

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland
Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR
T 0845 123 6001
F 0845 123 6002

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



10 March 2008

Miss E Smith
The Headteacher
Squirrel Hayes First School
Springfield Road
Biddulph
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST8 7DF

Dear Miss Smith

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SQUIRREL HAYES
FIRST SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Mary Usher-Clark, Additional Inspector, to your school on 27 and 28 February 2008, 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 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Watters
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF SQUIRREL HAYES FIRST SCHOOL

Report from the third monitoring inspection: 27 and 28 February 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and talked with pupils. They met with the headteacher, assistant headteacher, the literacy and numeracy coordinators, the teacher in charge of the Foundation Stage, the chair of governors and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

The headteacher started work at the school on 1 January 2008. At the end of the autumn term 2007, a Year 3 teacher, who was recruited to join the school at the beginning of the spring term 2008, informed the governors that she would not be taking up her post. As a result, the special educational needs coordinator was deployed to teach the Year 3 class, at least until the end of the summer term 2008. The nursery teacher continues to be absent on long term sick leave.

Achievement and standards

The school's most recent assessment information suggests that the majority of pupils are making at least satisfactory progress in reading, writing and mathematics, although there is still too much underachievement, particularly in Years 3 and 4. The school's data shows that the proportion of pupils who are making good progress is much higher in Years 1 and 2 than in Years 3 and 4. Standards are rising very slowly and the gap between what the pupils are currently attaining and the levels they should be reaching for their age is beginning to narrow. Nevertheless, the gap is still far too wide and, despite the accelerated progress of some pupils, standards remain well below average. For example, just over half the pupils in Years 1, 2, 3 and 4 are expected to attain average levels by the end of the summer term 2008. The school's assessment information should be treated with caution as some of the levels awarded are not supported by the quality of the pupils' work, particularly in writing, where progress to eliminate persistent weaknesses in spelling, grammar, punctuation and sentence structure is not fast enough.

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

- raise standards and increase rates of pupils' progress – broadly satisfactory to increase rates of progress overall, but inadequate to raise standards.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils are very well behaved and have positive attitudes. They are very welcoming to visitors and eager to talk about their work and life in school. They are confident, good humoured, open and easy in conversation with adults and each

other. Many of the older pupils are mature, thoughtful and sensible young people. Relationships between adults and pupils continue to be very positive.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning remains fragile, ranging from good to inadequate. In a good numeracy lesson in Year 3 the pace of learning was brisk, expectations were high, and pupils made good progress learning how to calculate fractions of numbers. Similarly, a few pupils in Year 4 showed they have the capability of producing good work when writing about the setting for a story. However, in too many lessons the pupils' work is either too easy or too difficult and is not matched well enough to different starting points and capabilities. Consequently, the rate of progress in these lessons is very slow, with pupils achieving very little. In some lessons learning is very limited because pupils are not taught the skills they need to improve the quality of their work. This was evident in both writing and numeracy lessons, when pupils were asked to complete tasks which did not take enough account of the gaps in their knowledge and understanding and weaknesses in the development of their key skills. For example, Year 2 pupils were confused when writing lists of instructions because they could not make enough sense of the materials they were given to work with. In numeracy in Year 1, pupils struggled to give change for amounts of money because of weaknesses in their understanding of number bonds and patterns to 10.

The curriculum for improving pupils' writing at a sufficiently speedy rate is generally ineffective. Weaknesses in writing are often overlooked and, as a result, pupils continue to repeat basic errors in spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and grammar. The quality of handwriting and the presentation of pupils' written work are frequently poor.

The curriculum is currently not meeting the pupils' needs well enough, particularly in literacy and numeracy. It has not been amended sufficiently to take more account of the pupils' different starting points. Too much of the teachers' short and medium term planning follows nationally prescribed units of work without sufficient adaptation to meet the different learning needs of the pupils. The afternoon curriculum has been revised to give more time to teaching key skills. Whilst this is appropriate, opportunities for raising achievement in literacy and numeracy in the afternoon remain underdeveloped, particularly to improve writing.

