



26 March 2007

Mrs S Penglase
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Dear Mrs Penglase

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ALVASTON JUNIOR SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Ann Taylor and Alan Lemon, Additional Inspectors to your school on 13 – 14 March, 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 March 2006.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the school council, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Two teachers have been appointed since the last visit. One teaches in the Education Resource Facility and has taken on the responsibility of leading and managing Special Needs, the other teaches in Year 6.

Achievement and standards

The amount of progress children are making varies across the school. In most lessons seen during the visit, the progress children made was satisfactory and in a few it was better than this. However, in every year group there are

significant numbers of children who are not making satisfactory progress over a longer period of time. The results of tests taken in English and mathematics during May 2006 have been compared to tests taken in February 2007 and confirm this. The school's analysis of these tests shows the uneven nature of progress throughout the school, both between classes and year groups. It identifies a few areas where children have made good progress in English and mathematics, such as for those children taught by Enhanced Resource Facility teachers. However, it also identifies the significant proportion of children making insufficient progress with some who have in fact regressed. To further complicate matters, in one year group the assessment data shows an improvement in progress which contradicts the school's judgements about the quality of teaching. This would suggest the accuracy of assessments needs to be moderated.

The school's evidence points to standards in English, mathematics and science remaining below average in the forthcoming 2007 Year 6 national tests, and work in books and lessons confirms this picture. Children currently in Year 6 arrived in Year 3 with above average standards, and therefore the progress they have made since Year 3 has been inadequate.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection 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 continue to enjoy school; they have noticed with pleasure improvements being made, such as the big investment in play equipment. Some of them are becoming more familiar with their English and mathematics targets and think these are helping them to improve their work. They have also noticed how the times tables they are asked to learn are much better matched to their ability. Children's behaviour was generally good. Since the last visit there has been a noticeable improvement in the way children work together. For example, in a Year 6 religious education lesson small groups discussed, planned and produced a short role play based on making the right decisions. There has been some improvement in the way that children present their work which reflects their attitudes in lessons. However this is patchy and in some books poor presentation continues and appears not to be corrected by the teacher.

Quality of provision

Since the last visit there have been some improvements in teaching although this is not consistent across the school. The proportion of good lessons seen was slightly up on the last visit and again one lesson seen was judged to be outstanding. More effective teaching was seen in Years 3 and 6 and also in the Enhanced Resource Facility. The inconsistency in the quality of teaching is the reason for the variations in children's progress.

In the good lessons seen, teaching succeeded in getting children really interested and applying good efforts in achieving objectives. Teaching was focused on what children needed to learn and teachers were aware of how well they were achieving throughout the lesson. For example in one good lesson the teacher picked up on how well children were learning fractions. Knowing that some children were finding the task difficult the teacher was able to ask further questions and demonstrate on the board so that children understood. In contrast, teaching in another mathematics lesson failed to realise that children were struggling with what they had been asked to do and their inadequate progress was ignored.

The approach to planning lessons has improved following the last visit. Plans show that teachers have thought about matching work to the different abilities within the class. In some lessons the work set was matched well so that children made at least satisfactory progress. However, in other lessons the work given to children did not sufficiently challenge them. For example in one lesson more able children talked about work that was too easy and were confident that they could manage something more difficult. When work failed to challenge children, the pace of their learning was too slow.

There has been limited success on improving the middle part of the lesson which was an identified priority at the last visit. Improvements to planning and the lessons where work is better matched to the range of children's abilities have helped. However, in too many lessons, although the teacher worked effectively with a small group, they did not always ensure that the rest of the class were on task and making progress. Work in children's books would also suggest that the amount of learning that takes place in this section of the lesson varies considerably. This relates to the findings of the last visit when it was reported that there were insufficient amounts of recorded work. This issue continues and in some books there is as little as two pieces of recorded science work in one month. This lack of written work suggests children are not given enough opportunities to consolidate learning or to prove that they have understood what they have been taught.

Children were more aware of their targets in literacy and numeracy although many had to find them written down somewhere to explain them in detail.

Targets are now displayed in classes and there is a greater sense of whole school approach compared to the last visit. However, targets were not always used with good effect in lessons and the amount of teaching that is linked to targets is inconsistent across different year groups and classes.

In many of the half hour guided skills sessions in the morning teaching failed to ensure children made enough progress. Too often, children were given tasks that did not match their learning needs. This was further complicated by the fact that some teachers did not know enough about children's abilities because they did not regularly teach them English or maths. However, in one Year 6 guided session children made good progress because there was teaching input to the whole class and then work given to match children's different abilities.

The school is developing a systematic approach to evaluating teaching and learning. The senior leadership team (SLT) know the strengths and areas to develop in teaching. In some classes teaching has improved because support has effectively targeted known areas of weakness.

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 pupils more fully - satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

Since the last visit the senior management team (SMT), which discusses management and organisational issues, and the senior leadership team (SLT), which discusses and leads the work on improving teaching and learning, have been extended effectively. This new SLT includes the special needs co-ordinator (SENCO) who has made a good start since joining the school in January. Regular meetings take place and there is now a more coordinated way of reporting back key messages to other staff. There is evidence from minutes of meetings that the hard messages are coming through and, where teaching is still inadequate, action is being taken. The SLT recognise that there is still work to do to build on good practice and improve teaching and learning where it remains inadequate.

The overall direction of the SMT and SLT is driven by the school's improvement plan. Although this has been amended, it does not have targets that can be used as milestones. For example there is a target to achieve 90% of teaching to be good or better but no intermediate targets with set dates. This is also the case for the section of the plan on improving achievement and standards where there are no clear set of short-term targets to aim for.

As part of the SLT, the English, mathematics and science subject leaders are becoming more aware of standards and achievement across the school. They have been involved in monitoring children's work and teachers' planning. However, there have been few opportunities for them to monitor lessons and this has restricted the impact of their work. As part of their ongoing work they have written progress reports which clearly identify some of the tasks they have been involved in. Although these reports are detailed they do not always pinpoint where there are still weaknesses in teaching, the reasons for this and what is happening to improve matters. This lack of detail, focused on specific year groups or groups of children, mean that strategic improvement planning is still not as strong as it should be.

Governors have kept in touch with how the school is progressing but have not sufficiently measured the rate of progress or challenged the school enough so as to determine the quality of teaching or standards and achievement across the school. Governors have begun work on evaluating school policies for a range of subjects while missing opportunities to have up-to-date checks on assessment data. An improvement since the last visit is the way governors are informed of the work being done in subject areas. Some governors have also met with subject leaders which has increased their knowledge of how subjects are taught.

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 continue to provide satisfactory support. Monitoring of teaching has taken place and also a scrutiny of children's work. The LA are responding to the school's identified areas where work still needs to be done, for example the LA school improvement officer has plans to attend and support Year 5 team meetings. The support in mathematics has improved recently and the school is confident that this will have a positive impact. With continued significant weakness in literacy teaching in some year groups and the rate of progress in English being very inconsistent across the school, the LA is right not to reduce the level of support in this area.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Link teaching more effectively to the targets given to children in English and mathematics to improve children's progress.
- Re think the use of the guided skills sessions so that teaching impacts on all learners.
- Ensure that children complete more recorded work so that they can consolidate learning and so there are increased opportunities for the assessment of children's 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

Andrew Cook

H M Inspector