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8 June 2007

Mr P Wright
The Interim Headteacher
Barley Lane School
Barley Lane
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Dear Mr Wright

Special Measures: Monitoring Inspection of Barley Lane School

Introduction

Following my visit with Janet Brennan HMI to your school on 23 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 September 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 senior staff, the chair of governors, the member of staff with responsibility for home/school liaison and representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the substantive deputy headteacher is making a phased return to work following long term illness. She is currently in school for three days per week. However, following a fourth national recruitment attempt, the governors have been unable to appoint a substantive headteacher. This raises questions as to the long term stability and sustainability of leadership and management. With the exception of the staff representative, a completely new governing body has been elected. Plans are well advanced for improving the fabric of

the building and for providing teaching accommodation for the Key Stage 4 pupils. The school environment is well cared for. Displays, although basic, are improving.

Achievement and standards

Years 6 and 9 sat the end of key stage national tests for the first time this year and generally coped well with the experience.

Systems are now in place to monitor the pupils' progress. However, as these have only been in place for one term, it is as yet too soon to be able to make an accurate judgement on the rate of progress. As a result of its monitoring, the school is able to target provision more effectively, particularly in literacy. The staff need to use the data systematically to plan their lessons and differentiate teaching and tasks to meet the needs of all abilities. They must also have further opportunities to moderate pupils' work against that of pupils in other schools to ensure that the levels they give are accurate. Pupils know their levels in literacy and mathematics but do not yet understand what they mean or what they need to do to improve their work. The data shows that for some pupils in some subjects their potential is above the nationally expected level for their age. At this point in time, these pupils are not being challenged sufficiently to achieve their full potential.

The recording of data needs to be fine tuned. There is still some ambiguity to the way in which levels are recorded, for example the use of high, medium and low alongside a, b and c as descriptors. This is an area in which local authority consultants have expertise and will be aware of good practice in other institutions. There is no need to reinvent systems when they have already been well established and successfully used in other schools.

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

- ensure that pupils can achieve and make progress in all subjects through improving the effectiveness of teaching and the guidance given to them – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

The system for behaviour management is now well established, although staff are still dependent on the headteacher and deputy headteacher with responsibility for behaviour to ensure that it is maintained. The system is clear, consistently applied and workable. Reward is integral to the system, tokens provide immediate, tangible gratification and earn trips out or sports vouchers for the pupils. Through careful monitoring by the deputy headteacher, the school can accurately judge changes to the boys' behaviour and analyse when and why things may go wrong. Pupils and staff have reacted positively to the system and there is a much calmer atmosphere within the school which is focused on learning.

Staff show great respect for the young people they work with, even at times of extreme provocation. This is another reason why the behaviour management system is proving effective.

The deputy headteacher now meets weekly with the education welfare officer to monitor attendance. There has been a 5% increase in attendance since January when compared to the previous term.

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

- improve the systems to support and guide pupils in their personal development, particularly in improving their behaviour – good.

Quality of provision

The formalising of the home/school liaison post is a positive move. This member of staff has oversight of the support for a pupil who is integrated into mainstream school and provides home tutoring for a small number who are following specific programmes. In addition, she can effectively coordinate the numerous agencies involved with these pupils to ensure that provision is tailored to suit their needs. As the school is aware, there is a need for further risk assessment to be carried out in respect of this post.

Teaching is improving as the staff can now deliver lessons knowing that the behaviour management system will support them. Rather than tackling pupils' inappropriate behaviour in an ad hoc fashion, this system has clarity for both staff and pupils. If behaviour is such that a lesson cannot continue, the use of the 'catch up room' provides an immediate solution but does not prevent pupils returning to their learning at the earliest opportunity. Teaching is now monitored. Teachers are given unambiguous feedback and clear areas for development are identified following the observation of lessons.

Increased curriculum opportunities for Year 10 are proving to be successful and motivating. These vocational courses take place at Bicton Agricultural College and Exeter College. An example of this success is one particular pupil in Year 10 who has been offered a place to study agriculture a year early, although the normal entry level would be a minimum of 4 GCSEs. The school will begin to work to next year's timetable after half term. This will enable the current Year 9 pupils to take advantage of taster courses at the colleges and return in September with a clear understanding of what the future year will bring.

The school is providing extra support for literacy through a well chosen published commercial phonics scheme and has arranged for appropriate training for one member of staff to implement this. Further training is planned. However, the plans to purchase a reading scheme for secondary aged pupils and the emphasis on the

testing of reading should be discussed further with local authority literacy consultants.

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

- ensuring that pupils are safe and that incidents of unacceptable behaviour are recorded properly – good.

Leadership and management

Without doubt, the interim headteacher has brought a sense of order and purpose to the school. It is much calmer and pupils are beginning to interact in a positive manner rather than sparring with each other. This has helped to raise staff morale and bring about an atmosphere in which people are smiling and feel they can do their job, which is to teach. The headteacher is endeavouring to involve staff in the development of the school. For the first time, they are reviewing the school self-evaluation process collaboratively and are encouraged to make a contribution. Senior staff are working with the headteacher to bring about improvement but there is currently no level of middle management to support them.

Most staff have been given the opportunity to observe good practice in other schools. They are also becoming involved in wider educational activities through the moderation of pupils' work and the sharing of specialist subject facilities.

The chair of the new governing body has a wealth of experience, including working with schools in challenging circumstances. The full governing body now meets every three weeks. This is an interim measure prior to setting up a committee structure and working parties which will involve parents. The chair meets regularly with the headteacher and is putting in place appropriate monitoring procedures to hold the school to account. Discussions with the local authority are taking place to secure future leadership and management and the chair of governors is proactive in his approach to this.

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

- establish more effective leadership and management to ensure that the school is monitored, evaluated and improved – good.

External support

The local authority provides good support both through its monitoring process and the intervention of subject consultants. It will need to continue working with, and supporting, the governing body in respect of personnel issues and in the appointment of a substantive headteacher.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Devon.

Yours sincerely

Pauline Robins
H M Inspector