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7 April 2011

Mr C Mansell
Executive Headteacher
Newhall Community Junior School
Chesterfield Avenue
Newhall
Swadlincote
DE11 0TR

Dear Mr Mansell

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Newhall Community Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 5 April 2011, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are 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.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher.

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 Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Parker", written in a cursive style.

Christopher Parker
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Eradicate underachievement in all year groups and in English, mathematics and science by:
 - improving the profile of teaching and learning so that a significant proportion is good or better by January 2012 through raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - improving the use of assessment so that work is planned more effectively to meet the needs of all pupils and challenges all abilities
 - quickening the pace of learning in all lessons by improving the quality of teachers' questioning skills and making better use of time so that pupils can apply and practise their skills
 - ensuring that basic skills are taught progressively so that prior learning is built upon in order to accelerate progress.

- Improve behaviour so that all pupils have responsible and positive attitudes and learn effectively by:
 - fostering greater motivation in lessons by ensuring that learning is interactive, investigative and enjoyable through activities that develop pupils' independent and collaborative skills
 - increasing pupils' involvement in their learning through much clearer explanations of what is to be learned; using success criteria to measure progress; achieving greater consistency in the quality of feedback both orally and written so that pupils understand what they need to do to improve further and teachers are well informed to plan the next steps in learning
 - securing pupils' confidence in the school's ability to deal with their concerns and involving them more in how to improve the quality of teaching and learning
 - providing separate small group work for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with emotional, social and behavioral difficulties
 - providing training for lunchtime supervisors so that they are better able to deal with unacceptable behaviour.

- Strengthen the school's capacity for sustained improvement by:
 - appointing, in partnership with the local authority, a substantive headteacher as soon as possible
 - improving the rigour of self-evaluation and improvement planning through challenging, clear and measurable targets linked to behaviour and achievement
 - developing the role of senior and middle leaders so that they are fully accountable for raising pupils' achievement and improving their behaviour
 - developing the governing body's knowledge and understanding of provision and outcomes to enable it to effectively challenge leaders to secure improvement.

Special measures: monitoring of Newhall Community Junior School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 5 April 2011

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with groups of pupils, the executive and acting headteachers, the literacy leader, a representative of the local authority, and the chair and vice chair of governors.

Context

The school is working in a close partnership with Parkside Junior School. The executive headteacher, who is working closely with the acting headteacher, spends 2.5 days per week in each school. Two teachers have left the school and one is on long-term sick leave. A new chair and vice chair of governors have been elected.

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

Although considerable variations in the rate of pupils' progress remain, many pupils are making better progress than in the recent past. The work in pupils' books and the school's comprehensive analysis of the teachers' assessments show that the rate of progress in several classes has accelerated. This is because the senior leadership team has established higher expectations and is holding the teachers to account for the progress pupils make. Well-focused action plans have resulted, for example, in attractive displays in some classrooms that help the pupils to use a broader range of vocabulary and construct more interesting sentences in their writing. In mathematics, progress has accelerated in some classes because the teachers are matching work to the needs of pupils with different abilities with greater accuracy.

One teacher had observed a lesson, on a visit to Parkside Junior School, where the teacher had used a range of strategies to manage activities planned for groups of pupils of differing abilities. Seeing the benefits of this approach, she had implemented the same way of working with her own class and seen a surge in the progress of the more-able pupils. The pupils' positive approach to tackling probability problems and the progress they made during the lesson observed reflected this improvement.

Pupils now have more opportunities to develop their independent and collaborative skills, but these skills remain weak and occasionally restrict the impact of potentially interesting and beneficial activities, particularly in Years 3 and 4.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- eradicate underachievement in all year groups and in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Attitudes to learning are improving. Although not consistently positive, most older pupils settle quickly to the tasks they are set and concentrate well. Younger pupils find it harder to concentrate, particularly when they are not absolutely clear about what is expected of them.

Teachers are beginning to foster greater motivation in lessons. The pupils say they enjoy the greater variety in lessons that has developed over the last few months. For example, Year 3 pupils particularly enjoyed the stimulus of a film clip used at the start of a writing lesson. Similarly, pupils in a Year 5 English lesson responded very positively to a brief drama activity in preparation for writing a persuasive letter. However, some pupils are restless where activities are more mundane.

