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25 April 2012

Ms J Baker
Headteacher
Doxey Primary and Nursery School
Doxey Road
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Stafford
ST16 1EG

Dear Ms Baker

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Doxey Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 24–25 April 2012, 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 3 March 2011. 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 – good.

One newly qualified teacher may be appointed in Year 5 with the prior agreement of HMI.

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 and Nursery School third monitoring inspection on 24–25 April 2012

Evidence

HMI observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of staff, two governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and representatives from the local authority. A number of joint lesson observations were completed with the headteacher and two subject leaders.

Context

The governing body has appointed a permanent headteacher with effect from March 2012 and it is in the process of recruiting a permanent deputy headteacher for September 2012. The school currently has three teachers on fixed-term contracts covering maternity leave and ill health.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Since the previous monitoring visit, the quality of pupils' learning has improved because teaching and assessment for learning have become more focused. Scrutiny of the most recent school assessment data indicate that almost all pupils are making accelerated progress and a greater proportion of pupils are working at age-related expectations. However, some weaknesses remain. Children in Reception do not make the progress of which they are capable because of the variability in the quality of teaching.

Although showing signs of improvement, writing remains the weakest area. School data show that pupils in Year 6 are currently one year behind their peers nationally. The quality of pupils' handwriting is variable across the school. The lack of the use of a continuous cursive script hampers pupils' ability to write fluently and neatly because letters and words are not formed correctly and teachers do not consistently model the school 'house style'. The school has recently introduced a systematic programme to teach writing but it is too soon to judge its impact.

The school has made great strides in improving pupils' achievement in mathematics since my previous visit. Teachers are now using increasingly effective strategies when teaching mathematics. Pupils now have a better understanding of place value and they are developing their skills in solving one- and two-step problems and in solving opened-ended investigations.

Similarly, the improvement in pupils' attainment and progress in reading is equally pleasing, particularly in Key Stage 1. Increasingly effective work to support pupils with poor reading levels, including the emphasis on the sounds that letters make (phonics), have enabled pupils to make accelerated progress and to improve their levels of fluency and comprehension when reading. Consequently, the gap between pupils' attainment and progress in reading and the attainment of their peers nationally is closing.

In lessons, pupils are keen to take responsibility for their own learning. They work well together. Strategies such as working in pairs and group discussions are used well to enable pupils to assess their own understanding of what they have learnt. In the best lessons, pupils are encouraged to self-evaluate and identify their strengths and areas for improvement in relation to the work set. These new initiatives are having good impact in raising pupils' expectations of how well they can achieve.

Progress since the last monitoring 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 – satisfactory.

The quality of teaching

There is a significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since the previous monitoring visit. Expectations about what pupils can achieve in lessons have been raised. Most teachers clearly identify the learning intentions, context and success criteria in their lesson plans and use these well to assess pupils' learning during the lesson. Consequently, pupils are more engaged in their learning and have an improved understanding of what they have to do to succeed and move their learning forward. The precise lesson structure ensures that most teachers strike the correct balance between pupils listening and working.

Teachers are becoming much more adept at assessing pupils' learning through each stage of the lesson. The best plenary sessions are, consequently, brisk and purposeful because teachers pull together what the pupils have learned. They assess, through skilful questioning, what pupils struggled to understand and provide immediate targeted support. Other improvements include the use of more open questions to improve pupils thinking skills, with pupils expected to give a detailed explanation for their answer, and a reduction in the use of worksheets.

Marking has improved. In some classes, such as in Years 5 and 6, marking is good. Here, it provides pupils with the specific guidance they need to improve their work, errors are corrected and pupils are given the opportunity to self-evaluate their work and identify their own targets for improvements.

Notwithstanding the improvements outlined above, inadequate teaching has not been eradicated. This is because, in a few cases, teachers have weak knowledge of the subject or aspect of the curriculum they are teaching. This is particularly evident in the Reception Year, where the activities set for children do not meet their needs and, therefore, children do not make the progress of which they are capable.

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

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

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour continues to improve in lessons as a result of improved teaching. The vast majority of pupils behave sensibly around the school and are friendly, both to adults and to each other. There are a few examples of boisterous behaviour during break and lunchtimes but nothing that causes pupils to feel unsafe in school. The headteacher is aware of a rise in the number of prejudice-based incidents and she has taken steps to provide training for staff and lessons for pupils on race and diversity. Attendance is currently in line with the national average. Routine scrutiny of documentation during the monitoring visit revealed that some of the first aid procedures were not robust enough.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The many well-devised strategies that have brought about an improvement in pupils' progress can be directly attributed to the sustained and substantial professional development teachers have received from the two National Teaching Schools. Opportunities for teachers to observe outstanding teaching are improving the planning of their lessons and the development of a variety of more challenging activities for pupils. Teachers have received intensive and effective training in the teaching of writing, mathematics and phonics. They are now willing to change their practice because of these professional development opportunities. They are more reflective and evaluative in their practice, and this is fostering a culture of self-improvement.

The management of teaching and learning has been strengthened considerably. The headteacher maintains a cumulative record of lesson observations, detailing the strengths of each teacher and areas for development. Her assessment of teaching and learning is accurate. School leaders hold staff to account for rates of pupils' progress. Teachers produce and implement action plans in response to pupil progress meetings, which are contributing to improved provision.

Monitoring activity has been carefully coordinated since the previous visit so that middle leaders review more systematically the school's provision and pupils' progress. This has given them confidence in their leadership roles. Their evaluation

of the impact of planned actions is generally accurate, but summative analysis is still not sufficiently incisive or rigorous. For example, the action plan in English has targets such as 'continue to deliver the guided reading sessions'. The intended outcomes do not refer to measurable targets for improving pupils' attainment.

Members of the governing body are developing their skills to enable them to understand the pupils' achievement data provided by the school. Discussion with governors confirms that the governing body is challenging the information presented to it by the school in relation to the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.

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

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

External support

The local authority continues to provide appropriate support through its advisers and local partner schools. Monitoring of the school's performance by the local authority is rigorous and accurate. The governing body benefited from training on understanding and interpreting data so that it can ensure stronger governance of the school.