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Mrs J Harris
The Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Harris

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WROCKWARDINE WOOD C OF E JUNIOR SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Rodney Braithwaite, Additional Inspector, to your school on 8 and 9 March 2006, 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 October 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 the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met staff, the acting headteacher, the chair of governors, groups of pupils, and two representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the inspection in October 2005, the headteacher has been away from the school with ill health. In his absence, the school is being managed by the deputy headteacher and a consultant. The consultant is employed by the LA in the role of acting headteacher and works in the school for three days a

week. The deputy headteacher has been released from her full time class commitment but still teaches groups of pupils on a regular basis.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in English is showing signs of improvement but is still not good enough. Standards in speaking are below expected levels. The pupils' oral contributions to lessons are brief. Pupils tend to answer questions in short or incomplete sentences and have a limited vocabulary when describing events or offering opinions. They enjoy reading but for some of them it is still difficult and progress is slower than it should be. The pupils do not have a range of strategies to tackle new words and their reading is not fluent enough for them to understand significant themes in a story. Writing has improved since the last inspection but is still not progressing at a quick enough rate. The pupils show a better understanding of punctuation but some of their work is let down by poor spelling. The ability to sustain writing to an appropriate length and engage the reader's interest is the weakest element of pupils' work.

Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory but there are elements where progress is slow. The pupils are more confident when they work in their books than when they are asked to tackle mental calculations. They set their work out neatly, understand the importance of accuracy and are making reasonable progress in numeracy. Although the pupils have some opportunities to discuss their work, they are not yet confident in using mathematical language to describe what they have done or suggest how they might have tackled a problem in a different way. The school's own data suggests that handling and interpreting data is a weaker element of the subject than number work or working with shape, space and measures.

In the 12 lessons observed the pupils made satisfactory progress towards the intended outcomes in ten and good progress in two. Progress was slower in English lessons where the pupils spent too much time listening to the teachers or answering questions and not enough time working their tasks. This affected adversely the pupils with learning difficulties and the more capable pupils because questions were not appropriately matched to their particular needs. Despite this, pupils with learning difficulties are beginning to show signs of good progress since the last inspection. This is because they are benefiting from effective small group support where the teaching ensures that they understand new concepts. The progress of more capable pupils shows slight improvement but is still too slow. Some of the teaching does not challenge these pupils and the pace at which they are expected to work is too leisurely.

Personal development and well-being

The personal development and well-being of the pupils continues to be good and is a significant strength of the school. The pupils look forward greatly to

coming to school and their attendance is good. Some of the pupils described the school as 'perfect', 'excellent' and 'fabulous' and were extremely enthusiastic in their praise for what is provided. The pupils feel safe and know that there is always an adult they can turn to if they have a problem, saying, for example, "Our teachers are very caring." Although they mention the occasional example of bullying, pupils feel that their teachers always sort it out quickly and they do not see it as a problem. The pupils behave well in classes and around the school and are polite and cheerful. Most of the pupils enjoy contributing to lessons but a minority of them have very passive attitudes to learning, especially during the start of lessons when they have to sit for lengthy periods of time.

The pupils are starting to understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They know which foods are healthy but do not always make healthy choices at lunchtime. Pupils have raised money for the British Heart Foundation through a sponsored skip and some of their contributions to charity are collected through their own initiatives. They are becoming more involved in their own learning by reflecting on what they have achieved and by marking each other's work. This is a good step and contributes well to their personal development.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. Improvement has taken place because there have been rigorous reviews of teaching, and training has been given to respond to the weaknesses identified through the reviews. The teachers have been given clear guidelines on how to set work at the right level for their pupils. This has helped them to improve their planning, particularly in English and mathematics which is now much more consistent and thorough. In other lessons, however, there is still too much work directed at the middle of the ability range and so the more capable pupils do not learn as rapidly as they might.

Although the teaching is better at pitching the work at the right level for group tasks it still has weaknesses in the whole class question and answer sessions. Staff are not yet skilled enough in posing questions to challenge all the pupils in their classes and there is a wide range of ability in all the classes. In the question and answer sessions the teachers tend to rely on pupils who put up their hands and do not expect enough of the more reticent pupils. In the two better lessons this was not the case and all pupils were included well.