Greater motivation in lessons is helping the drive to improve behaviour, and rapid improvement has been achieved through robust action to establish high expectations of behaviour and a firm stance that persistent misbehaviour will not be tolerated. Clear procedures now set out exactly how to manage and quickly deal with poor behaviour when it occurs. In addition, a weekly behaviour focus and positive rewards for good behaviour are all paying dividends. The pupils say that behaviour is 'much better' in lessons but they would like to see further improvement to eradicate disruptions altogether. The playground now has zones for different activities and age groups, and pupils have access to a broad range of play equipment. The pupils say that behaviour on the playground is much improved and they feel much happier during playtimes and lunchtimes.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- improve behaviour so that all pupils have responsible and positive attitudes and learn effectively – good.

The effectiveness of provision

Although some inadequate teaching remains, the profile of teaching has improved. Many of the teachers have benefited from the training and support provided by local authority consultants and advanced skills teachers from Parkside Junior School. In many lessons, pupils know what they are expected to learn and make steady progress towards the targets set for them. In one lesson observed in Year 6, success criteria were used particularly well to maintain a consistent focus on improving writing. However, in a few lessons work is not matched well enough to what the pupils need to learn next. The teachers are keen to maintain a brisk pace to lessons but sometimes this is at the expense of ensuring that the pupils are clear about what is expected of them. Occasionally, the pace of learning slows unacceptably because the teacher talks for too long, reducing the time available to the pupils to practise and develop their skills.

Training to improve questioning in lessons is beginning to have an impact but its use towards the end of lessons to assess the extent of pupils' understanding remains very inconsistent. Marking, although undertaken diligently, is similarly inconsistent although some examples are helping the pupils to improve their work. It has the greatest impact on pupils' progress where the lesson begins with a review of the marking of their last piece of work and pupils are given time to respond. However, links between pupils' targets, success criteria and marking are not securely established.

The school is starting to take greater account of the pupils' views. The school council has been re-established and now meets fortnightly, and a survey of the pupils' perceptions of improvements was recently carried out. Two behaviour assistants have been appointed, and pupils see them as playing a key role in supporting the small minority of pupils who occasionally disrupt learning to manage their own behaviour. Midday supervisors have received training and are better equipped to manage the new playground arrangements.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive headteacher and the acting headteacher have established a secure foundation for further improvement. By robustly tackling poor behaviour they have generated greater confidence among staff, pupils and their parents and carers that the shortcomings in the school's performance can be tackled quickly and successfully. A survey of parents' and carers' views shows that many feel there have been improvements over the last few months.

The executive headteacher and acting headteacher are also determined to improve the quality of teaching. The comprehensive action plan underpins a broad range of support provided by the local authority and by Parkside Junior School which is not only improving the teachers' skills, but also generating a shared desire to improve rapidly. Monitoring of the quality of teaching is clearly identifying the steps that need to be taken by each teacher to ensure the pupils are making faster progress in lessons. However, middle leaders are not playing a sufficiently central role in improvement activities to strengthen the capacity for sustained improvement at all levels.

The governing body is now better placed to both support and challenge the school. An audit of the governors' skills and knowledge has resulted in the governing body committees being re-formed with personnel who are better suited to the tasks being faced. The committees now have a much sharper focus on areas that require improvement. The governing body is receiving a broad range of clearly presented information about the school's performance and it has comprehensive plans for governors to visit the school to find out, for themselves, how successful it is in bringing improvements. The governing body has taken appropriate steps to appoint a substantive headteacher and interviews are to be held within the next few days so that a new headteacher will be in place for the start of the next academic year.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- strengthen the school's capacity for sustained improvement – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority statement of action fulfils requirements. Working in tandem, the local authority and Parkside Junior School are providing a broad and effective range of support that has contributed strongly to the secure start made by the school in tackling the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. The executive headteacher has played a pivotal role in targeting training to tackle specific areas of development, and in tailoring the support of advanced skills teachers to the particular needs of individual members of the school staff.