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17 November 2010

Mrs Grover
Wirksworth Junior School
Wash Green
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Dear Mrs Grover

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Wirksworth Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 15 and 16 November 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2009. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Strategic Director of Children and Younger Adults for Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely

Jane Melbourne
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2009:

- ensure that pupils consistently reach standards which are commensurate with their capabilities and starting points in writing and mathematics by:
 - providing more opportunities for extended writing
 - concentrating more on spelling
 - extending vocabulary by providing a greater range of writing experiences
 - ensuring that pupils master the topics they study in mathematics before moving on
 - setting different work to match the requirements of all of the pupils in the class
 - using exemplar materials in English and mathematics to show pupils what work at the next level looks like
- strengthen assessment procedures by:
 - improving marking so that it gives more indication to pupils about what they need to do to move to the next level
 - providing a much better link between the work pupils are doing and their targets
- improve leadership and management at all levels to maintain relentless and effective focus on increasing the rate of pupils' progress by:
 - rigorously monitoring what is happening in the classroom
 - analysing what needs to improve, producing a clear list of priorities for development
 - ensuring that effective action is taken to bring about improvement
- ensure that the current government regulations for safeguarding are fully met by December 2009.

Special measures: monitoring of Wirksworth Junior School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 15 - 16 November 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, staff, pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and representatives from the local authority.

Context

Following the inspection in October 2009, the substantive headteacher immediately took leave of absence. A temporary acting headteacher took up post from 1 January 2010 for the spring and summer terms. A new substantive headteacher was appointed in September 2010. There have also been two new members of staff appointed to the senior leadership team this autumn term. A member of staff returning from maternity leave provides additional teaching support in literacy and numeracy for Year 6 pupils on four mornings each week. A temporary teaching arrangement was established following October half term in Year 6 on four afternoons each week to reduce the class size in other subject areas. There are now five classes at the school with only one mixed-age class (Year 4/5). There are currently 145 pupils on roll, which is a decrease of 10 pupils from last term due to the last year's larger Year 6 cohort leaving the school. The local authority has made some improvements to the physical learning environment over the summer and the classroom arrangement is now to house three classes within the main school building.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Last year's Year 6 cohort performed well in their end of year assessments and much better than in previous years. Overall, performance in English was close to the national average at the expected Level 4 and above, but with much improved progress specifically in writing, which had been a whole school focus. Standards in mathematics were also just above the national average at Level 4 and above. The number of pupils achieving the higher Level 5 was also improved on previous years, with more Level 5 scores achieved in English than mathematics and more pupils gaining Level 5 in reading than in writing. However, as the cohorts are always hugely variable in size and prior attainment, it is important not to see this as an indication of trend.

At this early stage in the 2010-2011 school year, pupils' progress in two thirds of lessons is good: a reflection of the improved teaching and learning in some year groups. However, this has not yet impacted on pupils' progress over time. Year 3 pupils, despite consistently good teaching, have – as is often typical of the national

picture at this point in the school year - plateaued or even receded in terms of their achievement since their last assessment at the end of Key Stage 1. Progress in the other year groups is also behind the targets set by the school, but again this is based on October half-term assessments made when the pupils had only been in school for little over a month. Procedures for learning spellings have changed but pupils are positive about this and parents are supporting this well, which is important as spelling is poor across the school. The presentation of work in some classes is much improved and expectations are high. It is evident where there has been a focus on handwriting. However, these high standards are not consistent across the school.

There are simplified and more effective systems of assessment, enabling staff to identify which groups are not making sufficient progress. The legacy of under-achievement is still taking time to work through; pupils still have a number of gaps in their knowledge and skills which have to be dealt with, particularly at the top end of the school.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that pupils consistently reach standards which are commensurate with their capabilities and starting points in writing and mathematics – **satisfactory**

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour remains good across the school. Initiatives such as the nurture group aimed at pupils needing additional support started up again after October half term with much success, gradually improving the social integration and emotional well-being for a significant minority of pupils. Positive play sessions start this week to help a further group of pupils who need additional support to work with others. There remains a very positive climate for learning across the school with virtually no disruptions. Pupils contribute well within lessons and enjoy their friendships and activities outside of the classroom.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching is improving overall, although it is not yet good enough in every class to shift pupils' achievement and ensure they reach their targets. Inadequate teaching has not yet been eradicated. Staffing is more stable overall but there is still a change of staffing to occur in Year 5 from next term and the school continues to try to find solutions for managing the large cohort in Year 6 and to minimise any disruption to pupils through the teaching arrangements. The quality of planning continues to improve, with staff recognising the necessity to adapt learning to the range of pupils' abilities and to be specific about questioning to challenge. In some classes, this works well. In other classes, the difference in the work done by different groups is less distinctive and there is a lack of challenge for some pupils who are capable of

more. For example, these pupils may have to listen to things they already feel secure in with the remainder of the class, rather than being provided with work which would further promote their thinking. At these times, not all support staff are fully utilised either. However, in some classes, support staff complement the main teaching well, by reinforcing pupils' knowledge of letters and sounds, for example.

Target setting has been reinforced this term. However, currently pupils are much more aware of their literacy targets than their targets for mathematics, which have recently changed. There is greater reference to targets in some lessons than others and through the marking of work. There are some examples of well marked work which is helpful to pupils' development, but again this is not always consistent, nor are pupils always given the opportunity to respond to teachers' comments where given. In some classes, there is effective use of self- and peer-assessment to support learning. Some class teachers also check on pupils' learning on a regular basis. This is helpful to teachers' understanding of which learning is not secure and must be reinforced throughout the lesson or in future lessons. Systems for assessment are understood by all staff and are beginning to be maintained well.

The school has adopted a more 'creative curriculum' model and planning is increasingly focused on interweaving foundation subjects with literacy and numeracy to provide pupils with greater opportunities to apply their basic skills. Linking lessons together in this way is successful in engaging pupils' interest, and topics have been chosen to make improved use of the school's position within the community and to appeal equally to boys and girls.

The quality of care, guidance and support is variable across the school: it is sometimes outstanding and sometimes inadequate. The school has already identified the necessity to resolve this inconsistency. Pupils are quick to point out where they feel well supported and where they do not. The school has further improved its system for monitoring pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. It has built on the previous work done last year to adapt pupils' individual education plans, making them easier to use and more informative for pupils and their parents. The school has carefully mapped out provision for these pupils and a system for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of any interventions is in place. It is too early to assess the success of the current interventions.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- strengthen assessment procedures – **satisfactory**

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Changes to leadership and management this term have made a significant difference to the school and have built on the positive steps forward since the school moved into a category of concern. The school has brought more capacity and skills into the senior leadership team, and its members are taking their roles in driving

improvement very seriously. Much hard work has taken place to analyse data, monitor and evaluate teaching and the school's performance and to change key policies and procedures. Observations made by the senior leadership team and the local authority continue to be accurate. The governing body has been wholly supportive of the school's work and is continuing to take a lead role in monitoring its progress. The current team, including the governing body, has a strong vision for the school, aspires to high standards and is intent on turning the school around. Leaders' priorities, as recently updated in their school improvement plan, are sound and are focused on the areas identified at the last section 5 inspection. Changes this term so far have made a difference, but must be applied with an even greater consistency and over a longer duration to have the impact the school is seeking for its pupils. The school is also, rightly, building its partnership with parents and striving to engage them further in their children's progress and the life of the school. The school's procedures and recording for safeguarding pupils continues to be in line with current government regulations, which are met well.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve leadership and management at all levels to maintain a relentless and effective focus on increasing the rate of pupils' progress – **good**
- ensure that the current government regulations for safeguarding are fully met by December 2009 – **good**

External support

The external support provided by the local authority is good. It has had a particular impact on strengthening the senior leadership team and improving teaching and planning. Staff have received high quality input from a range of local authority consultants who continue to develop the staff team and their classroom practices. The consultants have successfully helped develop systems for monitoring teaching and learning more effectively. The local authority is working most positively with the new substantive headteacher and senior leadership team. The schedule of local authority support team meetings has been strictly adhered to, and an accurate overview of the school's progress has been maintained. The local authority continues to maintain a high level of support for the school, which includes support for the school's leadership; staffing; classroom arrangements; curriculum and overall school improvement. It has given substantial support to improving the school building and the facilities for information and communication technology.