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28 September 2011

Mr J Dreher
Headteacher
Doxey Primary School
Marsland Road
Stafford
Staffordshire
ST16 1EG

Dear Mr Dreher

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Doxey Primary School

Following my visit with Daniel Holborn, Additional Inspector, to your school on 27 and 28 September 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 March 2011. 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 – inadequate

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 Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2011

- Increase rates of pupils' learning and progress so that attainment in English and mathematics are at least in line with national averages at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2, by:
 - developing pupils' skills as independent learners
 - focusing closely on the development of pupils' skills as writers from an early age and ensuring that pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 have regular opportunities to write at length in all subjects
 - reviewing arrangements for the grouping of pupils in mathematics in Years 3 to 6 and ensuring effective systems for monitoring coverage of the curriculum.
- Raise the quality of teaching and learning so that by March 2012, the majority of lessons are good or better, by:
 - ensuring that teachers set clear, challenging targets for pupils of different levels of ability to achieve, based on the skills to be developed
 - providing more challenging, open-ended activities in place of limited photocopied worksheets, to promote pupils' thinking skills
 - ensuring that teachers' marking of pupils' work provides clear targets to be achieved, and that teachers check on pupils' response to their marking.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management on pupils' achievement by:
 - sharpening the skills of leaders and managers in self-evaluation
 - providing greater rigour in the way leaders and managers monitor the school's performance, so that actions taken will bring about sustainable improvements in the quality of provision.

Special measures: monitoring of Doxey Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 27 and 28 September 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, the Chair and vice chair of the Governing Body and representatives from the local authority. A number of joint lesson observations were completed with the headteacher.

Context

When the school was judged to require special measures, it was in the midst of a large building project that is now fully complete and operational. Since the previous inspection, two teachers have left the school and two teachers have joined, including a new deputy headteacher.

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

Inspection evidence and the school's own data show that there is still significant underachievement in reading, writing and mathematics throughout the school. Pupils' attainment at the end of both key stages is not significantly better than at the time of the previous inspection, apart from a small increase in the proportion of pupils reaching expected levels in the end of Key Stage 2 national tests.

The school has introduced programmes to improve pupils' progress, including those for early reading (phonics), guided reading and writing. Teachers do not implement these programmes systematically or effectively across the whole school. Often pupils are left to complete their work independently with no check on their progress through the activity or on the quality of completed work; this most evident in the guided reading sessions.

The school has reviewed its arrangements for grouping pupils for mathematics and has returned to single-age classes. Inspection evidence shows that all pupils in three separate year groups were asked to complete identical tasks with the same level of difficulty. Therefore, leaders have not tackled the issue of setting work at the correct level or ensuring that there is continuity and progression in pupils' learning. Basic weaknesses in pupils' calculation skills remain. Progress in mathematics is slow because pupils are not confident with the use of technical vocabulary, as teachers do not model this appropriately or accurately.

Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, tracking of the pupils' progress and monitoring by senior leaders mean that attainment is not improving fast enough.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- increase rates of pupils' learning and progress so that attainment in English and mathematics are at least in line with national averages at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 – inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The school has maintained its caring ethos. The climate for learning has improved since the previous inspection. It is supported appropriately by useful classroom displays that reinforce pupils' targets. Behaviour in classes and around the school generally is orderly and considerate. Pupils collaborate well in pairs and small groups and are willing to help others when they encounter difficulties.

The effectiveness of provision

Weaknesses in teaching highlighted at the previous inspection persist. The school's target of '100% satisfactory with 55% good or better lessons' has not been reached and there is still too much teaching that is inadequate. Although some features of teaching have improved, these are not yet substantial or consistent enough to have brought about significant improvements in pupils' progress. The most common limitations observed were in planning: too often plans described activities rather than charting the development of knowledge, skills and understanding. Most plans failed to identify exactly what the pupils were going to learn, how they were going to achieve it, and what they would be able to do to demonstrate that they had learned effectively. Teachers fail to assess pupils' progress during lessons carefully enough to enable them to plan for the next steps in pupils' learning.

Strategies to raise attainment in writing and mathematics have been a focus since the previous inspection. They include a sharper focus on the development of key skills, an increased emphasis on grammar and punctuation, and increased opportunities for extended or independent writing. The impact of such strategies is limited because teachers' marking is ineffective as they do not correctly identify errors in pupils' writing. Pupils are now required to complete corrections but a further check is not made to ensure that these have been completed accurately and therefore serves no purpose. Marking is not related to the pupils' targets. Pupils are not given an opportunity to improve their writing by re-drafting based on detailed advice on how to secure a higher level. Consequently, numerous examples of untidy work, poor handwriting, incorrect application of basic grammar and punctuation remain. These shortcomings, coupled with teachers' weak subject knowledge in phonics, reading, writing and mathematics mean that the school is not systemically addressing the deep-seated weaknesses in most pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding and thereby failing to raise standards more rapidly.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- raise the quality of teaching and learning so that by March 2012, the majority of lessons are good or better – inadequate.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The Chair and vice chair of the Governing Body have a good grasp of the need for urgent improvement as well as the need to build a sustainable effective school and to ensure that aspirations are high for all pupils. Nonetheless, scrutiny of the available minutes of governing body meetings, since the school was placed in special measures, shows little focus on the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted, or the progress the school is making in tackling them. Members of the senior leadership team or governing body have had no responsibility for leading on specific aspects of the key areas for improvement.

The school's self-evaluation is too generous as it focuses on what the school is doing, rather than assessing and analysing the impact of interventions on learning and other outcomes for pupils. The school's improvement plan does not include crisp, measurable outcomes for pupils as indicators of the success of the planned actions. Leaders fail to monitor the quality of lessons frequently or rigorously enough to provide palpable evidence that the intended benefits arising from professional development activities or new initiatives are implemented successfully into everyday classroom practice. Consequently, leaders have not been able to demonstrate sufficient capacity for sustained improvement against its action plan.

Pupils' progress is tracked regularly. A comprehensive tracking system charts the progress made by classes and groups of pupils. However, the system does not track pupils' progress from the previous key stage and therefore fails to pick up underachievement quickly enough. Therefore, leaders do not have a secure overview of attainment and progress in all classes and are consequently unable to hold teachers to account for pupils' progress.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- improve the impact of leadership and management on pupils' achievement – inadequate.

External support

The local authority has provided a satisfactory level of support for the school and has arranged some useful consultancy, for example, in English and mathematics, to help it move forward.

The local authority has prepared suitable action plan and is implementing this. So far, the impact of this is very limited and there is a long way to go to fully address some deep-seated problems in the school. A number of improvement plans for the school exist. To eliminate duplication and overlap there is a need to collate and simplify these various plans and to have clarity about the next steps the school needs to take. The school's progress has been monitored through core group meetings. However, opportunities for the local authority to gather direct evidence through whole-school reviews need to be more frequent in order to secure decisive intervention where progress is not good enough. Lack of continuity of key personnel is a significant barrier to improvement. The school's leaders and partners must work as a cohesive team to establish a greater shared sense of urgency for improvement.