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Mrs J Boaler
Headteacher
Thorne Moorends West Road Primary School
West Road
Moorends
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN8 4LH

Dear Mrs Boaler

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF THORNE MOORENDS WEST ROAD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Linda Murphy and Ross Parker, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 10 and 11 July, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in January 2007.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, visited lessons and two assemblies, and scrutinised documents and samples of pupils' work. Meetings were held with the acting headteacher, a group of teaching and non-teaching staff, and pupils. Discussions also took place with the vice-chair of governors, a representative from the local authority and the senior managers seconded to the school.

Context

The school has experienced significant turbulence in staffing over the past 18 months. For a year before the school became subject to special measures, the headteacher was absent through ill health. To cover his absence, the deputy headteacher was appointed acting headteacher. The substantive headteacher never returned and subsequently retired. Governors decided that the acting headteacher

should continue in her role until the end of the summer term, because the headteacher designate was unable to take up her post immediately. Governors and the local authority decided to second an associate headteacher to support the acting headteacher. Then the acting headteacher became ill and was absent for an extended period, during which time governors installed a consultant headteacher. While this was going on a significant number of staff, including almost all of the middle leaders, were absent, and temporary supply staff covered their respective teaching roles. The acting headteacher returned to school a few days before this inspection. Following lengthy absence, a number of the school staff have also returned to work. The local authority judges that there is no scope for closure of this school at this time.

Achievement and standards

Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are well below average. During the Foundation Stage children get off to a good start and make good progress, although standards remain below average overall. By the time pupils reach the end of Key Stage 1 standards and achievement have slipped, and outcomes are poor for the majority of pupils. This is particularly true of pupils' performance in reading and writing, which shows a three-year falling trend. At Key Stage 2 the underperformance continues, and in 2006 pupils' progress in English was also inadequate. The latest available data represented by the provisional 2007 national results show a similar pattern of underachievement, with pupils failing to hit any of the English, science or mathematics targets. Scrutiny of the school's in-year data reveals an inconsistent picture of progress, within and across year groups. Some pupils are broadly on track to meet their individual targets, while for others there has been minimal progress.

Some staff do not recognise what represents satisfactory progress and, as a result, their aspirations for pupils are not high enough. In addition, there is inconsistency in the implementation of the school's assessment policy. The school has begun to introduce targeted support for specified groups, with some initial success. For example, additional support for pupils with dyslexia has led to an increase in the pupils' reading ages of two years, over a three-month period. However, all teachers are not yet at the stage where they systematically and reliably measure and record what pupils know and can do, and then use that information to plan the next stage of their learning. New tracking and assessment procedures have not been in place long enough to show real impact on raising pupils' achievement and standards across the school.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- Drive up standards – inadequate

Personal development and well-being

In the Foundation Stage, children have good opportunities to discuss their work, to collaborate and to show independence within the secure and stimulating environment. Across the school, the majority of pupils cooperate with staff and do their best to please them. However, pupils complain that some misbehaviour in lessons undermines the effectiveness of some teachers and slows learning. Pupils enjoy school; they feel safe and are confident that the adults look after them well. The level of exclusions highlighted in the last report has reduced significantly. Intensive activity to emphasise the importance of good attendance has had a good impact on pupils, and attendance levels have improved, though the school has not met the target set by the local authority.

Support for pupils' future economic well-being is currently limited by low standards in basic skills and the incomplete teaching team, which constrains opportunities for successful collaboration and independence. The lack of equipment for pupils at break time results in a limited range of play activities. Otherwise, pupils are developing a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Assemblies offer good opportunities for reflection and the consideration of spiritual and moral issues, while the curriculum provides pupils with a number of opportunities to learn about different cultures.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- Improve attendance – satisfactory

Quality of provision

Teaching in the Foundation Stage remains good despite the incomplete team. Teachers and support assistants are very clear about their roles. They provide interesting opportunities for children to collaborate, to practise their speaking and listening and to develop appropriate levels of independence.

