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17 March 2008

Mrs V Cranton
The Headteacher
Gorse Hill Community Primary School
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Worcestershire
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Dear Mrs Cranton

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF GORSE HILL
COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Martin James and Peter Kemble, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 5 and 6 March 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to further consultation with HMI before any appointments are made.

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 Director of Children's Services for Worcestershire.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Watters
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF GORSE HILL COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the fifth monitoring inspection: 5 and 6 March 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with groups of pupils, the headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher, the senior leadership team, year group leaders, the Foundation Stage leader, the literacy and numeracy coordinators, a newly qualified teacher, the chair of governors and the school's local authority (LA) link adviser.

Context

Since the last inspection, a teacher has returned from maternity leave and a newly qualified teacher was recruited for the spring term 2008 to teach pupils in a Year 1 class. At the end of March, the acting deputy headteacher is expected to leave the school to take up a headship at another school in the West Midlands. The LA has seconded another senior teacher to take on the role of acting deputy headteacher until the end of the summer term 2008.

Achievement and standards

Rates of progress are accelerating and almost two thirds of the pupils are currently making satisfactory or better progress. Since the previous inspection, the proportion of pupils making good progress in reading has increased from 27% to 51%, in writing from 29% to 46%, and in mathematics from 31% to 47%. Standards are beginning to rise, but at a much slower rate. The gap between what the pupils should be achieving for their age and what they are currently attaining is still too wide but is slowly narrowing. Whilst this is a more positive picture than previously, only half the pupils are working at the level they should be at for their age and almost a third of the pupils are making unsatisfactory progress. Similarly, while the majority of pupils in Year 6 are making satisfactory and better progress, standards in Year 6 remain very low, with only 42% currently at the level expected for their age. Nevertheless, there is cause for optimism and an important corner has been turned. The school has been successful in halting the decline in the pupils' progress and the standards they are reaching and the trend in achievement is now firmly upward.

In each year group, and particularly in Years 5 and 6, pupils' books and writing on display in classrooms and corridors show examples of good quality work. However, overall standards are still low and weaknesses in sentence structure, spelling and handwriting persist, with just under half the pupils working at levels appropriate for their ages.

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

- improve achievement and raise standards in English and mathematics by accelerating the rate of pupils' progress in both subjects – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' behaviour is satisfactory overall. Some of the pupils behave very well and many are polite, courteous and welcoming to visitors. Pupils' attitudes to work have improved because of the very positive behaviour management strategies introduced since the last inspection. Pupils concentrate for longer periods because they are finding their work more interesting, for example in topics such as 'Heroes and Villains'. They enjoy their time in school, and are more enthusiastic than previously. Nevertheless, on occasions, when they find their work less interesting or when lesson introductions are too long, some become inattentive and restless.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved. Forty per cent of the lessons seen during the inspection were good, which matches the outcome of the most recent LA review. Lessons are better planned, with most teachers using assessment to provide a range of work to suit the pupils' different learning needs, which helps them make better progress. Pupils are also provided with clear advice about how they can improve their work. An increasing number talk confidently about their targets, enjoy their lessons, and work well together in small groups and pairs. However, some weaknesses in teaching remain. For example, the pace of learning is slower when the introductions to lessons are too long or when pupils are provided with limited opportunities to discuss their work and clarify their understanding.

In the Young Explorers Unit, the school has been successful in tackling weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. The unit provides a calm and purposeful environment for learning and the curriculum has improved significantly. There is greater emphasis on teaching key skills and a good balance between direct teaching and pupils' independent activities. Most pupils sustain concentration well because they are receiving much clearer guidance and direction about what they are expected to learn. The pupils are supervised well and enjoy the interesting and stimulating contexts for learning which are planned by the teachers. Whilst there is clearly more emphasis on improving pupils' speaking skills, there are some missed opportunities to enhance spoken language, particularly in whole class sessions, where adults are not always used effectively to promote faster progress. Similarly, in the Nursery class, learning objectives identified in planning are not sufficiently reflected in adults' discussions with children during their structured play activities.

