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Dear Mrs Penglase

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ALVASTON JUNIOR SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Georgina Beasley and Derek Watts, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 6 and 7 December 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 March 2006.

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 children's work, met with groups of children, the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team (SLT), the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Five new teachers joined the school in September. Three of the new staff joined the SLT, one as an assistant headteacher who is also subject leader for mathematics, one as English subject leader and one as science subject leader.

Achievement and standards

The amount of progress children make remains inadequate. Although in lessons seen most children made satisfactory progress the work completed in their books indicates that too many have not made enough progress since the start of the autumn term. The quantity of work produced is often insufficient and high quality, well presented pieces are rare. Children's progress is checked through regular assessments. However, the use of assessment results is not ensuring that children are always given work that matches their different abilities.

The national test results for Year 6 in 2006 were below average in English, mathematics and science. Whilst these results were higher than the well below average results of the previous year, children made inadequate progress from their above average attainment on entry to the school. Recent national value added data, which measures the progress that children make from Year 3 to 6 is still extremely low.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- Raise achievement and standards in English, mathematics and science by making better use of assessment – inadequate progress.

Personal development and well-being

Children shared with inspectors how much they enjoy school. They feel positive about recent improvements in behaviour and teaching. In most lessons seen, children's attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory. Now and then children became restless when teaching was less interesting or teachers spent too long on introductions. The work in books also shows that a significant proportion of children do not take sufficient pride in their work or produce enough.

In some lessons inspectors noticed that children found it difficult to work together in groups or as a team to accomplish a task. This weakness prevented children from learning through more interactive, and often interesting, activities.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. All of the lessons seen during this visit were at least satisfactory, just less than half were good and one was outstanding. However, the lack of consistently good quality teaching is not helping children make up for their previous underachievement.

Since the inspection in March, a new lesson planning format has been introduced which is designed to ensure that the needs of all ability groups are considered adequately. Lesson plans seen did not always make the most of this design and too often did not clearly show how teaching was going to ensure that children's learning would be different according to their abilities. For example, in too many lessons, the task all children were asked to do when working in groups was the same and more able children only moved onto an extension task when there was time. This did not provide a suitable challenge for them and restricted the pace of learning for some children.

When a variety of learning activities were used in lessons, all children were interested in what they were doing and concentrated well. For example, when children used whiteboards in a mathematics lesson they were keen to try out their ideas. Good use was also made of asking children to talk to a partner, which helped them to think of ideas to solve problems and answer questions. However, too often lessons started off at a cracking pace then slowed and children lost their concentration and began to be restless. In some lessons this was caused by introductions that were too long which also reduced the amount of time available for children to complete sufficient work of good quality. At the end of lessons there was often too little time to check how well children had done and to outline the next steps in learning. Teaching assistants were used effectively to support children with a statement of special need and children who need extra support to help them learn. They were not always used sufficiently well in the introductions to lessons or in group work because their role is not made clear.

In good lessons, children were told what they must, should or could learn and teachers explained how the lesson was planned to build on previous learning. The use of challenging targets for writing and mathematics was very inconsistent and there is no clear whole school approach. When targets were shared with children they were effectively involved in assessing what they had learned. However, not all children knew clearly what their targets were nor did they know how they were going to improve their work to meet their target. Marking was inconsistent, ranging from good to inadequate. In good examples, teachers had written comments that clearly identified what

children had learned and gave good guidance on how to improve their work. When marking was inadequate, too many comments focused only on presentation and requests to do more work rather than learning.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, through better planning and challenge, so that lessons are inspiring and engage children more fully - satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

Following the inspection in March the work of the SLT began to tackle some of the engrained weaknesses in the school. Although action was taken during the summer term some of it did not bring about change because senior leaders were unable to command a positive response from all staff. Progress in some areas was limited and the SLT failed to act as a united, effective team.

Since September the picture has been different and there has been a more determined approach by the SLT to address weaknesses and along with a change of mindset from the team of staff, things have moved on. The three new staff who have joined the SLT have come into the school with a fresh pair of eyes, quickly identifying a number of key weaknesses in how subjects are taught. Lessons, or parts of lessons, have been monitored, so has teachers' planning and children's work. However, this much needed step up in activity by the SLT has not always been co-ordinated well enough to make sure that the various strengths within the team are used to their full potential.

The Governors appreciate that the school still has some way to go to ensure that children's achievement improves. They actively discuss the work of the school and monitor progress through the school improvement committee meetings. The chair of governors attends meetings with the SLT and LA which enables him to keep up to date with improvements.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- Develop the leadership roles of the subject leaders to establish rigorous monitoring procedures with a clear focus on raising achievement – satisfactory.

External support

The LA support for the school has been satisfactory. The statement of action plan which outlines how the LA will support the school is clear and well thought out. The LA inspector has effectively been involved in the monitoring of all teaching, working alongside senior leaders. Support for literacy has been satisfactory and the school has taken on board a number of strategies that have begun to improve teaching. However, support for the development of mathematics is still at early stages and has yet to ensure the school has made sufficient progress in this area.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers can be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the management of lessons so that children make good progress in the middle part of the lesson when children work independently or in groups.
- Ensure planning and teaching in English and mathematics sets clearly meets the learning needs of different abilities.
- Use the systems for checking children's progress so that accurate judgements are made on a term by term basis.
- Improve the standard of presentation of children's work and have a system to regularly check progress.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Corporate Director for Children and Young People.

Yours sincerely



H M Inspector