Elsewhere the quality of teaching remains too inconsistent, with some very good teaching, but also teaching that is not good enough. Unfortunately, not all permanent staff have benefited from the additional training and support because of their absence. The lack of continuity in staffing is also affecting progress, with some classes experiencing six different teachers over the past term. Pupils reported that often this led to conflicting messages in terms of expectations over behaviour, assessment practice and approaches to learning. On occasions pupils were required to repeat work they had done before with another teacher. Overall, teachers work to create good relationships, but this is difficult in some classes where a number of pupils misbehave. This slows progress and reduces the level of challenge because it makes the teachers fall back on slower and safer methods to ensure that the class is orderly. Higher-attaining pupils complain that they are missing out because those who cannot cope and those who misbehave are monopolising the adults' attention in these lessons. The inconsistency also shows in the quality of pupils' work over time,

and in the quality of marking and feedback. In some cases, pupils' work had not been marked effectively, and this had resulted in erratic progress, a loss of focus on individual learning goals and a lack of clarity about how to improve. A good programme of intensive support undertaken by teaching assistants is proving effective for a group of pupils who have fallen behind in their basic skills, although the deployment of teaching assistants generally was not always suitable, because they did not have a clear enough role.

Despite the school's efforts there is a discrepancy between curriculum planning and curriculum practice. The absence of a curriculum coordinator exacerbates the situation. Inconsistency in planning means that not all groups receive appropriate levels of challenge. For example, lesson plans do not link directly to the individual education plans of the pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. As a result, at the beginnings of lessons in particular, these pupils do not always get the extra help they need to enable them to participate fully in the learning. Current timetabling arrangements and some poor timekeeping between lessons do not ensure that each class has a fair balance of time given to each subject. This is the case in literacy, for example, and results, in some cases, in wasted time and unfinished work. Classes in Years 2 and 3 receive only 45 minutes instead of one hour of literacy for four out of the five days. In addition, different classes in the same year groups are adopting different ways of working. For example, while some classes have discrete extended writing sessions, other classes incorporate this aspect within a cross-curricular session.

A sound range of strategies is being better focused on the needs of some groups, but the more able pupils see injustice in resources being skewed to the lower attainers while those who learn quickly or with special gifts and talents are often left to work independently. There is discrete time set aside for pupils to extend their writing and for teachers to guide pupils' reading. Teachers have received training on how to teach reading, although it is too early to see the full impact on all pupils' progress.

The school has been without an inclusion manager for some time. A teaching assistant has recently taken on responsibility for the administration of the arrangements for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and she has revised the individual education plans to allow pupils to be involved in setting their own targets. However, these targets are not precise enough to promote rapid progress.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils of all capabilities are fully challenged and understand how to improve their work – inadequate
- Improve curricular arrangements for literacy and the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities – inadequate

Leadership and management

The school's temporary senior management, with the support of the local authority, has set a clear agenda for tackling the areas for improvement. They have secured the support of staff, and have developed a common sense of purpose in the school, with an increasing recognition of the role each person has to play in the improvement process. Senior managers are working effectively as a team, and are ensuring that the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. These senior leaders have been proactive and have introduced a number of improvement strategies, including a programme of training and support for staff and specific intervention for underachieving groups.

However, the capacity of leadership at all levels remains compromised because none of the newly appointed middle leaders is currently working in the school. There are also concerns over the burden on the acting headteacher, who has assumed a number of additional roles in the absence of a literacy coordinator, an inclusion manager, a curriculum coordinator and an assessment manager. Clearly, this is not sustainable.

Although the school has acted swiftly to support senior management and stop the regression in Year 6, the situation elsewhere has remained fragile. Pupils reported that they had between four and six different teachers over the term, with staff absences and the use of supply staff still prevalent across the school. This ongoing instability in staffing has meant that staff do not always adhere to the school's protocols for assessment, teaching, learning, and managing behaviour. This is reducing the overall quality of provision.

The school has made several appointments so that by September 2007 there will be a full complement of permanent teachers, with the exception of one middle manager post which the school is yet to fill. However, at present the instability reported at the time of the last inspection largely remains. A third of the teachers are temporary; from September, nearly half the staff will be new. It will be critical to future progress that a stable position is established and that the new staffing arrangements are effective, allowing new procedures become embedded. Governors are committed to and supportive of the school.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- Establish stable staffing arrangements – inadequate

External support

The local authority is providing a good level of support to the school. As a result, the school is benefiting from support over teaching, learning, and literacy from a range of the local authority's advisers and consultants. The local authority acted decisively to support senior management in the school by seconding a consultant headteacher,

and by securing the services of an associate headteacher to the school on a part-time basis. In addition, the local authority has seconded a leading teacher from another Doncaster school to support learning in one of the Year 6 classes for half a term, and enlisted the help of an associate deputy headteacher in the other Year 6 class on a temporary basis. The local authority's statement of action meets requirements. The proposed actions are relevant, clear and specific. The local authority has exercised its powers to appoint additional governors.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- The priorities for further improvement continue to be the key issues previously identified by the last inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education Standards for Doncaster.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Young". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector