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Mrs C O'Malley
The Headteacher
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20 July 2006

Dear Mrs O'Malley

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF FAIRWAY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 12 and 13 July 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third 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 receipt of this letter.

Evidence

I observed five lessons, scrutinised documents, and met with you, the deputy headteacher, the senior management team, the chair of governors and a representative of the local authority (LA). Informal discussions were held with other members of the staff team and individual children. Using this evidence, I made the following observations to you, the deputy headteacher, a representative of the LA and a parent governor.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit in February 2006, the number on roll has stabilised. There are currently 86 pupils attending the school. There have been no changes in the staff team. The two staff with responsibility for administration were absent on sick leave at the time of the monitoring visit.

There has been no progress on the LA proposal for the school to be federated with another local school.

Achievement and standards

Standards at the end of both key stages are well below the national average. The school's own assessment data reveals there is still significant underachievement in reading, writing and mathematics across the school. Following the last visit, staff reviewed the targets for all pupils. At Key Stage 1, the new targets in reading, writing, mathematics and science were all exceeded in the end of year assessments. However, at Key Stage 2, new targets in the core subjects were all missed except for the higher level (Level 5) in reading and science. Staff have analysed these results and identified that pupil absence during the statutory assessments had a significant impact on the results for this small year group. Although the results are disappointing, staff are working hard to tackle underachievement.

There is clear evidence from the school's tracking data that most pupils have made at least satisfactory progress from their starting points since September 2005. Analysis of this data clearly shows that the gap between what the pupils are attaining and what they are capable of is beginning to close.

Progress on the area 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) – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

The personal development and well-being of pupils are satisfactory. The good behaviour seen at the time of the last inspection, both in lessons and around school, has been maintained. Pupils enjoy school. They are polite, respectful and work well together. Pupils' attitudes to learning have improved and there is a greater enthusiasm for learning. In lessons most pupils listen well, try hard and are keen to answer questions. They particularly enjoy practical activities.

Punctuality has improved since the last visit but attendance has declined. Although attendance is monitored regularly and there is good support from the education social worker, there is a small core of persistent absentees whose progress is hindered by erratic or infrequent attendance at school. The school is working hard, using a range of strategies, to address the issues and, despite the recent absence of office staff, have arranged temporary cover to ensure absence is followed up systematically. The administrative support arrangements need to be addressed as a matter of urgency to ensure first day absence calls are reintroduced in September.

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

- improve attendance and behaviour – satisfactory.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved. All of the lessons seen were satisfactory and two out of the five were good. Lessons observed reflected the improvements made across the school since the last monitoring visit. Teachers used questioning effectively and intervened successfully to move learning on. Teaching assistants were well briefed and thoughtfully deployed to support identified learning needs. Interactive whiteboards were used effectively, often to make the learning intention clear. Pupils were actively engaged and motivated to work independently. Adults modelled language well to reinforce learning. There was a good use of paired talk and pupils were able to share ideas and extend their thinking through discussion.

Challenging behaviour is managed well and teachers consistently use the whole school positive behaviour management approach. Pupils' targets are prominently displayed in bright, stimulating classrooms and the majority of pupils are able to articulate their personal targets. The best practice included good cross-curricular links to promote learning. This was seen in a Year 3 mathematics lesson. Pupils made good progress because the teacher provided activities which engaged them in a range of learning styles. Role play on an imaginary pirate ship, based on literacy work about Treasure Island, supported pupils' learning about direction using the points of a compass.

There are still too many satisfactory lessons. Where lessons were less effective, planning was not sufficiently well matched to pupils' learning needs. Lesson planning is consistent across the school but the wide range of ability represented in classes, especially those with mixed aged groups, requires teachers to plan appropriately to make sure all pupils' needs are met. Planning for the mixed Reception and Year 1 class does not cater adequately for children in the Foundation Stage. Marking is not consistent across the school and not all pupils know what they need to do to improve their work. The school has collected a lot of useful information about pupils' progress and teachers are more secure in their assessment of learning. However, tracking data needs to be used more precisely to inform planning and ensure effective intervention to tackle underachievement.

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

- improve the quality of teaching and learning – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has created a positive learning climate in the school. She has a clear focus on the school improvement agenda and is resolute in her

determination to tackle underperformance. The senior management team has been strengthened by the appointment of a new deputy headteacher. She has made a significant contribution in building a cohesive team focusing on teaching and learning and has quickly gained the trust of staff and pupils.

Subject leaders, including the new numeracy leader, are becoming increasingly effective in bringing about improvements in teaching and learning. The LA have provided good professional development through advisers and consultants and this has resulted in the improved quality of teaching seen on this monitoring visit. The headteacher has successfully involved the subject leaders in a planned programme to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. Joint observations have provided on the job training for their monitoring and evaluation roles. Written and verbal feedback provides teachers with clear direction for improvement. The joint observation carried out with HMI confirmed the deputy headteacher's accurate evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stage 1.

The governing body has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result of training through the Education Action Zone, governors are developing confidence in their role as critical friends. An example of their holding the school to account was seen in a report to the governing body from the governor with responsibility for special educational needs, based on first hand evidence from her visit to discuss learning difficulty and disability (LDD) issues. The governors are led by a very effective chairperson who has a firm grasp of the particular issues facing the school. The school budget is being closely monitored and a new budget plan has been recently agreed with the LA. The school has reviewed its high levels of spending on staffing in order to address the budgetary issues in light of the falling roll. Governors are rightly concerned about the longer term implications of a deficit budget and are keen to discuss a repayment plan with the LA.

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 – good
- ensure that finances are managed and used effectively to raise standards – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority is providing good support to the school. The headteacher continues to receive effective support and challenge from an experienced headteacher mentor. The Intensifying Support Programme (ISP) has had a positive impact on classroom practice and staff continue to value the quality of support provided by the ISP coordinator. The recent LA primary evaluative review made some helpful recommendations including the need to use assessment information consistently to raise attainment.

The LA has provided the school with an amended statement of proposed action following the decision not to close the school. However, it is not clear what the long term plans are for the school given the small numbers of pupils on roll. The governors still lack clarity about the local authority's intentions about a proposed federation with a local school. In addition, although a new budget has been set, the repayment plan for the deficit budget has still not been produced.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of teaching, turning more of the satisfactory lessons into good ones.
- Use assessment data more precisely to inform planning and provide appropriate intervention to tackle underachievement.
- Ensure children in the Foundation Stage receive an appropriate early year's curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda Rockey
H M Inspector