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Mr R Shenton
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Shenton

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SUMMERBANK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Sheila Boyle and John Collings, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 17 and 18 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 November 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, members of the senior leadership team a representative from the local authority (LA) and the chair of governors.

Context

There has been instability in the leadership and management of the school since the last inspection. The headteacher took up his post along with a new deputy headteacher at the start of the summer term. The deputy headteacher has taken over the coordination of numeracy. A member of staff has been on long term absence.

Achievement and standards

Standards remain low in spite of recent initiatives taken by the school. In the 2005 national tests standards were below average at both key stages. Although the school set more challenging targets for 2006, it is unlikely that standards will be significantly higher this year. Inspection evidence shows there are wide variations in standards within classes and these range from average to well below average. Standards are below average overall.

There are emerging strengths in the Foundation Stage, whereas at Key Stage 1 and 2 there were very few lessons where the pupils were working securely at age-appropriate levels. Pupils' writing skills are poor and reading skills are below that expected for pupils' age. Pupils' mental recall of number and problem solving skills is underdeveloped. Progress in lessons and over time is slow and too few pupils make the progress of which they are capable.

Progress on the areas identified for improvement in November 2005:

- monitor pupils' progress and ensure pupils reach the standards of which they are capable – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' behaviour is generally good both in and out of lessons. Occasionally, a few children become restless where teaching is not stimulating. This is particularly so when the pupils are required to sit for too long listening to the teacher during overlong introductory sessions and are not given sufficient opportunity to take a full part in lessons. Attendance is below average and similar to the last inspection. In the main this is due to a number of families taking extended visits abroad and a small number of other persistent absentees. The headteacher has identified a number of strategies aimed at improving pupils' attendance.

Quality of provision

Teaching is not good enough to raise standards and tackle the problem of underachievement. In the lessons seen, teaching and learning were only just satisfactory and there were too few lessons which were good or better. A scrutiny of books shows that pupils are still making insufficient progress in the development of basic skills. Where teaching is good, lessons are well planned, have good pace and provide challenging work for the pupils. In the less effective lessons, overlong introductions, ineffective use of assessment information and the teachers' low expectations, result in pupils not achieving as well as they should.

Improved assessment procedures are being introduced to ensure pupils' progress is monitored more systematically and that the system is understood and used by all staff. Nevertheless, these systems are very new and have had no time to make a positive difference.

There are still too few opportunities for the pupils to practise and develop writing skills through subjects other than literacy. The pupils' writing is also severely held back through the use of mundane worksheets.

The curriculum is undergoing a review to ensure it more closely reflects the learning needs of pupils. Planning for September 2006 is being based around themes so that knowledge, understanding and skills learnt in one subject can be applied and consolidated in another.

Progress on the areas identified for improvement in November 2005:

- help teachers make full use of assessments to focus teaching on eradicating underachievement – inadequate.

Leadership and management

Until recently insufficient work has been done to address the problem of the underachievement across the school, particularly in the identified area of writing. The good guidance and support provided by the LA have not yet been effective in raising standards. Where lessons have been monitored the leadership has not yet implemented strategies to raise the quality of teaching and learning. There is an urgent need for the school's leadership to make more effective use of the lesson observations.

The recently appointed headteacher and deputy have a very clear idea of what needs to be tackled. There have been some very constructive discussions about improving the provision, in particular how writing activities can be made more relevant and interesting. They have not yet, however, had sufficient time for these initiatives to be implemented. Subject leaders have received effective support from the LA and have successfully led meetings. They recognise that, although they have identified the issues to be addressed, their monitoring has not yet been successful in improving the pupils' work.

The chair of governors knows the school well and has already developed a good working relationship with the new headteacher. Changes to the structure of the governing body and to individual responsibilities are designed to support governors in challenging more effectively.

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

- improve the ways in which the school examines its own work and the quality of its provision – inadequate.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is good and clearly identifies the level of support, the action to be taken and the timescales. It has provided clear guidance and support for the core subject leaders. Support for the

interim headteacher enabled a number of initiatives which the substantive headteacher is now able to pursue with vigour.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Quality of LA's statement of action – good.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Make more effective use of assessment information to guide teachers' planning.
- Ensure that work is more accurately matched to pupils' individual needs, and that the average and more able are suitably challenged.
- Involve subject leaders more in monitoring standards and progress in their subjects.
- Ensure that initiatives taken by the school are regularly monitored and evaluated for impact.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Edwards
Additional Inspector