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13 July 2007

Mr R Shenton
The Headteacher
Summerbank Primary School
Summerbank Road
Tunstall
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Staffordshire
ST6 5HA

Dear Mr Shenton

Special Measures: Monitoring Inspection of Summerbank Primary School

Introduction

Following my visit with Peter Callow, Additional Inspector, to your school on 4 July 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 December 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

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, senior staff and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Two supply teachers are covering temporary staff absences in one of the Reception classes and one of the Year 3/4 classes. The leadership and senior management team has been restructured since the previous visit.

Achievement and standards

Standards are improving and throughout the school pupils are now making better progress. Children enter the school with skills that are much lower than those

normally expected, particularly in their communication, language and literacy. The children are provided with a curriculum that is well matched to their needs. All children, including those at a very early stage of learning English, are provided with a wide range of imaginative opportunities to develop their speaking skills. Consistently good teaching and well targeted support enable all children to make rapid progress. Strategies to improve the children's knowledge and use of letter sounds, introduced earlier this year, have had a significant impact on their progress. Most children are now reaching the goals expected for their age in all areas of learning when they enter Year 1.

At Key Stage 1, standards continue to improve. Although writing is still the weaker element, with too few pupils attaining the higher level, their enthusiasm for writing is improving. This is the result of the school providing more opportunities for exciting and enriching writing across the curriculum. The recent emphasis on teaching sounds and letters is beginning to have a better impact on the progress pupils make in writing.

At Key Stage 2, standards in mathematics and science have improved considerably. The provisional 2007 National Curriculum test results show 75% of the pupils are now attaining the expected level in mathematics, which is double that when the school went into special measures. There has also been a good improvement in science. However, fewer pupils than might be expected attain the higher Level 5 in mathematics. Whilst reading skills are considerably better, there has only been a slight improvement in writing. In part, this is due to the legacy of ineffective teaching in the past. The pupils' poor basic skills in spelling, handwriting and presentation remain, particularly for the older pupils.

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

- monitor pupils' progress and ensure the pupils reach the standards of which they are capable – good.

Personal development and well-being

Attendance remains in line with the national average, the result of the school's continued efforts. Pupils enjoy school and show good attitudes towards their learning. They are very appreciative of the new hard play area. Members of the school council are now actively consulting with their peers to determine how they can make this an exciting place for a range of sporting and other activities. The school council particularly enjoyed the opportunity to organise an 'X Factor' contest in aid of Red Nose Day. Pupils are keen to acknowledge the friendliness of others and the kindness of teachers in helping them to enjoy school. This is a factor in the consistently good behaviour seen both in lessons and in the playground. Pupils are respectful of adults, reflecting in part the good relationships that exist. There are good opportunities for older pupils to take responsibility, for example through the 'playground friends', when they look after and set an example for younger pupils.

Quality of provision

Teaching has improved and is satisfactory. There are, however, more good features. For example, the pace of lessons has improved and teachers are making better use of practical activities to make learning more relevant and interesting. Assessment information is being used more effectively and, as a result, work is better matched to pupils' ability. The assessment information has been used particularly effectively in Years 5 and 6 to identify underachievement and accelerate learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and make effective use of this to develop the pupils' language, mathematical and scientific vocabulary.

The good development of children's speaking skills in the Foundation Stage is not built upon sufficiently elsewhere in the school. Too few opportunities exist for pupils to give an extended response to teachers' questioning. Whilst a new marking policy has been introduced, its impact has been minimal and many inconsistencies remain. There are too few occasions when marking identifies how the pupils might improve their work. Similarly, there is an inconsistent approach to the setting of pupils' personal targets. The pupils' lack of understanding of their targets is limiting their progress. There is little correlation between teachers' marking and the pupils' personal targets. The teachers' expectations of pupils' handwriting and presentation are too low, resulting in untidy work which sometimes does not do justice to the content.

The school is providing the pupils with a wide range of visits and visitors to enhance the pupils' first hand experiences. For example, the school's recent Arts Week gave pupils experiences of different cultures, artistic and musical activities. This, together with a thematic approach to learning, is helping to engage and motivate the pupils effectively. Their topic books show that, when required, pupils will take a pride in their work and present it well.

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

- help teachers make full use of assessments to focus teaching on eradicating underachievement – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The restructuring of the leadership team has made more staff accountable for standards and achievement. They have undertaken a range of activities that has made them better aware of where the strengths and weaknesses lie. Through their monitoring of work, staff recognise that there are inconsistencies in the quality of marking and in the use of pupils' personal targets. However, they have yet to tackle these inconsistencies. Although there are good examples of marking and the use of targets, there are no effective procedures for sharing this good practice. The shortcomings in tracking the pupils' progress highlighted at the last visit have largely

been addressed. However, although the procedures for tracking the children's progress in the Foundation Stage are very good, the information is not used sufficiently rigorously to predict pupils' attainment at Key Stage 1. As a result of effective support provided by senior staff, teachers are now much more confident in identifying the levels at which pupils are working.

The leadership team is pleased with the progress made by pupils in reading, mathematics and science, but it fully recognises that pupils are still making too little progress in their writing. Members are, however, embracing a range of strategies to address this issue. There is some way to go, particularly in ensuring older pupils make up the ground lost as a result of ineffective teaching in the past.

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

- improve the ways in which the school examines its own work and the quality of its provision – good.

External support

Following the last visit, the local authority reconsidered the support it offered the school. It now provides a better match for the needs of staff. This has had a good impact on the progress made by pupils in reading and mathematics. Although there is less evidence of progress in writing, teachers are now providing an environment that supports the development of the pupils' writing skills more effectively. For example, most classrooms have displays and prompts that are beginning to help the pupils to write independently and at a higher standard.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop the strategies to improve standards and pupils' achievement in writing.
- Help pupils to understand how they can improve their work through greater consistency in the quality of marking and the setting of pupils' personal targets.
- Ensure all staff raise their expectations of how pupils present their work and the quality of their handwriting.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Edwards
Additional Inspector