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Mrs F Allen
The Acting Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Allen

Collaborative Restart: Monitoring Inspection of Corsham Primary School

Introduction

Following my visit with Jill Arnold, Additional Inspector, and Kevin Jane HMI to your school on 26 and 27 March 2008, 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 reopened in September 2007, under the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) collaborative restart scheme.

This letter will be published 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 acting executive headteacher, associate headteacher, key stage leaders, two members of the governing body, groups of pupils and a representative of the local authority. A telephone discussion took place with the executive headteacher. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils. The majority of inspection activities took place on the Broadwood site.

Context

Corsham Primary School is based on two sites at opposite ends of Corsham. There are 534 pupils on roll, with 119 on the Broadwood site and 415 at Pound Pill. The school has a speech and language unit for 18 pupils based at Pound Pill. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school has a children's centre and also provides a range of extended services for families and the community. The school serves some military families and pupils

from a Traveller heritage; pupil mobility is higher than is normally found. The collaborative restart involved another local primary school, formerly known as Box Highlands School (the Broadwood site), which was made subject to special measures in September 2006. At that time, pupils' achievement and standards, the quality of teaching, curriculum and leadership were all found to be inadequate. The collaborative restart enabled the school to expand the leadership team and create new roles. The school is led by an executive headteacher. Two associate headteachers have strategic and operational responsibilities for each site. Five experienced teachers from the previous Corsham Primary School moved to the Broadwood site in September 2007 to create a completely new teaching team. Three non teaching staff were reappointed from the predecessor school. The additional funding, from the collaborative restart, has enabled an extensive refurbishment programme to take place at Broadwood.

Achievement and standards

Pupils start school with skills generally below those expected for children starting Reception. The weaknesses mostly lie in children's early reading and writing skills and social and emotional development. Children make satisfactory progress and, by the end of Reception, standards are broadly in line with the goals for this age. The satisfactory progress continues and pupils leave school at the end of Year 6 with broadly average standards.

This is the picture across the whole school, but there are marked differences in pupils' standards and progress at the two sites. At Broadwood, pupils' standards have been affected by a legacy of underachievement. Pupils have gaps in their knowledge and skills which occurred whilst they were in the predecessor school. There have been clear improvements in the quality of teaching and the curriculum and the way pupils' progress is tracked at Broadwood. Teachers have been very quick to identify when the work they have initially planned has been beyond the pupils' understanding and have adjusted their teaching accordingly to compensate and help pupils catch up. The improved provision is having a positive effect on standards and achievement but there has not been sufficient time yet for this to lead to significant gains in pupil progress.

The school wisely assessed pupils on the Broadwood site early in the school year, to take a baseline from which to build. This means the school has a secure basis on which to judge pupils' progress as pupils move through this year and in the future. The school's most recent assessments show that the degree of underachievement at Broadwood is reducing as more pupils benefit from the good teaching. This is evident across all year groups but is particularly marked in Year 6, where a higher proportion of pupils are making the expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils have extremely positive attitudes to school at both sites. There is clear evidence of pupils enjoying their education. They value the individual attention they

get and the way that activities are organised to support their learning. Behaviour is exemplary in and around the school. Pupils are polite and very friendly. They are developing independence as learners. On both sites, they find the traffic light system helpful, whereby they can reflect on their learning and understanding and share how well they think they are doing with the teacher. This is more established at Pound Pill, but pupils at Broadwood are clear about their targets and the traffic light system, and know that these are supporting their learning. One older pupil said, 'We know our levels and where we are at and where we should be at.'

The school has addressed the weaknesses in pupil behaviour that related to the predecessor school and the extent to which the school listened to pupils' views. Pupils at Broadwood appreciate the 'fab system' (friends against bullying) and report, 'You can't get away with bad behaviour now.' They find there is greater consistency. They value the rewards and sanctions and understand them. They also like the monkey in the worry box system, whereby they can share any concerns or problems in a discrete way. Pupils feel very safe. They like the high fences round the site and are pleased that the public footpath, which went through the school grounds, has been removed.

Pupils have more opportunities to take responsibility and to contribute ideas and suggestions. They take the buddying responsibilities seriously. They also help with organising the school menus and like the range of options available to them. As a consequence, pupils report school meals have improved considerably. The school council is developing well at Broadwood. Members have focused on seeking the views of pupils in their classes about their learning and the after school clubs. They are enthusiastic about raising money for a future development of a sensory garden. Pupils told inspectors they are encouraged to be healthy and they value the specialist expertise for sports. One pupil said, 'PE now feels like a proper subject and not a treat.' The pupils at Broadwood are steadily improving their academic basic skills and their social skills, to help them be in a better position for their next stage of education. There is still some way to go before their economic well-being is secure.

Quality of provision

Lessons visited were consistently good at both sites. This reflects significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning at the Broadwood site since the inspection in 2006. Lessons are effectively planned to meet the range of pupils' needs, and are typically taught in a brisk, sharply focused way, which engages pupils well. Pupils are keen to learn, cooperate and they apply themselves well. Teachers are particularly skilled at extending pupils' learning through carefully phrased questions, and clear explanations and demonstrations. Pupils are actively involved in their learning. They discuss their ideas in pairs or groups, for example, and reflect on what they have learnt at the end of each lesson. Although teachers made effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) to structure lessons and consolidate pupils' understanding, there was little evidence of pupils using computers during the visit. This is because provision for ICT has only recently been expanded and developments are at an early stage.

Teaching assistants provide sensitive support to individual pupils and small groups. They have a good understanding of these pupils' needs and carefully tailor teaching to ensure that pupils' learning is productive. Record keeping is very good on both sites and teaching assistants keep detailed ongoing notes of pupils' progress and needs. The short, frequent sessions to consolidate or address specific gaps in pupils' learning are successful in helping to speed up the progress these pupils make.

Teachers adopt a consistent approach to creating a stimulating and vibrant classroom environment that supports pupils' progress and promotes personal development. Marking and feedback to pupils at the Broadwood site have improved greatly.

The curriculum has improved on the Broadwood site since the inspection. Staff have worked hard to address the areas identified for improvement from the predecessor school. They use ongoing assessment effectively to plan activities that will develop pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in a systematic and secure way. The school has based the new curriculum at Broadwood on the Pound Pill curriculum, which was already well established. Total alignment is not possible, due to the mixed age classes at the Broadwood site and the lower standards, but the approach to planning is consistent and the curriculum is regularly reviewed. There is appropriate emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills at Broadwood, including additional support programmes for pupils who have fallen behind or who have additional learning needs. A wide range of enrichment opportunities contributes greatly to pupils' enjoyment of school and to their good personal and social development. New computers have been installed very recently and ICT has been rightly identified by the school as a priority for development at Broadwood.

Staff have excellent relationships with pupils and understand their individual needs very well. Policies for academic guidance are consistently applied across the two school sites in terms of classroom displays, marking and the use of curricular targets. Marking now provides more specific guidance on how to improve the content, not just the presentation, of work. Pupils' books show that pupils are given time to respond to teachers' marking and check they have understood. Older pupils are made aware of the National Curriculum levels and how their work should be improved to reach the next level. Teachers track pupils' progress carefully, identifying who needs extra support and taking action to address specific needs.

Procedures for appointing staff are comprehensive and follow the necessary guidance. The school has addressed the deficiencies from the predecessor school and now meets government requirements for safeguarding learners.

Leadership and management

Strategic leadership has been successful in securing a clear vision for the new school. There is a consistent, whole school approach – The Corsham Way – across both sites. Expectations are very high and are modelled by leaders at all levels.

The school has a new leadership structure, with clear lines of delegation and accountability. The collaborative restart has enabled leaders with different areas of expertise and degrees of experience to develop their roles. There is a shared determination to succeed and this is leading to better learning and achievement, particularly for those pupils at Broadwood who have underachieved in the past. The executive headteacher and senior management have been successful in addressing the Broadwood site's most urgent weaknesses that related to health and safety and pupils' behaviour and they have focused appropriately on improving standards in writing in the first instance. The aspects judged inadequate at the last inspection are now at least satisfactory and some are good.

The quality of teaching and learning is monitored extensively by the school, in conjunction with the local authority. Systems are robust and precise. The school's own judgements on the quality of teaching and learning closely match inspectors' judgements. This indicates that the self-evaluation is accurate.

A secure range of systems and procedures has been put in place at Broadwood. Small steps files, for example, are ensuring pupils' learning is carefully monitored and these are used to identify pupils who need extra intervention or support. The senior leaders know what needs to be done and have a secure grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses, but there has been less analysis of the impact of the school's actions and systems at Broadwood. Teachers monitor pupils' progress at class level, but senior leaders have not yet analysed to what extent pupils in each year group are catching up and whether progress is better in some subjects, or classes, than others.

Governors take an appropriately strategic role in the school. They are knowledgeable and well informed. The governing body's committee structure is fit for purpose. Governors provide very good support and have played a valuable role in securing the confidence of parents and the community. This was essential after a difficult period leading up to, and during, the early stages of the collaborative restart. Along with senior leaders, governors have quickly established the school as 'one school' despite the split site organisation. Senior leaders provide governors with much important information, but there is limited evidence in the governing body's minutes of governors providing challenge for the school.

The strengths in leadership have led to clear improvements in the quality of provision, pupils' personal development and well-being and achievement. There is some way to go before all pupils at Broadwood make at least satisfactory progress in reading, writing and mathematics and reach their targets. Nevertheless, the successful steps, taken so far, show the school has good capacity to improve further.

External support

There has been a close working relationship between the local authority and the school over the establishment of the collaborative restart. The additional support manager has provided helpful guidance and support to governors and staff to ensure a smooth transition for pupils and parents during the setting up period. The school is receiving ongoing regular support from both the additional support manager and school improvement professional. Their visits are sharply focused and they provide the senior leaders and governors with a valuable, objective view of the school's provision and progress.

Main Judgements

The school's overall progress – good.

Priorities for further improvement

- Use information from assessments and monitoring to evaluate the success and impact of the school's provision on achievement in reading, writing and mathematics at Broadwood.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State at the Department for Children, Schools and Families, the chair of governors and the Director of the Department for Children and Education for Wiltshire.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson
H M Inspector of Schools