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16 May 2007

Mrs Mary St-Amour
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs St-Amour

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BUSHFIELD SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Judith Dawson, Additional Inspector, to your school on 8 and 9 May 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 July 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 and leadership team, groups of pupils, governors and a representative from the Local Authority (LA). Discussions were held with the staff responsible for pupils with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language. Thirteen lessons or parts of lessons and an assembly were inspected. Inspectors looked through samples of pupils' recorded work and teachers' assessments.

Context

An interim headteacher has been appointed to replace the headteacher who left last term. A substantive headteacher has been appointed and will join the school in September 2007. Both assistant headteachers were appointed just before the last monitoring visit. An inclusion manager was appointed after the last visit and is responsible for coordinating the provision made for pupils with learning difficulties

and for those learning English as an additional language. The governing body has been reorganised and there is a new chair of governors.

Achievement and standards

Standards are improving well and achievement is satisfactory. In all year groups pupils make better progress compared with that seen during the last visit. This marks a significant turning point for the school. Teachers are now better equipped to assess pupils' performance in English, mathematics and science. They set challenging and realistic targets for all pupils. Last year's national test results for pupils in Year 6 showed that standards were too low and they underachieved. This year, targets are higher and the pupils are on course to reach these because of effective teaching and strong leadership. Although standards are generally below average by the end of Year 6, they are edging upwards towards those expected nationally in all year groups.

Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities make good progress because they are supported well. Improvements to the management of provision for pupils learning English as an additional language are helping these pupils to make good progress.

Since the last visit, teachers have focused on improving reading and writing standards. There are now consistent approaches to the teaching of phonics and spelling which is improving the accuracy of pupils' writing. Pupils have regular opportunities to read a variety of texts which are closely matched to their abilities. Consequently, reading standards have improved well and are broadly in line with those expected in all year groups. Mathematics standards are improving because pupils are taught consistent methods of calculation across the school. However, there is still more to do to ensure that pupils of higher ability achieve as well as they can in mathematics. Current targets show that the proportion of pupils predicted to reach higher levels is relatively lower in mathematics compared with reading and writing.

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

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science, and ensure that pupils reach their potential – good progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being remain good. Pupils behave well both within lessons and around school. Much improved and consistent teaching has enabled pupils to be very involved and interested in their learning. They are enthusiastic learners who thrive on the challenges presented. For example, there were spontaneous cheers as pupils were given a complex mathematical investigation in an outstanding lesson. Attendance remains good. Pupils continue to enjoy their sporting and other activities and are very appreciative of the additional time the teachers give to them after school. The school maintains its ethos of care and respect for all.

Quality of provision

In the lessons observed, the teaching ranged between satisfactory and outstanding and it is good overall. The school has made good progress since the last visit. No lessons were inadequate and the proportion of good and outstanding teaching has increased significantly. The consistency of teaching has improved in all four year groups.

Strong leadership has streamlined teachers' planning so that it focuses on meeting pupils' different learning needs. Changes to planning and refinements to assessment have had a positive effect on pupils. They are interested in their learning and are rising to the challenges presented. Teachers are confident and morale is very high so they plan a broader range of activities in lessons. Role play and drama are used very well to consolidate learning. For example, pupils in Year 5 formulated questions to pose to a classmate in the 'hot-seat' when exploring the features of diary writing. In Year 4, pupils were stimulated by the use of an animation to help them improve their understanding of narrative writing and characterisation.

Improved assessment systems are helping teachers to group pupils by ability accurately. Teachers plan tasks that are closely matched to the needs of all pupils. However, in some lessons planning could be sharper to provide more challenging tasks for pupils of higher ability. There is still more to be done to ensure that all higher ability pupils reach their targets, particularly in mathematics. The staff have worked hard to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Therefore, teachers have an accurate knowledge of pupils' capabilities and a clear understanding of what pupils need to learn next.

Marking is consistently good. Pupils are given good guidance to help them improve as well as the knowledge of how well they have completed their work. Personal targets help pupils improve their literacy skills so they are clear about how to achieve them. This good practice has yet to be established in mathematics as the pupils do not have individual mathematics targets. Pupils have a whole school mathematics target, which has been met by all. Literacy targets provide the pupils with clear objectives so they look forward to their next challenge. Pupils say that their learning has improved because they understand their targets.

The curriculum has improved. Teachers have changed the way they plan lessons to accommodate extended topics. Good planning in history and geography incorporates the use of English and mathematics skills well, enabling the pupils to build on what they already know and understand. However, assessment is not always used to check if there are any gaps in pupils' learning across all subjects.

The pastoral care provided for pupils remains good. The school is rigorous in ensuring pupils are safeguarded and the school is a safe place. There is a well-planned programme for promoting pupils' personal development. Pupils relish the many additional responsibilities they are given. They have good guidance about how to improve their work so they are better able to take responsibility for their learning.

Changes to the management of provision for pupils with learning difficulties and for those learning English as an additional language have been very effective. These have helped teachers adjust their planning to ensure that all pupils have the appropriate support. Additional support for pupils who underachieve is becoming increasingly effective. The role of teaching assistants has been reviewed and they now have detailed timetables and responsibilities targeted at pupils with specific learning needs. The school has clear plans for improving this provision further. Good systems have been introduced to assess pupils new to the school, including those in the early stages of learning English.

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

- Make significant improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. Ensure that teachers have higher expectations of their pupils and provide achievable challenges to pupils of all levels of ability – good progress
- Make rigorous use of the new systems for checking pupils' progress to set and constantly review challenging targets for pupils to meet – good progress

Leadership and management

Strong leadership has guided and improved the teaching since the last visit. There is a noticeable change in the ethos of the school. The interim headteacher has been highly effective in providing a shared vision. Consequently, many of the inconsistencies of approach seen at the time of the last visit have been addressed. Leadership roles have been clarified and structures are now in place to ensure both day-to-day management and strategic leadership focus on improving the achievement of pupils. Staff morale is very high so that everyone is pulling together towards common aims. There is a renewed confidence amongst teachers and support staff. They feel empowered and say they are making a difference by supporting each other and working as a team.

Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and there are robust plans for improvement. Since the last visit, school improvement planning has been radically changed. The streamlining of priorities for improvement provides more focused success criteria. There are good systems in place to check how well pupils are doing and how well teachers are performing. Year group leaders constantly refer to the core priorities in the improvement plan to ensure they are on course to raise achievement. Staff welcome the new opportunities for wider communication and team planning which has resulted in more open dialogue and sharing of good practice.

The role of subject leaders has been developed extremely well. They are using data about pupils' performance to track their progress. Consequently, teachers are able to identify how best to intervene if there is underachievement by groups or individuals. This robust and effective approach to self-evaluation is accelerating the achievement of most pupils.

The governing body has been reorganised and includes a new chair and a LA appointed governor who is helping to advise and guide improvements to governance. Through the headteacher's reports and focused visits to the school, the governing body is in a good position to hold the school to account more robustly.

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

- Improve the quality of leadership at all levels. Ensure that information from data and monitoring is used rigorously to bring about demonstrable improvements. Ensure that self-evaluation focuses sharply on the impact of initiatives on achievement and standards – good progress

External support

The LA has continued to support the school well by providing a highly effective interim headteacher. The leadership team and the extended management structure of year team leaders is working well and provides clear direction. LA advisers have worked to support the staff and subject leaders, for example, by looking at teachers' planning. This accounts for the greater consistency of teaching seen across the school. The school is now demonstrating that it has the capacity to build on its improvements, providing a secure platform for further development when the substantive headteacher joins the school in September.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed

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

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Additional Inspector