The provision and outcomes for the pupils who have learning difficulties continues to be good, despite the significant change in the special educational needs (SEN) coordinators' responsibilities. The pupils who have learning difficulties receive very good support from the SEN teaching assistant and this was shown particularly in her work with groups of pupils in Year 2 and Year 4.

In the Reception class, the most recent teachers' assessments and the work in children's writing books show some children are making steady progress. The teacher in charge of the Foundation Stage tracks children's progress over the Nursery and Reception classes and regular good quality observations are made. Children's writing is marked rigorously and accurately, although the teachers' written comments are not easily understood or read by the children. Whilst a wide range of

curriculum activities is planned in the Nursery class, excessive adult intervention often restricts the children's natural creativity.

Children's progress in the Foundation Stage is currently impeded by ongoing staffing difficulties and the subsequent demands made on staff in both classes. Two teaching assistants have day to day responsibility for teaching the Nursery class and the children's work is planned jointly with the Reception class teacher. However, planning does not always match what is happening in lessons. Similarly, there is some confusion about the best way to improve the quality of learning and ensure that the youngest children receive at least a good start to their life in the school.

Both classrooms are small and the learning environment is cluttered and untidy, particularly in the Nursery class. Teachers have reasonable plans to make better use of the outdoor area, although currently it is difficult to ensure adequate levels of supervision when children are playing outside.

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

- improve the quality of teaching so that all pupils are suitably challenged and their differing needs are met – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The new headteacher has brought a clear sense of educational direction and purpose to the school. In a relatively short period of time, she has identified a range of appropriate actions to tackle many of the school's most pressing priorities and shows a resolute determination to bring about improvement at a more rapid rate than previously. She has identified shortcomings in procedures relating to the appointment of staff and has informed governors about changes that will need to be made. She has produced a sound analysis of the results of the school's most recent assessments of pupils' progress and the standards pupils have attained. She is aware that the assessments require further moderation and validation to ensure their accuracy and reliability.

The headteacher has amended the school development plan to ensure a better focus on eliminating underachievement, raising standards and to provide greater coherence in the process of improvement planning. Arrangements for monitoring teaching are becoming more systematic and rigorous, although the written feedback to teachers does not focus enough on evaluating the impact of teachers' work in lessons in relation to how well the pupils have achieved. Similarly, it is not sufficiently clear when teachers are expected to make improvements in their work. These weaknesses were reported previously in May and December 2007.

Whilst the new headteacher has made a positive start in introducing more rigorous systems to improve the quality of education, the short period of time she has been in post has not been enough in order for the impact of her work to be translated into measurable improvements. Significant weaknesses in teaching and learning reported at the previous inspection remain, subject leadership is barely satisfactory, and overall improvement is not yet happening at a sufficiently speedy rate. The

headteacher's leadership, however, is secure and has the potential to bring about more rapid improvement in the future.

This inspection has found examples of inadequate management relating to spending of the school's budget and recruiting staff. Although there is a governors' personnel committee, it has not exercised sufficient oversight of the recruitment of new staff or ensured that important decisions relating to staff pay have been subject to sufficient scrutiny and subsequent approval. As a result, the new headteacher has been faced with unnecessary constraints as she seeks to implement a coherent restructuring of staff responsibilities and their deployment based on tackling the school's most pressing priorities.

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

- more rigorously evaluate and monitor the school's work to bring about rapid improvement – inadequate.

External support

The local authority continues to provide a range of generally appropriate support, but the impact of this support in improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising standards has been limited. Governors have been given good support to recruit a new headteacher. As a result of this inspection, the LA has acted swiftly to tackle the school's weaknesses, putting in place a range of measures to improve the quality of education, particularly in relation to governance, the quality of teaching, and the quality of learning in the Foundation Stage.

Priorities for further improvement

- As a matter of urgency, ensure that procedures for recruiting staff and awarding pay rises follow LA and national guidelines for best practice.
- Ensure governors exercise greater oversight of spending the school's budget.
- Improve the quality of learning in the Foundation Stage.
- Ensure the curriculum is amended to take more account of the pupils' different starting points and capabilities.