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20 January 2011

Mrs J Naylor
Headteacher
The Henry Prince CofE (C) First School
Mayfield
Ashbourne
DE6 2LB

Dear Mrs Naylor

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Henry Prince CofE (C) First School

Following my visit on 19 January 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 2009. 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

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 governors, the diocese of Lichfield and the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Roy Bowers
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve standards and achievement in writing across the school by: improving the teaching of letter formation, sounds and words; ensuring that pupils apply their writing skills across all subjects; and informing pupils about what they need to do to reach their targets.
- Accelerate the rates of progress of all pupils and ensure they are consistent across the school by analysing the performance of specific groups so that teaching can address their needs.
- Ensure teachers use assessment information to match their teaching to pupils' abilities and give feedback that helps pupils know what they have to do to improve.
- Improve the management, support and guidance for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Establish a clear direction for the school and ensure that the actions taken by school leaders are effective in improving pupils' achievement.
- Make sure that governors hold the school to account for the standards it achieves and the rates of pupils' progress by providing them with the information needed to make decisions and judge the impact of the school's work.

Special measures: monitoring of The Henry Prince CofE (C) First School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 19 January 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, checked pupils' work in books, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the chair of the governing body and the local authority improvement officer.

Context

There have been no contextual changes since the last monitoring inspection.

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

Greater stability in staffing, more rigorous analysis of the progress of different groups and improved use of assessment information have helped ensure that more pupils now receive the correct degree of challenge. Consequently, pupils' progress and their learning in lessons continue to improve. Most pupils are making the expected progress in all subjects and a higher proportions of pupils are now making good progress.

Although there is variation across the school, the proportion of pupils who are reaching the expected levels of attainment has risen. Pupils' attainment in all subjects is now close to average in most year groups and is above average in Year 3. In Year 1, although pupils' progress is accelerating, the attainment of the boys is low in literacy and numeracy. Throughout the school, pupils' attainment in writing remains lower than in reading and mathematics. However, the gap between pupils' attainment in writing and their attainment in reading and mathematics is closing. In Year 4, the steps taken by the school to fill the gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills due to previous inadequate teaching are having a positive impact and are helping to raise pupils' achievement.

Continued regular timetabled handwriting lessons are helping pupils learn the skills of letter formation. Although a few pupils do not form the letters correctly when writing freely, most pupils in the school have now developed this skill. A structured approach to teaching the sounds of letters and words is continuing to have a positive impact on improving pupils' literacy skills. However, some of these lessons are too long and pupils begin to lose interest and concentration. Although, in some lessons other than literacy, teachers ensure that pupils practise their writing skills, opportunities for this are not always taken. Pupils have targets for improvement in writing, but teachers do not make clear enough the links between these targets and the work in lessons.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve standards and achievement in writing across the school by: improving the teaching of letter formation, sounds and words; ensuring that pupils apply their writing skills across all subjects; and informing pupils about what they need to do to reach their targets - satisfactory.
- Accelerate the rates of progress of all pupils and ensure they are consistent across the school by analysing the performance of specific groups so that teaching can address their needs - satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

During the monitoring inspection, behaviour in lessons was only less than good when the pace of learning was too slow because the teacher talked for too long or the activities were either too easy or too hard. Over the past year, there has been a noticeable improvement in pupils' attitudes to their learning, especially in Key Stage 2. Some of the older pupils say that the lessons are now more enjoyable because they feel that they are now learning more and do not spend as much time sitting and listening with little to challenge them.

The effectiveness of provision

Training from the local authority and a willingness of teachers to apply the newly acquired skills are having a positive impact on improving the quality of pupils' learning in lessons and raising achievement. Lesson planning is now more focused on what teachers are expecting pupils to learn and teachers are more skilled at communicating the learning intentions to pupils. However, this is still inconsistent. In some lessons, although the activities given to the pupils keep them engaged, pupils' knowledge and skills are not always systematically built upon.

All teachers regularly provide verbal feedback to pupils to reinforce learning and provide them with information on how to improve. However, the feedback is not always detailed enough to help pupils learn effectively. Feedback to pupils through marking of pupils' work in books is now much more consistent, with many examples of clear guidance to pupils on how to improve. The links teachers make between pupils' targets, teachers' marking and what pupils are learning in lessons are stronger than at the time of the last monitoring inspection, but are still not yet clear enough to have a major impact on raising pupils' achievement. The improved progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with the accelerating progress of other groups of pupils. All individual plans for improvement are in place and pupils' progress is monitored carefully.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure teachers use assessment information to match their teaching to pupils' abilities and give feedback that helps pupils know what they have to do to improve – satisfactory.
- Improve the management, support and guidance for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities - satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher's growing leadership skills and the continued support from the local authority have brought about clear changes in the school. More stable staffing has helped ensure that the improvements in teachers' skills are used and built upon. More rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems, including lesson observations, analysis of pupils' progress and checking on pupils' work have enabled the headteacher to have a more accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Initiatives for improvement are planned in detail and provide a clear direction for the school. Regular pupil progress meetings between the headteacher and each member of staff continue and these help the headteacher to evaluate the impact of the initiatives on improving the quality of learning in lessons and raising pupils' achievement. The governing body receives detailed information from the headteacher about pupils' progress and is now using this information much more effectively to hold the school to account for improvements made.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Establish a clear direction for the school and ensure that the actions taken by school leaders are effective in improving pupils' achievement – satisfactory.
- Make sure that governors hold the school to account for the standards it achieves and the rates of pupils' progress by providing them with the information needed to make decisions and judge the impact of the school's work – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has continued to provide strong support to the school. Monitoring of the progress of the school has been rigorous and has provided the headteacher and governing body with accurate evaluations of improvements made. Because of the increased leadership skills of the headteacher and governing body, the local authority has correctly reduced the extent of support for leadership and management.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no priorities for further improvement.