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Mrs J Dagg
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Dear Mrs Dagg

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF FRANCES OLIVE ANDERSON CHURCH OF ENGLAND (AIDED) PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Mr Martin Newell, Additional Inspector, to your school on 26 and 27 January 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 was found to have serious weaknesses in June 2005.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the senior management team and other staff with management responsibilities. They also spoke to pupils, parents, the chair and other members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. They observed seven lessons or part-lessons and spoke informally to other staff and pupils.

Context

The school has undergone a protracted period of disruption to staffing, leadership, management and governance. There is now a newly appointed, permanent headteacher and a full complement of governors. However, on-going illness and consequent absence amongst staff continues to pose barriers to the school's drive to improve the consistency of teaching and learning.

Achievement and standards

When children first come to the school, most are attaining standards that are typical of four-year-olds nationally. They make good progress in the reception class because teaching and learning are effective. By the end of their reception year, most attain the nationally expected early learning goals and many attain above average standards in their personal, social and emotional development and in aspects of communication, language and literacy.

In the most recent national tests for seven-year-olds, pupils' attainments in reading, writing and mathematics were broadly average, but pupils' performance in writing was weaker than in other core subjects. This was because in 2005, fewer pupils attained the above average level than in reading or mathematics. Inspection evidence is largely consistent with these results. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are average. Pupils currently in Year 2 are making satisfactory progress.

In the 2005 tests for eleven-year-olds, standards in English, mathematics and science were also average. However, in relation to their above average standards as seven-year-olds, the achievements of many pupils have been inadequate. This was particularly the case for the school's average and higher attaining pupils. Many pupils currently in Years 3 to 6 are also underachieving. These year groups have been affected by absence amongst staff, which has hindered the continuity of their learning and progress. However, underachievement has been exacerbated because the school's tracking systems have been inadequate. Staff have, therefore, been slow to identify and support pupils who begin to fall behind. Teachers' expectations have become too low and the targets that they set, particularly in mathematics, are insufficiently challenging to promote pupils' progress and achievement effectively.

Despite these shortcomings, pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress and there is evidence that the school has begun to address the weaknesses in pupils' writing that were identified by the previous inspection. Standards of handwriting and presentation are improving and teachers are rightly giving more attention to developing pupils' spelling, punctuation and the basic structure of their writing. However, there is still scope for teachers to provide more opportunities for pupils to write independently and at length across the curriculum as a whole.

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

- To improve writing standards from Year 1 onwards and provide more opportunities for the pupils to write at length – the school has made satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils speak enthusiastically about school and the fact that they enjoy school is reflected in the attendance rates which are above the national average. Behaviour is good and for many pupils it is very good. Exclusions are rare. In lessons, pupils are attentive and many show good attitudes to their work. Most pupils work hard and rise to the challenge to do their best. However, some older pupils occasionally need encouragement to complete their work speedily. Relationships are a strength and the school has a happy and calm atmosphere. The school works hard and is successful at helping to prepare pupils well for life in a culturally diverse society. A good number of pupils take part in the wide range of sporting activities the school offers. This together with the push that the school has on eating healthily means that pupils fully recognise what is needed to keep fit and healthy. Pupils have a strong sense of responsibility and demonstrate this through their telling contributions on the school council and their readiness to carry out a wide range of jobs around the school. Pupils add much to the sense of community in the school.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Good teaching was observed in the reception class and in Year 1. Teaching in Foundation Stage promotes effective learning because children have the opportunity to learn through investigative, structured play and lots of practical activities, as well as through the direct teaching of key skills. Teaching is lively and animated and holds the interest of the children, although free-play activities do not always offer enough challenge. When teaching is most effective in Years 1 to 6, it is because teachers have high expectations, set work that matches the differing abilities of the pupils and move the lesson along at a cracking pace. In such lessons key skills are taught in a systematic and rigorous manner. Learning improves well, because pupils are only too ready to rise to the challenges set.

However, the incidence of good or better teaching is not yet high enough to ensure that all pupils achieve consistently well. Throughout the school, pupils are generally managed well and relationships are strong. Teaching assistants support pupils well, particularly those who have special educational needs. When pupils are set challenging and investigative tasks in mathematics and science, pupils' learning accelerates, but such opportunities are too infrequent. The school is already addressing this and working hard to extend the practice of developing pupils' writing skills through work in other subjects of the curriculum, which is not yet embedded throughout the school.

