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Dear Mr Bridewell

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF LUDGERSHALL CASTLE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Patricia Davies, Additional Inspector, to your school on 7 and 8 February 2007, 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 May 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 met with the headteacher, the curriculum and assessment team, a representative from the local authority (LA), the chair of governors, a group of Year 6 pupils, and a group of parents.

Context

There have been no changes since the previous monitoring visit.

Achievement and standards

Evidence from lesson observations, supported by the school's much improved tracking of pupils' progress, indicates that achievement in Reception and in

Years 1 and 2 has improved well since the last visit. Pupils' progress in individual lessons is good. In a Year 2 lesson, pupils made very good progress in writing similes, especially because the teacher seized the moment of recent snowfall to excite and motivate her class. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are now above average and continue to rise..

In Years 3 to 6, achievement has improved since the last visit, although pockets of underachievement remain, particularly in mathematics. Standards have improved and are broadly average, with mathematics relatively weaker than English. There is still too great an inconsistency in progress between classes. Achievement and standards in mathematics are affected by significant gaps in prior learning and pupils needing to catch up, especially with problem-solving. Pupils still lack confidence in explaining how they solve problems. A weaker feature of pupils' speaking and listening skills is that many find it hard to explain their thinking and ideas.

Standards in reading are improving rapidly because of the significant developments in the teaching of guided reading since the last visit. Pupils enjoy reading much more, especially in Years 3 and 4, because they read to an audience which could be a teacher, a teaching assistant, or a Year 6 reading buddy. Pupils' fluency in reading has improved as have comprehension skills. Standards in writing are improving and this is evident from work in pupils' books. There are good examples of pupils using their writing skills successfully in other subjects.

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

- accelerate improvements to the quality of teaching so that all pupils achieve better and make consistently good progress in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Attendance continues to improve and is now well above the national average. Parents and pupils recognise that regular attendance is a very important part of good learning.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good, and often exemplary. Pupils' personal organisation is much improved since the last visit, especially in having the right equipment for lessons and in settling quickly to work. Very good relationships between pupils remain a strength. In paired discussion and in whole class question and answer sessions, pupils listen to, and value, the opinions of others.

Pupils' involvement in school life has been significant since the previous visit. In all classes, pupils have made a strong contribution to improving book corners through using their own ideas and initiative. Pupils in Year 6, who act

as reading buddies for younger pupils in Years 3 and 4, have played a significant role in making reading much more enjoyable for their buddies and indeed for themselves.

Parents and pupils say that learning is much more enjoyable now. Pupils feel valued as individuals. Celebration of individual achievement in assemblies, whether academic, sporting or social, is seen by parents and pupils as a significant improvement.

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

- raise the level of pupils' attendance – outstanding.

Quality of provision

There have been some significant improvements to teaching since the last monitoring visit. Most importantly, no inadequate teaching was seen during this visit which has resulted in pupils making at least satisfactory progress during lessons. In the case of the Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2, progress is good. Teaching and learning in these classes is stronger than in Years 3 to 6 largely because work is better matched to pupils' needs and abilities. The focus on nurturing independent learning skills in the Reception classes is usefully carried through into the teaching in Years 1 and 2. In Years 3 to 6, the quality of teaching and learning still has too many inconsistencies. Planning is not consistently meeting the needs of all pupils. It does not in all cases identify clearly enough what individual pupils should learn by the end of each lesson.

Nevertheless, throughout the school, planning is now tightly focused with clear learning objectives. In the case of guided reading, this means that key skills are tackled systematically. These skills include the more sophisticated analysis of text as well as developing a range of strategies to read unfamiliar words. Pupils recognise and appreciate these improvements, which have clearly added much to their enjoyment of their work. Indeed, in all lessons, pupils were industrious and productive. Increasingly, teaching staff are asking the kinds of questions that challenge pupils to think carefully and explain their ideas, but this does not happen as much as it should. The school recognises that the key to moving pupils on is encouraging many more opportunities of this kind, not only in English and mathematics but in all subjects.

