer to questions or by getting them to explain their reasoning within mathematics and science. However, in some lessons teachers do not make the most of opportunities to develop speaking skills. Pupils miss valuable opportunities to extend their speaking and writing skills across the curriculum, which are important elements if standards in English are to improve at a quicker rate than at present.

Well informed teaching assistants work effectively with the pupils. Targets are clearly visible in classes and most pupils know what they need to do to achieve them. However, the quality of marking in pupils' books varies and there are insufficient comments in books to help and guide pupils to know what they need to do to improve.

Children in the Foundation Stage make satisfactory progress and follow an appropriate range of activities. Purposeful play activities in Nursery successfully promote early language skills. The current use of the Nursery by the pre-school in the afternoons severely limits the provision within school and also the storage space available is inadequate at present. The lack of easy access to an outdoor area significantly hinders progress of their gross motor skills for the younger children. The

school has well established plans to overcome these inadequacies but issues beyond its control are hampering their implementation.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. Appropriate child protection procedures are in place and staff have received suitable training. Risk assessments have been carried out rigorously. Procedures for safeguarding pupils have been implemented rigorously and the school has chased up permission slips to use the internet in school and nearly all have now been returned. Plans have been made to ensure all new parents complete these forms when children start school.

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

- ensure that procedures for safeguarding pupils are implemented rigorously – good.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and deputy headteacher continue to give a clear direction to the school and set the agenda on how to improve. They provide very good support to staff so that improvements to the quality of teaching and learning is starting to become evident in lessons. They closely monitor the work of the school and use this as a basis to bring about further improvements. The good analysis of the levels at which pupils are working enables the school to monitor their progress and hold staff to account for the achievement in their classes.

There is an effective action plan to overcome deficiencies in teaching and learning, raise standards, and improve the quality of leadership at all levels. Subject and phase leadership have improved but it is still inconsistent and weak overall. However, subject leaders and phase coordinators have started to monitor the work and planning within their areas and this is starting to ensure lessons are more challenging, which is starting to ensure pupils make better progress in lessons.

Governance continues to improve and is now effective in supporting the school and holding it to account. A nucleus of highly committed governors works well together and is instrumental in supporting the school as it continues to improve.

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

- carry out rigorous monitoring of the school's performance to identify exactly where weaknesses lie. Draw up and implement plans to rectify the weaknesses – satisfactory
- improve the effectiveness of the governing body – good.

External support

The local authority continues to provide good support for the school. It completed a review of the school in May including watching all staff teach. The feedback has been used by the school to focus future developments. The school has been given additional support from consultants and it is being extended to include support for coordinators on how to lead their areas, prior to the school becoming part of the local authority's ISP programme. The local authority is also working hard to maintain the momentum within the school from September by trying to ensure the headteacher continues to be supported by a suitable deputy.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise achievement by improving the quality of teaching to ensure consistently good or better learning across all subjects and years.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children and Lifelong Learning for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith
H M Inspector