

Mrs Viv Stevens
The headteacher
Hinguar Community Primary School
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SS3 9AN

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Dear Mrs Stevens

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HINGUAR COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Sean Harford HMI and Mike Milton, Additional Inspector to your school on 24 and 25 May 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 December 2005.

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Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the chair of governors and representatives from the local authority (LA). Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils, and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, inspectors made the following observations to the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and a representative from the LA.

Context

There have been no significant changes to the school's context since the inspection in December 2005.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average but their progress in English, mathematics and science in Key Stage 2 has been consistently inadequate for the last three years. Consequently, the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 have been below what is expected of their age. Standards seen in the children's work in mathematics and English, particularly in writing in Year 6, remain below average. Standards in lessons, though remaining below national expectations overall, reflect the gains suggested by the school's assessment information which indicates that pupils' are making satisfactory progress overall. This improvement has been greatly helped by additional 'booster' classes and intervention strategies put on by the school.

Schools assessment information indicates that overall, boys underachieved significantly with nearly a third of them making poor progress. The school is tackling this through effective targeted support and booster classes. The school's most recent assessment data shows that these are beginning to have an impact.

In lessons, pupils' progress was variable but mostly satisfactory. Where progress was good, teachers' expectations of children were high and the work was matched to their individual needs. The pupils' individual targets have not always been realistic. However, the school is aware of this and more realistic and demanding targets are now being set.

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

- Raise standards of achievement, particularly in Key Stage 2 - satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' behaviour and attitudes in lessons were satisfactory overall and often good. Most pupils were keen to contribute and they followed the instructions given by the adults in the school readily. The good relationships that exist between the teachers and pupils help create a pleasant environment for learning. The pupils behaved well around the school, despite the necessity for them to stay inside the building because of poor weather on the first day of the inspection. They spoke politely and with interest to inspectors, especially when explaining the role of the school council, and the systems for rewarding good behaviour and supporting those who present challenging behaviour. There have been no permanent exclusions this year. While the number of incidents that give rise to fixed term exclusions is similar to previous years, the staff now manage the pupils on the school site.

At 93.9%, the rate of attendance for the year so far is a little below the national average and similar to last year; a virus contracted by a large number of pupils caused a significant dip in attendance during the spring term. Punctuality to school on the second morning of the inspection was good; only four pupils came into school after the start of the day. However, the school has no formal means of recording lateness, or the reasons for it.

Quality of provision

The school has a clear strategy for improving teaching, and is moving towards its target for the quality of teaching for the end of this term. Since the inspection in December, the school has reduced the proportion of inadequate lessons and increased the proportion of lessons in which there is good teaching and learning.

Class management was generally effective, although in a few lessons the pupils' learning slowed as they moved from whole-class activities to working individually. Learning objectives were usually clearly displayed and used by teachers to help pupils focus on their learning. In a good plenary, the teacher used the interactive whiteboard to enable pupils to apply the knowledge gained during the lesson; this provided useful assessment information for planning the pupils' next stage of learning.

Where teaching was good, the planning matched the individual learning needs of pupils and lessons were very well structured, with clear explanations as to what was expected of them. Lessons were less successful where too much time was given to whole-class teaching; as a result, some pupils lost their concentration and there was insufficient time for pupils to complete their tasks.

Where questions were used well, pupils were made to think; for example in one good lesson, the teacher insisted on thinking time before pupils gave their answers. In several lessons, teachers used paired discussions about specific questions as a way of helping pupils to share and develop their thinking which they then fed back to the whole class.

The use of teaching assistants has improved since the last inspection. They are now actively involved, support targeted individuals and groups, and take initiative to supporting other pupils as necessary. Occasionally, opportunities are missed to make more effective use of teaching assistants at the start of the whole-class activities.

The school has worked hard to improve the tracking of pupils' progress since the last inspection, including the use of a computer-based system to record and analyse assessment data throughout the school. Detailed assessment data is used to identify pupils who are not making the expected progress, as well as those making good progress.

Quality of marking is inconsistent. Marking is good where it gives pupils clear guidance about how to improve their work although pupils do not always respond to teachers' advice. Target setting has been introduced for English, mathematics and science; currently these are too general. The school is aware of this and is beginning to set them based on the needs of individual pupils.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching by focusing on learning outcomes particularly in mixed-age classes – satisfactory progress.
- Improve the assessment information to help teachers plan lessons that match the pupils' learning needs by building effectively on their previous knowledge - satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

Since the last inspection the school's improvement planning has been reviewed and appropriate actions taken. The plan, although unnecessarily complex, provides suitable information about actions to be taken. Overarching success criteria for each key issue are appropriately framed as measurable targets to be achieved. Some of these targets, particularly for the pupils' achievements, are not always met because they are generic and not based on individual needs. For each element of the plan, a series of appropriate actions are outlined, with starting and finishing dates and expected outcomes. Each area for improvement also has a helpful series of key questions to help monitor progress. The pace of improvement, however should now be accelerated.

The quality of planning and the monitoring of improvement by the school and the LA are satisfactory. However there doesn't seem to be any involvement of the middle management team; the senior leaders are aware of the need to develop middle management capacity and are working on ways of involving them in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of their curriculum areas. The

school has identified appropriate priorities and actions for its next stage of development.

Systems for monitoring lessons and checking the quality of children's work are now in place. They show some evidence of sound improvement. The senior leaders' evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning are accurate. There has been an appropriate programme of staff development in teaching and learning, which has begun to tackle the weaknesses identified in the last inspection, particularly in relation to the needs of pupils in Years 3 to 6. There is a closer focus on developing the use of assessment information to promote higher expectations of what the pupils can achieve. However, this has yet to make an impact on overall standards.

The governors have responded well to the support given by the LA and are now more aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Usefully, a governor has been identified to lead on each of the four main areas for development identified by the inspection in December 2005, although they have not met as a group to focus specifically on the improvement planning.

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

- Improve the quality of leadership and management through the use of rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures - satisfactory progress.

External support

Following the inspection in November 2004 when the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in its provision, the LA gave inadequate support in seeking to tackle the school's areas for development. Since the section 5 inspection in December 2005, the LA support has been satisfactory. It has been organised more coherently and has provided well-focused advice and training for improving governance and reasonable guidance on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The chair of governors is especially appreciative of this support. In addition to the provisions set out in its statement of action, the LA has brokered support for the senior leaders from a local advisory headteacher for two days per week; the headteacher is beginning to derive some benefit from this. The LA has been less effective in providing a lever for improvements in subject leadership. While its plans identify this as an important area of development to be pursued in the spring and summer terms, little has been done; as noted earlier, the weaknesses in middle management remain a significant challenge for the school.

The LA's statement of action is satisfactory overall with some weaknesses that need to be addressed by the time of the next monitoring inspection. Generally, it makes provision for tackling the main issues identified by the inspection in December 2005 through clear and specific actions, and identifies the personnel responsible for completing them. Additionally, those responsible for monitoring and evaluating that actions are successful are identified. However, the criteria by which the LA will judge the impact of its actions in helping the school to improve its use of assessment information to plan lessons are too vague; they focus on completing the action and do not provide a tangible method of evaluating success. The LA has set a target date for the removal of special measures of December 2006. Considering the lack of capacity in subject leadership, this date represents a significant challenge for the school. The LA's statement of action identifies insufficient support for the school after the summer term.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Quality of LA's statement of action – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Build capacity of the middle managers so that they take responsibility for securing good achievement in their subjects.
- Continue to ensure that all teachers embed assessment into their planning.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services of Southend-on-Sea.

Yours sincerely

Rashida Sharif
H M Inspector