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Ms T Pyke
The Headteacher
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Dear Ms Pyke

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF GRENDON JUNIOR & INFANT SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Andrew Watters HMI and Nina Bee, Additional Inspector, to your school on 8 and 9 February 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 September 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 with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assessment coordinator, a group of pupils, the chair of governors, the consultant headteacher and two representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the school was placed in special measures in September 2005 two full time teachers and one part time teacher have left the school. These positions are currently filled by long term supply teachers. The senior leadership team is the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assessment coordinator. The special educational needs coordinator and the phase leader for Years 4, 5 and

6 join this group to make up the senior management team. The headteacher is being supported by a consultant headteacher.

Achievement and standards

Standards are below average in reading, writing and mathematics in Years 3, 4 and 5. Lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work in all three year groups indicate clearly that standards are below average and the progress that pupils make in lessons is not good enough. The school's own data confirms that achievement in Years 3, 4, and 5 is inadequate.

Analysis of the school's assessment information for pupils in Year 2 shows that too many have underachieved in reading, writing and mathematics. In Year 6 there is still evidence of underachievement in writing and mathematics although pupils' records show that progress in reading is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Children's behaviour is satisfactory overall. In the small minority of lessons where teaching is good, pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are also good. However, in the majority of lessons, pupils have difficulty sustaining concentration and do not participate fully in class discussions. In many lessons pupils were passive learners and contributed little to the lessons.

Discussions with pupils revealed that a number of them do not enjoy coming to school. Pupils' concerns were reflected in a number of lessons where the work lacked excitement and failed to interest the pupils. Pupils commented that some of their activities were either too difficult or too easy. The children think that most of them behave well and that when others are naughty, it is because they have lost interest in their lessons. It is clear that for many pupils lessons are too long.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 ranges from good to inadequate and is unsatisfactory overall. Consequently standards are not rising quickly enough and the pupils are making insufficient progress. The gap between what they should be attaining for their age and what they are actually achieving is too wide. Expectations are too low and the pupils are not given enough guidance about how to improve their work. For example, teachers' explanations and instructions often caused confusion rather than adding clarity. Curricular targets to improve standards in writing and mathematics are not being translated into short term goals that are specific and achievable. Day to day assessment and the written marking of pupils' work are weak. In many lessons the pupils' tasks were either too easy or too difficult and the pace of learning was slowed by long introductions where the pupils required to sit and listen passively while the teacher instructed the class. Although some good work has been undertaken to identify the most pressing priorities for

improvement in writing and mathematics, too much of the teaching is failing to eliminate the identified weaknesses quickly enough.

In the few good lessons teachers' expectations were high, their subject knowledge was good and questions were used effectively to probe the pupils' understanding and challenge their thinking. As a result the majority of pupils made good progress in improving their basic skills.

Following a review of the curriculum, teachers' medium term plans have been amended to provide more opportunities for teaching mathematics and writing in other subjects. Sensible decisions have been taken to increase the time given to teaching number in numeracy lessons by including data handling as a cross curricular element in other subjects. Similarly opportunities for improving writing have been identified in topic planning. As a result of these initiatives the amount of writing and mathematics covered in other subjects has increased. Nevertheless the impact of these changes in relation to raising standards has been limited.

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

- improve the teaching in Years 3, 4 and 5 in order to raise standards in mathematics and writing—inadequate progress
- increase the amount of mathematics and writing carried out across the different subjects in Years 3 to 6—satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

There are still marked weaknesses in the school's leadership and management. The school is not sufficiently focused on improving pupils' learning and the leadership team lacks strategic guidance. The school's self-evaluation is more descriptive than evaluative and is not having enough impact on improving the quality of teaching.

The headteacher and senior staff have introduced a range of relevant strategies for monitoring the school's work including lesson observations and scrutiny of planning and pupils' work. However, these are not evaluated effectively to provide precise targets for improvements in teaching and learning. The outcomes from lesson observations lack detail and teachers are not given clear enough guidance to help them improve. Evaluations from monitoring activities are not precise enough and are not used effectively to bring about consistency in the quality of teaching throughout the school.

The school has recently enhanced its existing system for monitoring the progress made by individual children. Termly meetings with class teachers have just been introduced. The system is thorough and is highlighting significant areas of underachievement throughout Key Stages 1 and 2. This information is not yet being used effectively to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The school has prepared an addition to its school improvement plan to address each of the issues raised in the inspection report. The proposed actions are broken down into a series of milestones designed to achieve the planned outcomes. A separate section of the plan describes a detailed programme of monitoring activities, although the absence of short term targets is making it difficult for the school to measure progress. The headteacher has produced summary evaluations of progress which describe actions taken, the perceived impact and further action points. These evaluations do not provide sufficient evidence of improvements in pupils' learning.

A recent review by the LA judged the quality of teaching to be significantly better than the school judges it to be. The written feedback from the review is ambiguous and it does not provide the school with a clear diagnosis of the issues it faces. For example, the quality of teaching described does not concur with the areas for development.

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

- carry out more rigorous monitoring of the school's work, especially teaching, to identify and tackle problems at an earlier stage—inadequate progress.

External support

The LA statement of action is inadequate as it only provides support up to the end of the current term and it does not include sufficiently detailed and measurable success criteria. It identifies support for each area of improvement to be implemented during the term the school was placed in special measures and the following term. This is planned to an outline timescale. The lack of planned LA support for the school after spring 2006 makes it difficult to assess the likely impact of the LA on supporting the school up to the target date for recovery of April 2007 and beyond.

The support provided by the LA has been of limited value although the work of the consultant headteacher has been helpful. The school appreciates the support provided by an advanced skills teacher but planned support from a literacy consultant has not taken place. The ambiguity of the LA review feedback has not been helpful to the school. It is imperative that the school and LA work together more effectively in order to enable the school to improve quickly enough.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures—inadequate.

Quality of LA's statement of action—inadequate. The LA should address the weaknesses identified and prepare amendments within 25 working days.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Establish an effective partnership between the school's leadership, the governing body and the LA.
- Eliminate underachievement by making best use of the available resources to establish consistently good teaching throughout the school.
- Establish a more rigorous and effective programme of monitoring, intervention, challenge and support.

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

Mark Mumby
Her Majesty's Inspector