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9 December 2005

Mrs C O'Malley
Fairway Primary School
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Dear Mrs O'Malley

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF FAIRWAY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Andrew Watters HMI to your school on Wednesday 9 and Thursday 10 November 2005, 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 April 2005.

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 ten lessons, scrutinised a range of documents, and met with you, the senior leadership team, the chair of governors and two representatives of the local authority (LA). Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and pupils. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to you, the representative from the LA, and a parent governor.

Context

The school has experienced a turbulent period and there have been some significant changes to staff. At the time of the inspection in April 2005 you had been in post for two weeks following a succession of four acting

headteachers. The deputy headteacher and three other staff left at the end of the summer term. The acting deputy headteacher is on secondment to the school and will leave at the end of the autumn term 2005. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed and is expected to start in January 2006. At present there are vacancies for two class teachers which are being covered by overseas trained teachers. Representatives from the local authority met with the governors on 31 October 2005 to announce the proposal to consult on the school's closure.

Achievement and standards

Standards are rising slowly at each key stage although they remain below the national average. The results of the 2005 national tests reflect this picture. Since the previous year the proportions of pupils at Key Stage 1 who attained the level expected for their age increased in reading and mathematics and stayed the same in writing. At Key Stage 2 the proportions of pupils who attained the level expected for their age increased from the previous year in English and science and stayed the same in mathematics. However, the school's assessment data shows significant numbers of pupils are underachieving in reading, writing and mathematics and the inspection findings confirm this view. While standards are improving, the major challenge facing the school is the eradication of the high level of underachievement.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in April 2005:

- ensure that all pupils achieve in line with their capabilities and attain higher standards in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT)—inadequate progress.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning are satisfactory. Pupils are diligent and good humoured. Many are keen to talk about their work even when it is too easy and uninteresting. They enjoy conversation and show a refreshingly frank, open and mature approach to their school life. Relationships are good and the pupils generally respect each other and the adults who work with them. The few occasions when they became restless and inattentive in lessons were directly related to weaknesses in the quality of teaching. The pupils' attendance is currently 94% which is in line with the national average for primary schools. Attendance is monitored regularly and good attendance is celebrated in each class and by the whole school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in April 2005:

- improve attendance and behaviour—satisfactory progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning ranges from good to unsatisfactory and is unsatisfactory overall. In the good lessons the pupils knew exactly what they were expected to learn, important strategies were taught effectively, and teachers checked carefully that the pupils understood what they were doing. There was a good pace of learning and praise was used effectively to celebrate achievement and remind the pupils about good behaviour. In a few classes stimulating displays and imaginative planning helped the pupils improve their work. Nevertheless, too many lessons were mediocre and failed to match the pupils' work sufficiently to their different starting points and capabilities. In the weakest lessons planning was poor, pupils were given low level tasks which did not challenge their thinking, there were few opportunities to work independently and show initiative, and expectations were far too low. Pupils were kept for too long sitting on the carpet in whole class introductions and some were excluded because they did not understand what they were required to do.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in April 2005:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning—inadequate progress.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has been successful in improving pupils' behaviour and their attendance. She has overseen a range of initiatives to improve the quality of education. The post Ofsted action plan is a reasonable framework for improvement but there is insufficient reference to measuring pupils' progress against targets for raising standards and achievements. The rate of improvement has been too slow. Timescales in the action plan have slipped and there is not a coherent, strategic overview which shows how the various initiatives should be linked. This is impeding the school's ability to focus on the most pressing priorities.

Rigorous and effective systems to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning have not been established. There has been a strong reliance on external support to drive school improvement. Whilst reasonable procedures have been established to monitor some of the actions taken, they are not sufficiently evaluative or sharply enough focused on raising standards, eliminating underachievement, or improving teaching and learning.

Teachers have recently identified targets for improvement for all pupils as part of a whole school focus on raising standards. Some of the targets are challenging but their implementation in each key stage is inconsistent and, as yet, are having a limited impact on eliminating underachievement. The school is not meeting its commitment to carry out regular lesson observations and give teachers written feedback about the quality of their work. The school is currently falling well short of meeting the governors' target of achieving

100% satisfactory or better teaching by July 2006 and the target does not identify how much good teaching there should be.

The headteacher and deputy meet regularly with the subject leaders to discuss progress against the action plan. The system of tracking pupils' progress has improved but is still in the early stages of development and is not having sufficient impact on raising standards and achievement. The subject leaders are given regular release time to fulfil their leadership role. Although they are developing in confidence the lack of specific training and coaching has limited the impact of their work.

The capacity of the governing body to monitor the work of the school has improved. The new chair of governors provides astute leadership and recognises the need to hold the school to account for the standards achieved by the pupils.

Since the previous inspection, the LA has agreed that the school can set a deficit budget of £140,000 to meet the cost of the post Ofsted action plan. The governors are keeping a close eye on expenditure and have benchmarked spending against similar schools in the LA. This detailed exercise has highlighted concerns and led to a review about the high level of spending in certain areas.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in April 2005:

- improve leadership and management and develop the roles of the deputy headteacher and subject leaders so that they are able to take a lead in raising standards—~~inadequate~~ progress
- ensure that finances are managed and used effectively to raise standards—~~satisfactory~~ progress.

External support

The LA's statement of proposed action is satisfactory. It gives specific information about the extra support to be provided. Given the recent notification of the proposal to consult on closing the school, the LA expects to amend the statement of proposed action and make clear its strategic plans for the school in light of the outcomes of the consultation and decision about the future of the school.

In their commentary the LA has rightly identified a weakness in the school's action plan which is the omission of targets for the higher attainers at the end of key stages and in core subjects. This has not been addressed sufficiently by the school nor followed up by the link adviser.

The impact of the Intensifying Support programme (ISP) has been positive, for example, in improving lesson planning, tracking pupils' progress and, in

some cases, setting challenging targets. The staff have high regard for the quality of the support provided by the ISP coordinator since September 2005.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures—inadequate.

The quality of the LA's statement of action—satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

The priorities remain those identified in the inspection of April 2005. Within this, the school's priorities are to:

- make more rapid progress to eliminate underachievement
- improve strategic planning
- provide robust and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Learning and Culture for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Linda Rockey
H M Inspector