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18 October 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 17–18 October 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 fourth 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 – satisfactory.

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 and Nursery School fourth monitoring inspection on 17–18 October 2012

Evidence

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

Context

The governing body has appointed a permanent deputy and an assistant headteacher with effect from September 2012. The school currently has two teachers on fixed-term contracts covering the work of staff on family leave.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The rise in pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics across the school, evident in the previous monitoring visit, continues for most groups of pupils. Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are inching their way towards being in line with those found in other schools nationally, with the most improvement in pupils' reading. Provisional results in the 2012 end of Year 6 tests, based on the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level (Level 4), improved well in reading and writing but to a lesser extent in mathematics. The results for both Years 2 and 6 show that pupils made faster progress than that made by pupils in 2011 and reflect the improvements the school have made in the quality of teaching. However, there are too few opportunities for the pupils in Years 5 and 6 who are already at Level 5 to tackle much harder work, such as trying some aspects of Level 6 work in reading and mathematics. Information is available in school to show the improved progress made by different groups of pupils in other year groups. This information shows that far more pupils are reaching the expected level for their age and that some are doing better than this.

Pupils who find learning difficult, including those supported at school action plus, are beginning to make the progress that they should. This is because work is now set at the right level for them and the systems for identifying their needs and providing the right support for them have improved. Pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals do not do as well as other pupils in the school. The school is currently investigating the best way to support these pupils in making more rapid progress, so that they too begin to reach the same standards as pupils in other schools nationally.

Pupils' current progress in lessons is variable. While good in many lessons across the school, it is still too slow in some, particularly in mathematics. Pupils' progress has been inhibited, to some extent, by the fact that the current Year 3 had many changes of teacher during last year. Work in pupils' books in Year 2 this term shows that most are making rapid improvement and are developing a sound understanding of number. They add and subtract numbers within 100 successfully, though those who find learning difficult work more confidently with numbers to 20. Similarly, as pupils move through the school, their understanding of how numbers work is beginning to build steadily from year to year. Stronger teaching of mental approaches to mathematics provides pupils with more interesting and harder activities that improve their ability to manipulate numbers quickly and efficiently. Few opportunities exist to reinforce their mathematical skills in other subjects.

The good improvement in pupils' progress in reading owes much to the well-taught daily phonic sessions that provide short periods of highly focused teaching. Younger pupils have an increasingly secure understanding of letters and sounds and are becoming more confident in applying their knowledge when reading unfamiliar words. Similarly, pupils' increasing progress in writing is a direct result of highly structured and well-planned activities to reinforce and improve their basic punctuation and sentence construction. These opportunities enable pupils to write increasingly structured pieces of work. As pupils move through the school, teachers successfully encourage them to express their ideas and to increasingly select words carefully for their effect. A consistent approach to the teaching of handwriting has led to better presentation, including the use of a fluent, joined handwriting style. Teachers now provide two opportunities per week for pupils to use their writing skills to support their learning in other subjects. For example, pupils write up science investigations in their own words.

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

Three teachers joined in September; while some are effective, others need considerable support and guidance. Although the proportion of good teaching observed was greater than at the last visit, the quality of teaching and learning varies greatly. There are still pockets of inadequate teaching. Here, teachers do not set work for pupils at the correct level because they do not have good enough understanding of the subjects they teach, particularly in mathematics, and so they introduce misconceptions. This means that pupils' mistakes are not identified and corrected. Leaders have stressed to teachers that pupils should be clear from the beginning of the lesson about what they should learn and know at the end of the lesson what they have learned. While teachers abide by this instruction, the way in

which it is followed is sometimes too mechanical or lacking in clarity to be useful and, therefore, teachers cannot check pupils' understanding well enough throughout the lesson. This is particularly the case not only in mathematics but also in other subjects including history, geography, and design and technology.

Teachers in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 get the best out of pupils. Effective teaching happens when teachers: have a good understanding of the subjects they teach; allow enough time in lessons to sum up and reinforce what pupils have learned; provide extra activities to those pupils who are at risk of falling behind; ensure that there is a balance between the teacher talking to the whole class and working with groups and individuals; set work at the right level for most groups of pupils; and make good use of meetings to discuss the progress of individual pupils with headteacher and other senior members of staff. Other strengths in teaching include: focused and accurate marking of pupils' work; teachers using questions well to establish how well pupils understand new material; and focused and effective marking of pupils' work. This is particularly effective in Year 4 because the teacher makes use of every opportunity to check pupils' understanding and progress at key points during the lesson.

