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22 March 2007

Mrs C Lancey
The Headteacher
West Huntspill Community Primary School
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Dear Mrs Lancey

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WEST HUNTSPILL COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 8 and 9 March 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 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

Six parts of lessons were observed and pupils' work was scrutinised. Meetings were held with the headteacher, teachers and teaching assistants, the chair and vice chair of governors, the school council, and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since the last inspection, the deputy headteacher has taken up a permanent post in another school. A new temporary teacher has been appointed for the Year 5 and 6 class. Action is being taken to appoint a new manager for the resource base. The work of the resource base was not evaluated during this inspection.

Achievement and standards

Standards remain low at the end of Years 2 and 6. Too few pupils are working at the level expected for their age and there is little evidence of even the most capable pupils working at a higher level. However, there is improvement in pupils' attainment in science in Year 2, which is now close to the level expected. Standards are also broadly average in Years 3 and 4 in English and mathematics.

Throughout the school, progress is still too patchy and is inadequate overall. Children get off to a satisfactory start in Reception. Most make steady gains in Year 1, although the more capable pupils are still not consistently doing as well as they should. In Year 2, progress is poor in English and mathematics. Good gains are made in Years 3 and 4 in English and mathematics. A legacy of substantial underachievement remains in Years 5 and 6, and progress continues to be too slow in these years.

Pupils do well in art and design and reach standards at least at the level expected.

Progress in the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2005:

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Children get off to a good start in their personal, social and emotional development in Reception where they benefit from working with Year 1 pupils. As at the last inspection, almost all pupils behave well and have positive attitudes to work. Pupils' sensible behaviour contributes much to the safe and calm environment. In Years 5 and 6, however, not all pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are as good as in other years. When teaching does not engage them or is not pitched at the right level, some pupils 'switch off' and a few respond in an immature way. More generally across the school, pupils' positive responses help them to learn even when teaching does not meet their needs.

Pupils are friendly, courteous and polite. They are delightful to talk with. Relationships among pupils are good and they get on well with the adults in school. Pupils are particularly sensitive to the needs of others and caring towards those with learning difficulties.

Pupils are keen to help others and proud, for example, of the funds they have raised for Children in Need. They are also proud of their successes, for instance, in performing poetry in the Highbridge Festival. They make a satisfactory contribution to the school community through the school council and by taking on responsibilities.

Pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles is satisfactory and pupils eagerly participate in physical education lessons taken by a specialist teacher. Although pupils have good personal qualities, weaknesses in the development of their basic literacy and numeracy skills result in them being insufficiently well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

The main reason why pupils' achievement is not improving and standards are not rising is that teaching is not getting better. A high proportion of teaching is inadequate. Four out of the six lessons observed during this inspection were less than satisfactory. The pattern of teaching in the school matches that of pupils' inconsistent progress.

Teaching is consistently at least satisfactory, and often good, for most Year 3 pupils and those in Year 4. In the combined Year 3 and 4 class, all pupils' needs are met and the teacher has high expectations of the standards all pupils are capable of attaining. Explanations are clear, pupils know exactly what is expected of them and what they are aiming to achieve. Lessons are well paced and focused. As a result, pupils of all capabilities move on well in English and mathematics. Some of the good features of teaching evident in Years 3 and 4 are also found in Reception and Year 1. There is accurate teaching of basics for these young children, such as letter sounds and blends for reading and spelling.

Too often, lessons proceed at a slow pace and, occasionally, too quickly. Pupils lose interest when the teacher talks for a long period without involving them enough. Time is lost when resources are not out ready, particularly when pupils spend time getting out and setting up laptop computers or collecting books from cupboards. The use of interactive whiteboards to promote learning has not developed well enough. There are occasions, for example, when these valuable resources are used only to show the main learning objective for the lesson.

