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30 June 2011

Mrs P Dosanjh
Acting Headteacher
Alvaston Junior School
Elvaston Lane
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Derby
DE24 0PU

Dear Mrs Dosanjh

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Alvaston Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 28–29 June 2011, with Bob Roberts, additional inspector, 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 fourth 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 – 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 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 28–29 June 2011

Evidence

The inspector 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

After a period of absence through illness, the headteacher resigned her post with effect from the end of March 2011. The deputy headteacher remains as acting headteacher until a new substantive headteacher is appointed. The three teachers who were on long-term absence through illness at the time of the last monitoring inspection have now returned to school. Two teachers have resigned and will leave at the end of this summer term.

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

Pupils say that their enjoyment of learning has risen over the past year because most lessons are more exciting and motivating. They are displaying greater independence in their learning and showing a developing maturity in wanting to improve the quality of their work. The school's tracking systems and analysis of pupils' work confirm that pupils' progress continues to improve. More pupils than at the time of the last monitoring inspection are working at age-related expectations and pupils' attainment in most year groups is now close to average in reading, writing and mathematics. However, due to previous inadequate teaching, a minority of pupils in Year 6 are still not attaining the levels expected for their age, and few pupils are exceeding them. Lesson observations show that pupils' learning overall is better than at the time of the last monitoring inspection but, in a few lessons, it is inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning, try to do their best and are eager to improve their skills and knowledge. They are polite and courteous to visitors and eager to talk about their work. Relationships are positive and pupils clearly trust and respect the adults who work with them each day. In lessons, behaviour is usually good. However, there continue to be a few instances of undisciplined behaviour around school over the lunchtime period.

The effectiveness of provision

The hard work by leaders to improve the quality of teaching is evident in improved practice in many classes. Most teachers have a better understanding of the main features of good quality teaching. A greater proportion of teaching is now good and, occasionally, it is outstanding. However, there continues to be some teaching that is inadequate. This is because, due to long-term absence through illness, some teachers have not been able to access all of the training and support available to other teachers.

Most teachers have a greater understanding of how to assess pupils' work against National Curriculum levels and are more aware of the knowledge, skills and understanding that are expected for pupils of a certain age. Most teachers' expectations are higher and assessment information is used more rigorously to match work to pupils' needs. In all classes, effective class management and strong relationships between adults and pupils ensure that lessons are calm and orderly. Teachers' marking usually provides pupils with clear points for improvement and, in some classes, opportunities are provided for pupils to use the marking to improve their work. However, this is inconsistent.

Since the last monitoring inspection, the school has worked hard to improve teachers' understanding of the need to focus their planning on what they want the pupils to learn in lessons and not merely on the activities that pupils are expected to complete. In some lessons observed, there were noticeable improvements. However, this is still not fully embedded, and in many lessons, there is not enough focus on improving pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.

Teachers' planning, lesson observations and work in pupils' books show that pupils are now given many more opportunities to write freely and at length in English lessons and other subjects. During the inspection, pupils effectively reinforced their learning of how to write a biography through studying and writing about the life and influence of John Lennon as part of their work in history. More opportunities are provided for pupils to practise their mathematical skills to solve real-life problems in mathematics lessons and in subjects such as science. Staff have received training on how information and communication technology (ICT) can be used more effectively to promote pupils' learning. This was seen during the monitoring inspection through the effective use of film clips to stimulate pupils' imagination about life in the trenches during the First World War.

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

All leaders and nearly all teachers have a strong commitment to improve provision and raise pupils' achievement. The leadership team continues to refine the school's systems for monitoring and evaluating all major aspects of the school's provision and outcomes for pupils. The quality of pupils' work is checked regularly and systematically, and the accuracy of teachers' assessments is monitored carefully. Teachers are held to account for pupils' progress through meetings with the acting headteacher and other senior leaders. The school has recently improved the format for lesson observations, which now show much more clearly the link between the teacher's actions and the quality of pupils' learning. However, lesson observations are not evaluating sharply enough how effectively teachers are focusing on pupils' learning in lessons and building upon their prior knowledge, skills and understanding.

The analysis of pupils' progress data continues to improve. However, it is not evaluated rigorously enough to show the progress made by all groups of pupils or the effect of new initiatives and interventions on pupils' achievement. The governing body continues to play an increasingly important role in monitoring many aspects of the school. The curriculum and standards committee receives the school's monitoring information and challenges the acting headteacher about pupils' progress much more effectively. The Chair of the Governing Body visits the school regularly, hears pupils read and attends some staff meetings and meetings with parents and carers. The governing body has analysed questionnaires completed by pupils and parents and carers, and is beginning to look further into their responses.

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 local authority School Improvement Partner continues to provide very clear guidance to senior leaders and the governing body. She is correctly allowing the senior leaders to take greater responsibility for taking strategic decisions and improving the way in which the school's effectiveness is monitored and evaluated. The school's advisory headteacher provides effective support for senior leaders.

Priorities for further improvement

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