Teaching assistants are playing a more active role in pupils' learning and are being particularly effective when working with lower attaining pupils or those with learning difficulties and disabilities. They are well briefed through the planning on what they should do and make a good contribution to lessons. All the staff have good management skills and enjoy good relationships with their pupils.

The care and guidance provided for the pupils is satisfactory. The positive atmosphere helps the pupils to feel safe and know that their contributions are valued. Links are developing with the infant school to ensure a consistency of approach in aspects of teaching and improve transition from one phase to the next.

There has been some improvement in assessment and tracking procedures, but much still needs to be done. Systems are now in place which show the attainment of each pupil in relation to national benchmarks. This system is relatively new and cannot yet demonstrate the rate of progress that pupils have made. Records are kept to track pupils' reading in class but these are not helpful enough in identifying what the pupils know, or in diagnosing what they need to learn next.

Action has been taken to set learning targets for pupils. However, some of the pupils do not really understand their targets because they are written in language that they cannot understand. Furthermore, those pupils that know their targets cannot say what they must do to achieve them. The teachers' marking shows clear improvement but is much better in some classes than others. Some helpful developmental comments are made, but not by all, and marking in books other than English is in need of further development.

The curriculum continues to be satisfactory. English and mathematics are now starting to be developed more consistently across the curriculum. However, the overuse of worksheets across a range of subjects is inhibiting the development of writing and opportunities for pupils to organise and set out their own data.

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

- ensure that planning for teaching and learning matches the needs of pupils so that they do as well as they should, particularly in writing and mathematics for the more able pupils—satisfactory progress
- develop marking and other assessment practice so that pupils are much clearer about what they need to do to improve their work—inadequate progress.

Leadership and management

The school has produced a sound plan for improvement which is clearly focused on the issues identified in the last inspection. The range of actions is appropriate, timescales are realistic, and there are adequate arrangements to monitor the progress of the plan. Support from the LA has helped the school implement a coherent programme of staff training which is beginning to improve aspects of teaching such as planning. Mentoring arrangements for newly qualified teachers are good and give such staff a range of useful support and encouragement.

Staff with leadership responsibilities have a clearer role in school improvement and have started to take more ownership of their areas of responsibility. Some very useful training has been given to them to improve their skills and there are signs that this is starting to take effect. The school is developing whole school self-evaluation systems. These are potentially very useful and are already beginning to show accurately where progress has been made and identifying where further action needs to be taken.

The school has started to check the quality of teaching and learning on a more formal and regular basis. This gives an accurate picture of its quality and is a significant area of improvement. However, there are still aspects of leadership that are not tackled with sufficient rigour. For example, there is not yet a subject action plan for English and record keeping in reading is not good enough.

The governors are strengthening their strategic overview of the school. They have been supported by the LA in developing their capacity to evaluate and hold the school to account for its actions. The chair of governors shows strong commitment to the school and understands the need for the governing body to play a greater part in evaluation. The governors are having discussions with the LA to consider strategies to combat the prospective deficit in the budget. The school has sound capacity to improve further.

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

- improve the effectiveness of self-evaluation so that weaknesses in standards are identified and tracked rigorously—satisfactory progress.

External support

The school receives good support from the LA. The LA has acted quickly and the range and quality of its actions show a perceptive understanding of the school's needs. The LA was instrumental in helping to appoint a consultant for three days each week to help manage the school and has secured additional advisory support to improve provision. The training given by the LA has been very valuable to staff and governors and is helping to build capacity for further improvement within the school itself.

The LA's statement of action is satisfactory. It demonstrates a clear commitment to the school's difficulties and sets out succinctly how the LA's support will be targeted. It is clearly aligned with the school's own plan and sets out a range of appropriate actions. The statement summarises actions already taken and identifies the personnel and costings to implement the plan. However, key milestones in the plan are not clear enough and some of the targets lack sufficient specificity.

The LA has coopted an additional governor to support the governing body and has offered financial support to the school. A particularly good feature of

the support given from the LA is that it is ensuring that that school is held to account for its actions and that improvements show sustainability.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures is satisfactory.

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

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve achievement in English and mathematics.
- Continue to improve the quality of teaching.
- Continue to develop the leadership skills of staff.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Telford and Wrekin.

Yours sincerely

Mary E Hamby
Her Majesty's Inspector