Teaching has improved significantly in the Early Years Foundation Stage since the previous monitoring visit. Staff have a better understanding of how young children learn. Teachers increasingly plan work that is at the right level for children of this age group. Classrooms are now better organised and the activities set for the children capture their interest. Teachers now plan appropriately to support the work of other adults who work alongside the children. All adults are supported to ask questions that develop appropriately the children's early reading, writing and mathematical skills.

The identification of pupils who find learning difficult is becoming better organised. Teachers have recognised that slow progress is due to inadequate teaching, past or present, rather than pupils' specific difficulties. As a result, the numbers of pupils identified as having special educational needs has reduced significantly. Teaching for those pupils who find learning difficult has improved because teachers have a better understanding of pupils' difficulties. Other adults who provide additional support to pupils have benefited from good quality training to ask the right questions and know when to give pupils harder work.

Information from pupils' learning in books and from tests is used well to set targets for improvement in reading, writing and mathematics, but this does not happen in other subjects. Also, teachers do not set work of the right level in some subjects such as history or geography, particularly for those that find learning easy.

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 – satisfactory.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour continues to improve in lessons as a result of improved teaching. A clear behaviour policy is in place and consistently applied by all staff. Procedures for monitoring and eliminating deliberately hurtful or oppressive behaviour, including bullying, are developing well. Pupils increasingly understand the importance of listening to the views of others and appreciate how their actions can affect other people. They can explain why there needs to be rules based on safety, protection and fairness and, as a result, they follow the school's code of conduct without any fuss. Pupils in Year 5 and 6 speak well of their recent popular and successful residential trip to promote pupils' leadership skills. A number of pupils in Year 5 have started the Young Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme; other pupils are taking an active part in the school council, all of which are encouraging pupils to take an active part in all that school has to offer.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher is ambitious for change and continues to develop an increasingly effective role in driving improvements. The sharp focus on improving the quality of teaching and on increasing pupils' progress is paying dividends in the rising standards in reading, writing and mathematics evident throughout the school. However, the impact of this has been lessened because some of the new staff have needed support in settling into school routines and in meeting expectations.

Some of the new senior leaders lack the skills needed to bring about rapid improvement in the quality of teaching and in speeding up pupils' progress; they are having limited impact and are unable to give other staff enough support. Improvement plans, including subject-specific action plans, lack sharpness and clarity; targets are too vague and general, and are often not measurable.

Procedures to monitor the work of the school and the performance of teachers are well established and reflect up-to-date national guidance; they are used appropriately to improve the skills of individual teachers. Teachers have received intensive and effective training in the teaching of writing, mathematics and phonics. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved significantly in these key subjects. The leadership of the development of early reading skill is effective, and has directly led to an improvement in the teaching of reading across the school. Similarly, the leadership of English is a developing strength, with good quality training provided to improve teachers' knowledge of how to teach punctuation and grammar.

Other improvements include the identification of, and assessment procedures to support, those pupils at the risk of falling behind, those who have additional needs or those supported at school action plus. Procedures are clear, understood by most staff and are increasingly effective. Teachers work with the acting special educational needs coordinator to review these pupils' progress in order to set the

next small steps that will help them to catch up on their learning. However, not all adults are willing to implement the new systems and procedures and this is holding back the progress of pupils in some year groups.

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

The governing body is becoming increasingly involved in shaping the strategic direction of the school, but its members are less involved with improvement planning. Similarly, there are areas where the governing body does not fulfil its statutory duties or check that school meets its statutory requirements in all aspects of its work. For example, governors are insufficiently aware of how the additional money awarded for pupils at risk of not performing well (the pupil premium) is being used to speed up their progress. In addition, some written material requires updating and certain procedures to check on the work of the school are not place.

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

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

External support

The local authority continues to provide appropriate support through its advisers and local partner schools. This support is still required to improve the quality of leadership and management, particularly with those with leadership responsibilities who are new to the school.