Assessment procedures for English and mathematics have now been extended beyond Year 6 to all classes. This improvement gives the school a full picture of pupils' attainment that it can track and analyse progress. As a result, priorities focus on those areas most likely to increase achievement and raise standards. Termly checks on progress enable staff to identify those pupils in danger of not meeting their targets and give additional support.

The school has moved swiftly and successfully to tackle the weaknesses in guided reading. In addition to the improvements to planning, book resources as a whole, and specifically those in classrooms, have been extended with new and interesting selections. Pupils read with ready pleasure during lessons, illustrating the improved attitudes to reading recognised by staff, pupils and parents. Planning for mathematics includes a sustained focus on solving problems. As a result, pupils are gaining a methodical approach to working out their calculations, but there is not the same close attention to exploring, explaining and sharing pupils' own ways of working things out. Links between subjects continue to develop and the school sees this as another way of increasing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills through their use in other subjects.

Pupils spoke positively of the 'learning journeys' displayed in all classes. Linked closely to National Curriculum levels, these make plain to pupils what steps they need to take next to improve their achievement. Pupils are becoming more involved in assessing their progress. For example, they have opportunities at the ends of lessons to assess their level of confidence and where they feel they need more help. In the case of Year 6, this activity has been refined further to include the discussion of each other's work. The school has identified this approach as another way of increasing the level of challenge and raising expectations.

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

- accelerate improvements to the quality of teaching so that all pupils achieve better and make consistently good progress in English, mathematics and science - satisfactory
- improve assessment and establish tracking of pupils' achievements to make sure that teachers have the right information to plan work at the right level - good.

Leadership and management

A significant feature of the school's good leadership and management is the quality of its school improvement plan. It is very much a working document which is amended to address needs identified by accurate self-evaluation. Following the previous visit, the school improvement plan was amended within days to address the issue of the weakness in the teaching of guided reading. The success of the impact of the action taken in improving guided reading, which is recognised by parents, pupils, governors and the LA, is testimony to the school's good ongoing capacity to improve.

The school improvement plan continues to focus on improving pupils' problem-solving skills in mathematics. Actions taken to support developments

with in-service training and monitoring of teaching and learning have made a good contribution to pupils making better progress.

The school leadership team has a detailed understanding of the improvements made since the school was put into special measures. Equally, its commitment to raising standards and achievement is absolute. Governors share this commitment as the key to school improvement. The school now has detailed tracking systems in place for each class and is in a much more secure position to analyse trends and, in particular, to identify potential underachievement.

Successful monitoring of teaching and learning has led to significant improvements. The initiative to put teachers into teams (Year R, 1 and 2; Year 3 and 4; Year 5 and 6) has led to much improved shared planning for each team. As a result, planning is more consistent across year groups, which, in turn, contributes to raising achievement and standards. An inconsistency remains in some day-to-day planning, especially in meeting the needs of individual pupils within lessons. Parents mentioned this as an area of minor concern in relation to whether their children achieve as well as they might in all lessons.

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

- strengthen the leadership and management skills of the senior leadership team to increase the capacity for improvement – good.

External support

The quality of support from the local authority continues to be good. The advisory headteacher works with the school on a regular basis and has supported the school effectively in maintaining a rigorous focus on addressing the issues raised in the inspection and from the previous monitoring visit. Currently, the local authority is in the process of appointing a School Improvement Partner for the school.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

Priorities for further improvement

The school should maintain its focus on the four key areas from the inspection report, but within those, give a light touch to attendance, but a stronger emphasis to:

- developing pupils' skills in explaining their thinking and ideas, including problem solving in mathematics
- ensure that in day to day lesson planning that work planned for different groups is based on what should be learned rather than on activities for pupils to do.

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

Yours sincerely

David Curtis
Additional Inspector