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2 July 2007

Mrs T Withers
The Headteacher
Cosby Primary School
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Dear Mrs Withers

Special Measures: Monitoring Inspection of Cosby Primary School

Introduction

Following my visit with Rodney Braithwaite and Carol Parkinson, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in January 2007.

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 and scrutinised documents. They met with the headteacher, assistant headteachers, subject leaders for mathematics and science, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, and representatives from the local authority (LA), including the school development adviser and school improvement partner.

Context

There have been no substantial changes to personnel or structures in the school since it became subject to special measures, although an assistant headteacher has returned from maternity leave.

Achievement and standards

There has been a steady trend of improvement in standards since the inspection in January, but a significant number of pupils are still underachieving. The school's rigorous new system for assessing pupils' progress against their targets confirms this. It also shows that, overall, pupils are making better progress than before the last inspection.

Children continue to make good progress in the Foundation Stage (Reception classes) and start Year 1 reaching the standards expected for their age. At the end of Year 2 standards are broadly average and there has been some improvement since last year especially in mathematics. The most recent assessments of pupils correctly indicate a significant increase in the number of pupils attaining the higher Level 3 in mathematics, and a slight improvement in the number reaching this level in writing and reading. However, there are still too few pupils reaching the higher levels in their writing.

In Year 6, standards are broadly average overall but this represents inadequate progress for these pupils who scored above average results when they were in Year 2. Results for the 2007 national tests at the end of Year 6 are not yet available, but teacher assessments indicate an improvement in standards in mathematics and science, including at the higher levels, with English attainment remaining similar to 2006. Progress in English, therefore, is a rising concern because the prior attainment of the current Year 6 was much stronger than that of the previous year. As in Years 1 and 2, though, improvement in Years 3 to 6 is greatest in mathematics. The introduction of more focused assessment procedures and regular tracking of pupils' progress is helping to identify underachieving pupils at an earlier stage than in the past. Appropriate interventions and planning to support the needs of these pupils are now being put in place. More challenging work in some classes and some subjects is leading to an improvement in the achievement of middle and higher attainers, but this is patchy. More remains to be done to ensure that all pupils are achieving well and reaching their full potential.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- improve progress in mathematics by ensuring that teachers have higher expectations of what can be achieved by middle and higher ability pupils – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

There were no specific matters of concern arising in this area in the last inspection. Pupils continue to be well behaved, show good attitudes, and work well together. They show a good regard for each other's safety and their good participation in a range of activities supports their development of healthy lifestyles.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved since the inspection and, as a result, standards have risen. Teachers set clear objectives for lessons, and are making increasingly effective use of success criteria through which they and the pupils can measure how well each lesson meets its objectives. There remain, however, significantly more satisfactory lessons than good ones and this reflects weaknesses that continue to persist. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is good because it is well planned and caters effectively for pupils of all abilities. Too often teaching in the rest of school is not good enough to challenge its most able pupils because expectations of what they could learn are not high enough. Tasks are not matched closely enough to pupils' different starting points and capabilities. In good lessons, teachers have a clear understanding of what their pupils need to learn next, they move the lesson at a good pace, demand a high quality of presentation, and teach enough new well illustrated information with opportunities for practice. Where teaching is weaker the lessons often lack pace and sparkle. The quality of teachers' marking is inconsistent. Whilst some is helpful and shows pupils how to improve their work, some is difficult to understand and does not give enough guidance. Marking in science, for example, does not challenge pupils enough to think about how their work could be improved.

The school has doubled the time it allocates to science since the inspection in January 2007. Pupils' work shows the increased input and coverage of the subject but the curriculum is not yet planned coherently enough to ensure pupils make consistent progress as they go through the school. The science curriculum is being restructured at present and the revised version is due to be introduced in September 2007. Whilst plans and actions taken so far show a sound understanding of what needs to be done to make adequate provision for science, they are still at too early a stage to have had a significant impact on standards and achievement.

Whilst the school has a register for its gifted and talented pupils and plans to change the way it organises its support for them in September 2007, at present its provision has lapsed and is inadequate.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- improve achievement in science by ensuring that sufficient time is devoted to the subject – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Planning to support the school's improvement since the last inspection is clear and comprehensive. Strong emphasis has been given to setting out more clearly the roles and responsibilities of leaders and managers at all levels, and to ensuring that leaders and managers have the appropriate skills to carry out their duties. The school readily accepts that there was a lack of accountability over the decline in standards prior to the last inspection. Planning has therefore focused on the empowerment of leaders and managers to more sharply evaluate the school's

effectiveness, with evident success. Governors are now more able to analyse performance data and a specific standards committee has been established to monitor the school's results. Governors are now actively involved in reviews of school performance, and visit lessons when senior staff monitor teaching and learning. The senior leadership team is active in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, and has become more rigorous in taking action where improvement has not been strong enough. Subject coordinators are developing a greater awareness of their role in monitoring and supporting standards by working closely with consultants from the local authority.

These changes are leading to improvements in the classroom and in the quality of pupils' work. However, key shortcomings remain. In particular, the science curriculum still lacks continuity in the development of pupils' knowledge and skills. Monitoring of teaching has brought about better use of assessment information to inform teachers' planning, but too many lessons are still unexciting and offer too little challenge, especially for higher attainers. There has yet to be sufficient sharing of good practice in the school so that all teachers can see how pupils can be engaged, enthused and challenged. Whilst improvements to the structure of leadership and management are evident, they have not yet had enough impact to confirm that the school has sufficient capacity to improve.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- strengthen leadership and management so that the most important weaknesses in the school's performance are suitably prioritised and swiftly addressed – satisfactory.

External support

The quality of support given by the LA and school improvement partner has been good. They have supported the school in its own action planning, so that there is a good degree of coherence between the school's plan and that of the LA. The actions specified in the LA statement of action have had satisfactory impact. They are appropriately focused on raising leadership capacity within the school, but the actions set in place have yet to eradicate underachievement and secure good enough teaching.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the amount of good teaching by increasing pace, challenge and enjoyment in lessons.

- Ensure that the science curriculum is planned coherently to help pupils make consistently good progress in their scientific knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Increase opportunities for teachers to see and share the best practice in teaching and learning.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Leicestershire.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Additional Inspector