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Mr R Shenton
The Headteacher
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12 October 2006

Dear Mr Shenton

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SUMMERBANK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Sally Hall, Additional Inspector, to your school on 11 and 12 October, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in December 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, deputy headteacher and groups of pupils.

Context

The school has appointed two new full time members of staff since the previous visit, one of whom has taken on responsibility for science. Two part time members of staff have been appointed, one as coordinator for pupils with learning difficulties and one with responsibility for pupils learning English as an additional language.

Achievement and standards

In the Foundation Stage children generally make good progress. They enter the Nursery class with skills that are much lower than those expected for their age. Whilst progress is good throughout the Nursery and Reception classes, few will attain the expected goals in literacy and numeracy by the time they enter Year 1. They do, however, make particularly good progress in their personal and social development.

The provisional results for the 2006 national tests for pupils in Year 6 show an improvement on the very poor results of 2005. In mathematics, almost double the number of pupils attained the level expected for their age than in the previous year and considerably more pupils attained the expected level in science. However, although results in English improved, they are still well below those expected for pupils of this age in both reading and writing. Whilst inspection evidence shows that standards are improving, they have not improved sufficiently, particularly in writing.

The headteacher has clearly identified where the underachievement lies in English and has put in place strategies across the school to improve pupils' progress. Teachers are now matching work more closely to the pupils' ability although this is not yet consistent enough in all classes. There is a greater focus on providing pupils with more opportunities to practise their writing skills in other subjects but this needs to be extended further. Handwriting and spelling skills are weak and pupils still do not present their work as neatly as they should. The low standards that have been prevalent in writing for some time have left significant gaps in pupils' skills and there is still much to be done to address this issue. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 have made better progress because they are presented with a higher level of challenge. Throughout the school, teachers generally have higher expectations of what pupils can do but they need guidance on matching the work more closely to the needs of all pupils.

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

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

Personal development and well-being

There is a good atmosphere in the school with a feeling of mutual respect between staff and pupils. This helps to promote a happy learning environment. As a result, pupils enjoy lessons and usually work hard. Where lessons are too long, their interest occasionally wanes but they still behave well. The pattern of good behaviour seen at the time of the last visit has been maintained. The pupils' attitudes are particularly good when pupils are given the opportunity to work things out for themselves and to undertake research

activities. This was observed during the visit when older pupils were making good use of the Internet to locate information about the Victorians.

Pupils enjoy and take seriously their responsibilities such as being prefects and playground buddies. The school is rightly considering reintroducing a school council to provide pupils with greater responsibilities and to allow them to have a say in their school.

Attendance this term shows significant improvement on the rates for the previous year. During the monitoring visit it was over 94%. The school has worked hard to promote regular attendance and the employment of a member of staff with specific responsibility to chase up absentees has been effective.

Quality of provision

Teaching is gradually improving and is now satisfactory. The low expectations previously seen have been eradicated and teachers are now expecting more of the children. They are making better use of assessment information when planning lessons. However, although different work is now set for different ability groups within each lesson, teachers are not yet sufficiently accurate in matching work to the various National Curriculum levels. The absence of levels in their planning does not help them in this respect. Classroom assistants are well utilised by teachers and provide satisfactory support for pupils. Pupils learning English as an additional language are provided with sufficient support to enable them to take a full part in lessons. Some lessons are too long and lack pace and this results in a loss of concentration by some pupils.

The curriculum is satisfactory. An approach to planning the curriculum through linking subjects and through teaching skills has been enthusiastically taken up by staff and pupils can see a purpose in what they are doing. There are now more opportunities for pupils to practise writing across the curriculum. As yet this has had little impact on raising standards and these opportunities need to be extended further. Good enrichment opportunities through visits and visitors linked to themes such as the Victorians are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' academic and personal development.

Pupils are well looked after. Academic guidance is improving through better tracking of pupils' performance although there are gaps in the information where pupils have joined or left the school partway through the school year. Teachers are setting targets that are shared with the pupils although the process is inconsistent and too new to have had any impact.

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

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

Leadership and management

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have led the school well since their appointment in April 2006. Through systematic monitoring of teaching and learning they have identified individual strengths and weaknesses. Discussions with the inspectors show the senior management team are accurately identifying what needs to be improved. Ongoing self-assessment is realistic in terms of what is to be achieved. However, timescales are not sufficiently clear as to when targets will be met.

Those in charge of subjects have correctly identified what needs to be done to raise standards. This has resulted in an improvement in standards but the leadership team has rightly acknowledged that much more needs to be done to ensure standards in English, particularly in writing, improve sufficiently. The leadership team has focused on improving the quality of teaching and whilst there have been improvements there is still work to do to ensure that there is more good teaching. Since the previous visit, a reorganisation of the governing body has enabled members to become more aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and thus to hold the school more accountable.

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

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

External support

The local authority (LA) is providing good support for the school. Consultants are being used effectively to demonstrate good practice and to improve the quality of teaching. An external audit supported by the LA, and linked closely to the previous monitoring visit letter, has been useful in clarifying the issues and alerting the school to the need for a tighter timescale for its action plan.

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

- Focus more clearly on pupils' progress in writing, ensuring there are sufficient opportunities to practise writing skills in other subjects and ensuring activities meet the needs of all pupils.
- Further develop teachers' skills in using assessment to plan lessons that are sufficiently challenging for all pupils.

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