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The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cleland

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SUTTON ST JAMES PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 2 – 3 February 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was found to have serious weaknesses in June 2005.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the chair of governors, key staff and a representative from the LEA, and held informal discussions with many pupils about their work.

Context

There have been no significant changes since the last inspection.

Achievement and standards

Children make satisfactory progress through the Foundation Stage and most attain the levels expected by the end of the Reception Year. This is built on satisfactorily and, by the end of Year 2, standards are close to those expected nationally. However, this progress is not maintained and pupils make inadequate progress

overall. Results in national tests for 2005 show that by Year 6, standards are well below the national figure in English and mathematics and below in science. Test results in English and mathematics fell between 2004 and 2005, and in 2005 no Year 6 pupil attained the higher level in English. The progress made in English between Year 2 and Year 6 is very low and in the bottom 5% of schools nationally.

Current standards in English are well below average but improvements to the teaching of writing are having an impact in Year 6. However, few pupils are working above the expected levels. A high proportion of pupils working at the lower levels have made inadequate progress over time. These pupils have too much catching up to do and few are on target to achieve the expected standard by the end of Year 6, even with the high level of support they are receiving. Pupils do not have a good grasp of common spelling rules and their use of punctuation is inadequate. Handwriting and presentation across the school are unsatisfactory and much of the work in all subjects is spoiled by heavy crossing out. Speaking and listening skills across the school are weak. While teachers are using a range of strategies aimed at improving these, many pupils are poor at listening to others and not enough attention is given to the role of the speaker. Standards remain below national expectations in mathematics but there are indications that, more recently, pupils are making improved progress, particularly in Years 2 and 6. However, too many lack the rapid recall of tables and number bonds they need to work more quickly and effectively. Presentation in pupils' books is unsatisfactory with much of the work being untidy with lines drawn freehand. The use of plain paper for mathematics confuses some pupils and highlights their lack of understanding of place value when they set out their work. Standards in science remain low and pupils lack skills and understanding of investigative science. Work has only recently begun in addressing this issue and it is too early to judge the impact of this.

Appropriate support is provided for those pupils who have learning difficulties and in some classes there is now more effective provision for those pupils identified as being more able.

Judgement

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

- Raise standards in writing and science - inadequate progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils generally show sound attitudes to work and older pupils concentrated well for long periods. However, some pupils have poorer attention and chatter to those around them, even when others are speaking. This often requires the teacher or teaching assistant to intervene. Often this was as a result of pupils not being fully engaged by the lesson.

Pupils' behaviour in and around school is satisfactory. They are polite and helpful to each other. In lessons, teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to

work in pairs or small groups and they are beginning to respond well to this. The youngest pupils in school showed good social skills when involved in independent activities. The assembly provided a suitable spiritual occasion, helped by pupils' calm and orderly entry into the hall. However, the corporate nature and occasion provided by the assembly was lessened by the absence of all the teaching staff and does not fit with the school's stated values, aims and ethos.

With support from the LEA, good work has been done on raising attendance levels which are now broadly in line with national averages.

Judgement

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

- Increase pupils' rates of attendance – good progress

Quality of provision

Teaching is satisfactory. It was satisfactory or good in nine of the ten lessons seen, with good teaching seen in three of these. All of the good teaching was in either Year 2 or Year 6. Where the teaching is good it is lively and learning is well planned to meet the individual needs of all pupils. As a result, they are responsive, keen to learn and work at a good pace. However, there is not enough good teaching generally across the school to improve the overall rate of pupils' progress. Too much of the teaching is pedestrian and as a result not enough pupils achieve what they are capable of. Few teachers set time limits or give pupils guidance about how much time they had to complete their tasks to improve the pace of the lessons. In too many lessons, pace, drive and tasks which fire the pupils' imagination were lacking. In some instances the quality of teaching and learning slipped further because the work was undemanding or pitched at the wrong level, resulting in limited progress. Where learning was inadequate this was due mainly to poor timing or tasks for which pupils had not been adequately prepared. Where lesson timing was poor the lesson overran and prevented the teacher from pulling the different elements of the lesson together at the end so they could effectively evaluate the progress pupils had made.

All work is marked regularly. However, not enough provides good quality guidance on what pupils have done well and why, or what they need to do to improve their work further. Many pupils are unsure of what they are good at or what they need to focus on to improve their work. Where teachers are using target sheets well, pupils are clearer about what they need to do to move on to the next levels. Procedures for recording pupils' achievement and tracking progress are secure but only more recently put into place.

Detailed planning for English and mathematics is now providing a better match of work to the needs of the pupils and particularly for the more capable. However, few plans refer to the use of ICT to support learning in the class or indicate how work is being closely matched to the needs of pupils who have learning difficulties.

Teachers' plans show what pupils are to learn and these are regularly shared with

the pupils. The best examples are clear and often modified for different ability groups in the class. However, some are not written in a way that is easily understood by pupils, particularly the younger ones.

Much work has been done to provide better quality and more timely information for parents. Surveys of parents' views and the outcomes of these are being used by the school to improve parents' involvement and their perceptions of the school.

Judgement

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

- Ensure the work planned for the mixed age classes takes account of the pupils' different ages and abilities. – satisfactory progress
- Continue to improve links with parents - satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory overall. The headteacher has a clear strategy aimed at raising standards of attainment, teachers' expectations and improving the overall quality of teaching and learning. Staff have taken on these initiatives well and improvements can be seen, for example, in the reducing number of inadequate lessons seen. The school is developing satisfactory systems for monitoring its effectiveness. The systems in place to evaluate and track pupils' attainment show how big the task facing the school is in identifying and addressing the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Monitoring of teaching is regular and suitably rigorous. Improvements in the quality of teaching are being tracked and targets have been set for improvement over time. The school has a sound capacity for improvement but the pace of change needs to be maintained with a strong focus on learning.

The role of subject leaders is developing but not all have a sufficiently good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Subject leaders' action plans need further development to enable sharper analysis and evaluation and ensure a clear link with the school's overall improvement plan. However, they have been well supported by Local Authority consultants in developing their subject leadership roles.

The governing body has an appropriate committee structure and is knowledgeable about the work of the school with a clearer understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses than at the time of the last inspection. Regular meetings and monitoring reports on the progress of the action plan and visits to school by individual governors enable the governing body to gather better information for itself rather than relying on others to provide this. Through their questioning they are developing their role as the 'critical friend' to the school. The governors' action plan is suitably detailed and addresses most of the issues identified at the time of the last inspection.

Judgement

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning through more rigorous monitoring activities– satisfactory progress

External support

The LEA's statement of action is good. The commentary clearly evaluates the viability of the school and the quality of the governors' action plan. It outlines the action it intends to take, clear, measurable success criteria and the resources needed. Through monitoring, practical advice on teaching and learning, planning and general management, the LEA has provided good support since the inspection and for the foreseeable future. The results of this support can be seen in the improvements to the quality of teaching and learning.

Main Judgements

The school has made satisfactory progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses. This visit has raised some concerns about the standard of education provided and the school's performance will be monitored.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to develop pupils' English skills, particularly in writing and speaking and listening.
- Focus more closely on improving achievement in science, particularly through investigative and experimental work.
- Improve the quality of marking so pupils are clear about what they do well and what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the presentation of pupils' work and the pride they take in it.

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

Yours sincerely

John Francis
Additional Inspector