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Mrs G Weston
The Interim Headteacher
Newcroft Primary School
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Dear Mrs Weston

Special Measures: Monitoring Inspection of Newcroft Primary School

Introduction

Following my visit with Garth Muton and Gail Robertson, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 19 and 20 June 2007, 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, scrutinised documents, and met with the interim headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, other staff, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, the school improvement partner, and a representative of the local authority.

Context

The headteacher resigned during the spring term 2007 and was replaced by an interim headteacher from the 1 March, who will remain until the beginning of the autumn term 2007 when a new headteacher takes up the post. The local authority has appointed two additional governors to enhance the capacity of the governing body.

Achievement and standards

Standards are rising steadily. Teachers are embracing new initiatives to develop pupils' learning and these are beginning to have an impact on progress and attainment. Pupils' attainment on entry to the Foundation Stage is broadly in line with what is normally expected of young children. The good provision in the Nursery and Reception classes ensures that children make at least satisfactory progress overall. They make good progress in their speaking and listening skills and in their personal development. Provisional results from the Key Stage 1 teacher assessments indicate that standards are rising in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards have improved at all levels when compared with the 2006 results of national teacher assessments. There has been an improvement in reading in Year 4 and standards are slightly above national expectations. However, pupils' progress in Years 3 and 4 is much slower than expected, particularly in mathematics. The underachievement found at the time of the last inspection still remains. The progress made by Year 5 pupils has increased, particularly in writing. Pupils' progress in reading and mathematics is broadly satisfactory. Observations of lessons and the scrutiny of pupils' work during this inspection indicate that the majority of pupils are now achieving better than at the time of the last inspection. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities continue to make satisfactory progress.

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

- improve standards in English and mathematics across the school – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour are good, both inside the school and in the playground. This is an improvement since the last inspection. The majority of pupils are happy and proud of their school and enjoy their working day. Relationships are positive, reflecting the pupils' good social development. There is good harmony in the school and no bullying or harassment of any kind is reported by the pupils. Attendance is good, reflecting the fact that pupils say that they find most lessons interesting. Teachers are now providing opportunities for pupils to learn independently, such as having discussions with a partner, and pupils make the most of these opportunities. The school continues to encourage pupils to exercise responsibility. The pupils respond well and are keen to take on classroom tasks and participate as school councillors and play leaders. Pupils feel safe in school and report that adults take good care of them. They know about healthy eating and how exercise keeps their bodies fit. Healthy lunchtime choices are made, but the issue of mid-morning sugary snacks still remains.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved and is now satisfactory. There is evidence of increasingly better teaching. Suitable training and support for the teachers have raised their expectations of what can be achieved. A particular

strength of all the lessons observed was the consistent use of positive approaches to managing pupils' behaviour and the judicious use of praise. The staff have worked hard to create a better climate for learning. Classroom displays now feature 'working walls' which provide pupils with examples and prompts for different aspects of their work. Pupils were observed making good use of them. Displayed targets in English and mathematics are beginning to provide a sharper focus for learning. Generally, pupils refer to these targets and aim to reach higher. For example, a Year 1 pupil proudly reported 'I can do the must and should, now I am working on the could', referring to the layered mathematics targets. Teachers' planning continues to improve. There is a clear focus for lessons and learning objectives are shared from the outset with the pupils. Staff are beginning to address pupils' different learning needs, but expectations of what can be achieved are still not consistently high enough. In some lessons teachers give pupils the opportunities to fully explain their ideas, but this is still at an early stage of development. In all of the lessons observed the teaching assistants were deployed well to support pupils' learning.

Considerable work has been done to improve the reliability of the school system for tracking pupils' progress. New data has been added and its effective analysis gives the senior management team a clear picture of pupils' achievement and standards. Additional help has been used to improve teachers' understanding of the tracking system. This is enabling teachers to have a better understanding of the degree of underachievement in the school and the progress pupils need to make from year to year. The assessment information is only just beginning to be used by teachers to help them plan suitable challenges for pupils. The process of updating the tracking system has highlighted the need to extend the range of assessments beyond that of optional tests. Not enough use is made of ongoing assessments to inform teaching and planning. An assessment policy has yet to be formulated to help address these issues.