Moreover, there are still weaknesses in assessment procedures. The school has rightly introduced systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress but current arrangements are not fully effective. Although teachers carry out regular assessments, they do not use assessment information effectively to identify how well pupils are doing or to set challenging targets for further improvement. Until recently, work has not always been pitched at the right level and pupils' progress has been hindered. Similarly, because there has been no accurate overview of how well pupils are doing as they move through school, underachievement has gone unchecked. The headteacher has recognised this area of weakness and is already tackling the issue rigorously.

There is a satisfactory curriculum overall. A wide and varied range of visits, visitors and extra-curricular activities brings an added dimension and improves the quality of pupils' learning. The school's strong focus on sporting and musical activities is a strength. The provision made for pupils with learning difficulties is good. The weaker aspect is that too much curriculum time is allocated to literacy activities in some classes. The result is that other subjects of the curriculum are not given enough prominence and are not always covered in enough depth.

The school gives the care and welfare of all pupils a high priority and child protection procedures are rigorously followed by all staff. Pupils feel safe and valued and feel that their views are listened to and acted upon. The academic guidance and support for pupils, however, are not good enough, although the school is already introducing strategies to enable pupils to play a more prominent role in setting and reviewing their own targets.

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

- To improve the quality of teaching to ensure that all pupils achieve consistently well throughout the school in English, mathematics and science – the school has made satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall, although governance is good.

Despite the fact that their permanent headteacher was unable to take up her post until six months after the previous inspection, the governing body has made strenuous efforts to begin the process of strengthening the school. In particular, the governing body has sought to improve the ways in which governors discharge their duties. There has been an influx of newly appointed governors who bring a wealth of professional and community expertise in support of the school. Under the dynamic leadership of their new Chair, they have taken immediate and successful steps to improve channels of communication with parents and to increase their involvement in every aspect of school life. As a result, the management of on-going issues, such as staff absence, is more rigorous and governors' checking of standards

and quality is more systematic and thorough. These measures put governors in a strong position to support the school and to hold it to account for what it achieves. They have already begun to restore parents' confidence in the school and in the governing body.

The leadership provided by the newly appointed headteacher is good. In a few short weeks, she has generated a sense of excitement and optimism amongst staff, governors and parents. She has quickly formed a view of the essential first steps and has now begun to take the school forward. Her approach to school management is systemic and measured but she has already begun the task of strengthening assessment systems and redressing imbalances in the curriculum. Most importantly, she has put in place a rigorous programme of monitoring, which involves governors and staff at all levels in evaluating the school's performance and in planning for improvement. These early initiatives are well-conceived, but it is too soon for their impact on standards and quality to be evaluated.

Senior staff provide sound support. They have a clear understanding of their role and of the headteacher's expectations of them. Training is helping them develop their leadership and management skills and the monitoring programme gives them the time to carry out their duties properly. They began their work under the interim leadership, which followed the previous inspection, but it is only now coming 'up to speed'. It is therefore too soon to fully evaluate their contribution to school improvement.

Thanks to the prompt start made by governors and the interim headteacher, the school has already begun to improve. There is still a lot to be done, but the renewed rigour with which governors and staff approach all aspects of school life, along with the inspiration and example of the new headteacher, makes the school well placed to make further improvements

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection June 2005:

- To improve leadership, management and governance in order to raise standards and restore parents' confidence in the school – the school has made satisfactory progress

External support

The local authority has provided good support for the school. The post-inspection statement demonstrates that it had been aware of the school's difficulties for some time and has provided much support for teaching, leadership and management in the past. Urgent and appropriate action was taken when necessary. The local authority's own plans indicate that a good level of support is to continue and that there are effective measures for checking the progress being made. The support and challenge provided have been successful in moving the governing body to a position from which it is much better able to discharge its duties effectively and in ensuring that staff had the training necessary to improve their practice.

Main Judgements

The school has made satisfactory progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses. This visit has raised some concerns about the standard of education provided and the school's performance will be monitored.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve procedures for assessing pupils' and evaluating their progress.
- Ensure that teachers use assessment information systematically to plan work for pupils with different capabilities and to give pupils clear guidance on how to attain higher standards.
- Revise timetables so that curriculum time is used more effectively and all subjects receive time allocations which allow them to be taught thoroughly.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Head of Children's Services for Lincolnshire and the Lincolnshire Diocese.

Yours sincerely

G T Storer: Additional Inspector