In writing, most pupils are familiar with what they need to do to improve and try hard to achieve their targets. Although there are inconsistencies in the way work is marked, teachers are making better use of marking to illustrate areas for development and show pupils what they need to do next to improve. For example, they use of different coloured highlighter pens to show good work, aspects that need improvement, and where pupils' individual targets are achieved. This gives both teachers and pupils an immediate picture of the success of a piece of writing. Many

pupils are writing at length, which reflects their increasing confidence. Pupils' handwriting is improving, although skills learned in handwriting sessions are not always transferred successfully when writing in other lessons.

Teachers are using an improved range of strategies to increase pupils' enthusiasm for writing. In a mixed Year 2 and 3 class, pupils used drama to explore how a character might feel and this helped to extend the range of descriptive words they used. Most writing activities are well planned to meet pupils' differing needs. In a Year 4 and Year 5 literacy lesson, all pupils made good progress when creating tension and excitement in a story because the independent group work tasks, although different, were just as challenging for the lower attaining pupils as they were for the average and higher attaining pupils. Teaching assistants give good support to individuals and groups of pupils in writing lessons, helping them make at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress.

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

- improve the quality of teaching by requiring all teachers to use assessment information properly to assist their planning and target setting – good.

Leadership and management

Following the previous inspection, the headteacher and senior staff, with the support of LA consultants and advisers, produced a strategic plan. This explains how the persistent weaknesses in teaching and learning should be eliminated, what improvements were to be made to the quality of learning in the Young Explorers Unit, and how teachers would raise standards and increase rates of progress in writing. The plan provides a sound framework for further improvement and has made a positive difference, particularly in the Young Explorers Unit. Teaching is improving and rates of progress are increasing in writing, although standards remain very low and there has only been a small shift upwards since the last inspection.

Monitoring and self-evaluation continue to improve and are beginning to make a more positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The headteacher and senior teachers check teachers' planning, scrutinise pupils' work, and observe lessons. The outcomes of these activities are used to set targets for improvement and to eliminate weaknesses. There is a stronger focus on achievement and standards and senior teachers have a clearer understanding of pupils' levels of attainment and rates of progress. Written feedback to teachers is generally helpful, although there still too many examples of over generous judgements, some grades for lessons that do not match the written evidence, and insufficient reference to the impact of teaching on pupils' achievements.

The headteacher and senior leadership team have produced a helpful self-evaluation of progress against the key issues for improvement and the school's other main priorities. The evaluation is mostly accurate and supported by a secure evidence base. The headteacher and senior staff are becoming far more adept at measuring progress in relation to pupils' achievements and the quality of learning. The school is clearly demonstrating a better capacity to improve, which provides a sound foundation for further improvements in the coming months.

The literacy and numeracy coordinators have a good knowledge and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their subjects, and have led staff well in pursuing the targets set out in the subject action plans. Year group leaders are also making an effective contribution to raising achievement and improving the quality of learning. The acting deputy headteacher has made a very positive contribution to improving pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning.

The support and training provided for newly qualified teachers is satisfactory, although the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating progress and setting clear unambiguous targets for improvement are not as rigorous as they might be. The governing body, under the diligent and thoughtful leadership of the chair of governors, continues to develop and improve its role in holding the school to account for the standards achieved by the pupils. Governors keep a watchful eye on the school's progress through regular monitoring visits, lesson observations and receiving presentations from senior staff. The governing body is kept well informed about the school's progress, particularly by the chair of governor's frequent meetings with the headteacher.

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

- improve the quality of leadership and management by establishing greater rigour in the checks made on teaching and learning to ensure that they are always strongly focused on raising standards – good.

External support

The local authority continues to monitor the school's effectiveness and maintain a close check on the school's progress. It has given good support to ensure continuity in leadership by stepping in swiftly to second another senior teacher to replace the current acting deputy headteacher. Good support has also been provided to improve the quality of teaching and learning and tackle weaknesses in the Young Explorers Unit.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise achievement and standards in writing.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching.