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Mr P Talbot
The Headteacher
Castle Hill Community Primary School
Sidney Street
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Dear Mr Talbot

Fresh Start: monitoring inspection of Castle Hill Community Primary School

Introduction

Following my visit with David Collard, Additional Inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 March 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school opened in January 2007.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, senior and subject leaders, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and the School Improvement Partner.

Context

The number of pupils on the school roll currently stands at 296 with 52 pupils in the nursery. The number of pupils who leave and join the school at different times remains high. Staffing is stable and two teaching assistant vacancies have been filled. Since the previous monitoring visit the leadership of literacy and numeracy has changed. Senior staff are now responsible for these subjects. The Year 2 classes have been organised into three ability sets for literacy and numeracy. Three new governors have joined the governing body with two vacancies remaining. Building work continues and requires periodic changes to the organisation of the school day, such as lunchtime.

Achievement and standards

Attainment on entry to the nursery is below average. Children are making good progress in both the Nursery and Reception classes so most currently have the skills and knowledge expected for their age, except in calculation. Few children are working at levels above those expected for their age.

The school's analysis of assessment and tracking information is becoming more sophisticated. As a result, leaders are able to demonstrate that there has been an increase in the number of pupils on track to reach the levels expected for their age in literacy and numeracy. This is beginning to have an impact on raising standards, but overall these remain too low. The use of challenging targets to raise standards overall is being developed appropriately and a greater proportion of pupils now make the progress expected. Some individuals are progressing rapidly and are recovering from previous underachievement.

The progress that pupils make in Key Stage 2, however, is too variable because there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Pupil progress meetings are taking place four times a year. These are accurately identifying pupils who need to make faster progress and additional support is being provided to overcome barriers to learning and accelerate individual progress. Target setting with pupils has been refined and is more consistent. These targets are linked more specifically to the work pupils are given in lessons and reviewed with greater frequency. Consequently, pupils know their targets and this is helping them to improve. Data is analysed to monitor the progress of different groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This indicates that there is no clear pattern to underachievement, except for pupils who do not attend regularly. Pupils who are profoundly deaf or with hearing impairment are assessed regularly and their results analysed to ensure that they are making the progress they should.

Personal development and well-being

Attendance remains below average. The school is diligent in following up any persistent absentees and the proportion is now starting to fall. However, the number of pupils who do not attend regularly is too high. There is still some lateness but this has improved. Pupils feel safe and secure. They say that there is less misbehaviour than there was and that this is dealt with quickly. There has been a fall in the number of exclusions during this year. Older pupils take on responsibility and act as translators for pupils who speak little or no English and pupils with hearing impairment are included fully. Pupils say they enjoy lessons, particularly literacy and numeracy, and especially when lessons are exciting. They get on well with adults and want to do well. Attitudes to learning have improved and are most productive in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. When working in larger class groups, older pupils are often shy and reticent to join in with discussions. They respond more readily when working on their own or in pairs.

Quality of provision

There has been an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning which is having an impact on improving the achievement of pupils. A greater proportion of lessons are now good, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. In the most effective lessons teaching is precise and interests pupils so they are keen to take part. Assessment information is used effectively to provide varied tasks which are appropriately challenging for pupils of different ability, including the most able. Pupils are given good opportunities to think for themselves and work together and so the pace of learning is maintained. Varied resources, including laptops and the interactive whiteboard, enliven lessons. In the Early Years Foundation Stage activities are carefully planned so that children have good opportunities to make choices and teaching assistants understand the purpose of activities so support learning well. However, there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stage 2 where some lessons are inadequate. The progress that pupils make in these lessons is limited because too often all children are given the same work to do and for some this is mundane and lacking the challenge to motivate. The pace of learning in these lessons is too slow so pupils lose focus.

The school is rightly continuing to focus on raising standards in literacy and numeracy. There are opportunities to link other subjects together, but this is not yet fully developed. When talking about the curriculum, pupils said that their favourite subject was literacy and, in particular, writing stories, but they pointed out that they would like to do more art, design and technology, and music.

Provision for pupils who are profoundly deaf or have a hearing impairment is well organised. There is a balance between withdrawal for specialist support and work in classrooms. Specialist teachers and assistants have a good understanding about the level of support that each individual needs and provide close supervision at lunchtimes and playtimes. Through the use of consistent signing in lessons and elsewhere, many hearing pupils have learnt to sign confidently.

Pastoral and academic support has been strengthened. All safeguarding procedures are in place and child protection has a high priority. Day to day support for pupils, including the most vulnerable, is established and provided by the well trained assistants.

The quality of marking has improved. The marking policy is now more consistently applied and is providing pupils with an understanding about how well they have done and what they need to do to improve. Targets are clearly understood by pupils and are refined in light of assessments to ensure they are increasingly challenged.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in September 2008:

- increase the pace of learning and the level of challenge in lessons for all pupils, particularly the more able – satisfactory
- improve the proportion of good or better teaching by ensuring the pace of learning and challenge for all pupils is maintained – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Self-evaluation is more robust because it links the school's performance more closely to national expectations. However, the evaluation of some lessons is overgenerous. Assessment information is secure and the analysis of data is increasingly detailed, enabling leaders to challenge staff and hold them to account for the progress that pupils make and the standards they attain. The school's plan for improvement now includes the appropriate areas for development with quantifiable measures of success and milestones against which progress can be measured. Governor involvement in shaping the strategic direction of the school is developing well. Governors attend the pupil progress meetings which has helped them to have a sharper understanding of how well the school is progressing and where further improvements need to be made. Consequently, they are better able to provide school leaders with challenge as well as support. The chair of governors is knowledgeable and focused sharply on improvement.

Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage and inclusion are well established and making effective contributions to the school's progress. The changes made to the leadership of literacy and numeracy since the previous monitoring visit are beginning to make a difference to the quality of provision and pupil achievement. Leaders at all levels are now well informed about the school's strengths and where weaknesses remain. Whilst some action is being taken to address inadequate teaching, leaders are aware that they need to act more quickly to secure consistently better teaching and learning in Key Stage 2.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in September 2008:

- leaders, including governors, make better use of data to evaluate the school's performance realistically against nationally expectations to inform strategic planning and target resources effectively – good.

External support

The School Improvement Partner has provided senior leaders and governors with good levels of support and challenge to secure the improvement needed. This is helping leaders to take more control and is building the capacity they need to ensure improvement is sustained. Leaders are now directing the external support they receive and targeting it more carefully to address issues that they have identified.

Main Judgements

The school's overall progress is satisfactory.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Krafft
Her Majesty's Inspector