There are particular weaknesses in the teaching of pupils in Year 2, and also for some in Year 3 who are taught with them. Here, pupils are failing to make adequate gains in English and mathematics because what happens in the lesson does not closely match the lesson's planned intentions. This happens in part because explanations are weak and pupils' lack of understanding is not picked up and rectified. As a result, pupils work on what they think they should be doing rather than on activities related to the stated purpose of the lesson. In a mathematics lesson, for example, the more capable pupils applied their existing knowledge of calculation and did not develop new skills and understanding as they should have. It is also the case that the planned activities are not always the right ones to promote the intended learning.

Although no science lessons were observed in Year 2, the evidence of teaching and learning shown in pupils' recorded work contrasts sharply with that in their English and mathematics books. Pupils' science books indicate clear and effective teaching of learning because the teacher's expectations of pupils are pitched at the right level.

Throughout the school, pupils with learning difficulties are supported well by teaching assistants. On occasions, the result can be that these pupils learn more effectively than others. In Years 3 and 4, there is particularly strong teamwork of teachers and teaching assistants.

The curriculum in English, mathematics and science is still not closely enough matched to pupils' needs. Pupils are enthusiastic about the opportunities this term to work with an artist in residence. They also respond very positively to the well organised teaching of physical education by a teacher from outside the school.

Pastoral care is strong and pupils feel able to approach adults in the school with any worries or concerns they might have. All adults deal sensitively with pupils. Good personal support is given to pupils with statements of special educational needs, including those from the base, when working in the mainstream classes. A high priority is given to ensuring pupils' safety in school, as reflected in the findings of a recent health and safety audit.

Even though pupils all have new literacy and numeracy targets, the effectiveness of academic guidance is still too patchy. Where teaching is effective, targets give pupils good support to improve their performance, for instance in mathematics in Years 3 and 4. There is also some good marking to support learning, for example, in science in Year 2 as well as more generally in Years 3 and 4. Marking is not used adequately in all classes.

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

- ensure that the teaching and curriculum provision meet the needs of all pupils – inadequate
- make full use of the information gained from checking pupils' progress to improve planning and provide challenging work in lessons – inadequate.

Leadership and management

Although there has been some improvement in the amount of monitoring of teaching and the quality of feedback to teachers on their teaching, this has not been enough to raise the persistently low quality of teaching in some areas of the school. Staff who speak with the most enthusiasm about the impact of the headteacher's monitoring visits to classrooms and the checks on pupils' work are those who are already the most effective practitioners. Where teaching is particularly weak or where staff are inexperienced, the

level of support and checking of the effectiveness of teaching is not yet intensive enough. As a result, even when hard messages are given clearly to individuals, there is too little improvement. Not enough is done to build on the external support provided by the local authority to provide unfaltering development of teaching from within the school's own resources.

Teachers and teaching assistants are becoming more aware that the quality of their teaching affects the outcomes for pupils. This has largely been achieved through the sensible action of looking at samples of work from other schools. However, there is still little involvement of teachers in developing provision. For instance, the effective teaching in the Year 3 and 4 class has not been observed by a teacher in an adjoining classroom who is new to the school and to teaching. Good practice exists in isolation and is not well enough shared.

Governance has improved well since the last inspection. The governing body is starting to become a driving force for improvement. There is absolute determination on the part of the chair and vice chair that the school must do better and quickly.

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

- improve systems and procedures for evaluating how well the school is performing – inadequate.

External support

The local authority is providing a substantial amount of good support to limited effect. It has increased its support since the last monitoring inspection. Throughout this term, support has focused more sharply on improving teaching. Support for the headteacher has been increased. The headteacher appreciates the additional advice she receives from another serving headteacher acting as her mentor. The effectiveness of the local authority's support is reduced by the school's own monitoring and development of teaching, although improved, not being sufficiently intensive to create a real momentum of improvement.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- As a matter of urgency, improve teaching and eradicate unsatisfactory teaching.
- Intensify the monitoring of teaching and learning and share good practice where it exists within the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Alison Grainger
Additional Inspector