Significant progress has been made in using targets to support teaching and learning in English and mathematics. All teachers use a system of targets at three different levels. Some teachers have created extension targets for the most able pupils. Pupils have a growing understanding of targets. In some classes, pupils' knowledge of the targets, and the stage they are at, is very good, reflecting the emphasis placed on these targets by their teachers. However, the effective use of targets to raise standards and to motivate pupils varies from class to class. There is similar variation in the quality of marking. Some teachers are developing effective methods which enable pupils to see what they have achieved and what they have to do next to improve. In some classes this is less well developed and guidance to pupils is not clear and precise.

After a thorough consultation with parents and the local authority, arrangements have been made for the school day to be lengthened from September 2007. This should help to ensure that the teaching time meets the minimum recommendation. Short term changes to the timetable have ensured that all pupils receive mathematics and English lessons every day. The introduction of new 'learning

challenges' to begin daily lessons helps to set the tone for learning. This is part of a general tightening up of the use of time. The weekly swimming lessons continue to create unacceptable levels of disruption. From September 2007, the provision of swimming lessons throughout the year will be changed so that pupils receive two half terms of lessons. Some difficulties remain with providing a balanced curriculum. There is, as yet, no consistent monitoring of the curriculum to ensure that all subjects receive sufficient time over the school year. For example, too little time is allowed for science, and information and communication technology is not used sufficiently well to support and enhance learning in other subjects. Teachers plan together in year groups and this is a positive development. In planning for the effective use of the new longer school week, much more attention will need to be paid to minimising disruptions in the shared teaching areas.

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

- improve the quality of teaching and learning in Years 1 to 4 by better matching work to pupils' abilities – satisfactory
- adopt a whole-school approach to assessing and tracking pupils' progress which is understood and implemented by all staff – satisfactory
- ensure that sufficient teaching time is allocated for pupils in Key Stage 2 and that the curriculum is well balanced, especially in Years 3 and 4 – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The interim headteacher is providing a strong sense of direction for the school. Within a relatively short period since her arrival, she has ensured that significant improvement has been made to the environment inside the school and has focused staff attention on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Efforts to concentrate on these aspects are well judged and show noticeable improvement. The improved learning environment now better reflects the senior leaders' high expectations and there is a shared sense of common purpose across the school. The interim headteacher provides a good model for the senior leadership team and the effective use of external consultants is enabling the senior team members to develop a comprehensive and accurate view about pupils' standards and progress. Training for senior staff to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning has been welcomed and there are good plans in place to bring rigour to this process from the autumn term 2007. This will supplement the evaluation senior leaders have made of teachers' planning and pupils' work. There is growing capacity in the school to undertake rigorous self-evaluation. The school's own progress report on the impact of actions taken to date provides accurate and perceptive evaluations. Governors have received training and have a clear understanding about their roles in providing support and challenge. Visits carried out so far indicate that they are well placed to exercise their responsibilities. Parents remain largely supportive of the school's work.

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

- ensure that the leadership team adopts a rigorous approach to monitoring standards and the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school – satisfactory
- implement more rigorous self-evaluation procedures – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is satisfactory and has resulted in suitable levels of support for the school. In particular, the local authority has acted swiftly to bring in an interim headteacher and appoint two additional governors. The local authority has fully supported governors to appoint a new headteacher. All these are positive steps to aid the school's improvement. Support for developing English and mathematics has been received well and is helping to improve teaching and learning.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

The priorities remain those identified in the inspection of January 2007. Within these, the school's key priority is to:

- audit the time allocated for the curriculum to fully secure its breadth and balance.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Leicestershire.

Yours sincerely

Dilip Kadodwala
H M Inspector