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2 December 2010

Mrs Penglase
Headteacher
Alvaston Junior School
Elvaston Lane
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Derby
DE24 0PU

Dear Mrs Penglase

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Alvaston Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 30 November–1 December 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2010. 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 – inadequate

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 the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Derby.

Yours sincerely

Roy Bowers
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2010

- Raise the quality of teaching to accelerate pupils' progress by raising teachers' expectations of pupils' learning by ensuring that:
 - the outcomes of assessment are used consistently in all planning so that pupils' work is better matched to their different levels of ability
 - the teaching of writing includes more opportunities for pupils to write freely and to practise writing at length more frequently
 - the teaching of mathematics gives pupils more opportunities to use their skills to solve real-life problems
 - marking shows pupils what they have to do to improve their work, and teachers give pupils time to respond to their marking
 - writing, mathematical and ICT skills are promoted effectively in different subjects.

- Introduce rigour into the monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the school's work, and especially of teaching and learning by:
 - establishing a whole-school view of what good teaching, learning, leadership and management look like and taking steps to ensure all staff come up to the raised expectations
 - making teachers more accountable for their part in accelerating pupils' progress in all year groups, in order to raise standards in Year 6
 - increasing the role of the governors in holding the school to account for its pupils' outcomes.

Special measures: monitoring of Alvaston Junior School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 30 November – 1 December 2010

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and pupils' work, and met with the acting headteacher, senior leaders, pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, two of the senior leaders have left the school. The governors appointed a full-time teacher who commenced his duties at the start of this term. A local authority consultant has been seconded to work as assistant headteacher in the school. The substantive headteacher has been absent from the school through illness since September 2010. Prompted by this absence and advised by the local authority, the governing body reorganised the senior leadership team. The deputy headteacher, as acting headteacher, is currently leading and managing the school.

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

Pupils say that they enjoy their learning. There are signs that pupils' progress and attainment are slowly beginning to rise in some classes. However, attainment remains low in all year groups, especially in writing and mathematics and very few pupils exceed the levels expected for their age in all subjects. The school's tracking information shows that pupils' progress during the first half of this term remains inadequate in most year groups.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Strong relationships help ensure that pupils behave well. In most of the lessons observed, pupils showed positive attitudes to their learning and only became restless and inattentive when the work was not matched to their capabilities or the teacher talked for too long. Pupils work together well and are keen to help each other when required.

The effectiveness of provision

The local authority's observations and the school's monitoring show that the proportion of good teaching has risen since the last monitoring inspection. All teachers now focus much more on what they want pupils to learn, and most of the lesson planning shows how they intend to guide pupils through the small learning steps. At the start of all lessons, teachers talk to the pupils about the learning

intentions and refer to them at the end of the lesson. However, in most lessons, the small learning steps are not detailed or focused enough to help pupils learn effectively.

Since the last monitoring inspection, teachers have continued to receive training on using assessment information to match work to pupils' capabilities. Teachers now have higher expectations of pupils and the work in most lessons is more closely matched to pupils' capabilities and provides a greater degree of challenge. However, although the quality of teaching has improved, the majority of teaching is still no better than satisfactory and some inadequate teaching remains.

The quality of teachers' marking has improved greatly since the last inspection, especially in writing. Although a few inconsistencies remain, nearly all of the marking shows what pupils need to do to improve. In a few classes, pupils are given the opportunity to respond to the teachers' comments. Pupils say that teachers' marking is especially helpful when the written comments are followed up and explained through verbal feedback.

Teachers are now creating more opportunities for pupils to write freely and at length in subjects other than English. Examples were seen in pupils' books where the skills of report writing were reinforced very effectively through work in history and geography. However, in the history lessons observed, although opportunities were provided for pupils to write, the skills involved were not linked well enough to those learned in literacy lessons. Consequently, opportunities to reinforce recently learned literacy skills or extend them further were not taken. Some teachers are taking opportunities for pupils to undertake mathematical problem-solving, but gaps in pupils' basic mathematical skills due to previous inadequate teaching hinder their ability to undertake this successfully. Because of the drive to improve pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics, the senior leaders have decided not to focus on the development of information and communication technology in different subjects. Consequently, there has been no improvement in this area.

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

- Raise the quality of teaching to accelerate pupils' progress by raising teachers' expectations of pupils' learning – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders work together well and are building rapidly on the small improvements made before the first monitoring inspection. They have effectively communicated higher expectations to staff and are establishing a common vision throughout the school centred on the urgency to effect improvement. Using the skills they have recently developed, often through the support given by the local authority, senior leaders are now adding more rigour into school improvement. Monitoring information is now used more thoroughly and carefully to hold staff to

account for pupils' achievement and identify those pupils who are falling behind. Feedback to teachers following regular checks on teachers' planning, pupils' work and the quality of learning in lessons is helping teachers understand how to make learning more effective. Senior leaders know what they must do to improve the school and have detailed plans to effect the changes required. However, this accelerated impetus for improvement has not been sustained for long enough to have more than a satisfactory impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising pupils' achievement. A new Chair of the Governing Body and several new governors are now in place. Many governors are taking active roles in the life of the school through helping in classes, meeting with parents and undertaking joint lesson observations with the senior leaders. Through training, the governing body is gaining a detailed knowledge and understanding of how it can more effectively hold the school to account.

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

- Introduce rigour into the monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the school's work, and especially of teaching and learning – satisfactory

External support

The support and guidance provided by the local authority, particularly through the school improvement partner, has continued to be central to all improvements. The chair of governors and senior leaders say that they appreciate the training organised and the advice given by the local authority on all aspects of school improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no priorities for further improvement. The urgency is to increase the proportion of consistently good teaching and eradicate all teaching that is inadequate.