

13 July 2007

Mrs S Penglase  
Alvaston Junior School  
Elvaston Lane  
Alvaston  
Derby  
Derbyshire  
DE24 0PU

Dear Mrs Penglase,

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ALVASTON JUNIOR SCHOOL

### Introduction

Following my visit with Rosemary Eaton and Kris Sharma, Additional Inspectors to your school on 4-5 July, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2006.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, special educational needs co-ordinator, subject leaders for English, mathematics and science, the school council, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

### Context

One Year 5 teacher was absent due to illness, as was the senior teaching assistant. The provisional results for the Year 6 national tests in mathematics and science had arrived at the beginning of the week.

## Achievement and standards

The rate of progress most children are making is improving. Work in children's books and the school's tracking of standards in English and mathematics confirms this.

The provisional test results for Year 6 show a modest improvement in standards in mathematics, although an equally modest decline in science. This would indicate that the amount of progress many of them made was inadequate. However, this masks the fact that in the last twelve months, progress has been accelerated, helping children to start catching up to where they should be. This is also the case for the majority of children in other year groups, where better teaching has improved the rate of progress they are making.

Progress made by children in lessons observed was mainly satisfactory and good in a small number of lessons. The school's tracking of children's progress is improving and is helping to identify children who are underachieving. Consequently, teachers are able to provide appropriate short-term targets and timely intervention to improve achievement. During the inspection most children were aware of their targets, although their understanding of how they would know when they achieved them varied.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection March 2006:

- Raise achievement and standards in English, mathematics and science by making better use of assessment – satisfactory progress.

## Personal development and well-being

Behaviour continues to be at least satisfactory and in many lessons good. Teaching assistants play an important and effective role in supporting those children who sometimes find it difficult to concentrate in lessons. The school council commented on how lessons are becoming more interesting and how they appreciate the work of the teachers.

## Quality of provision

In the majority of lessons seen, teaching was satisfactory. Good teaching was also seen but not in the same proportion as recent observations undertaken by the school. In a small number of lessons, teaching was inadequate, indicating that there remain classes where practice has not improved.

Teaching observed in the enhanced resource facility was good. The children make good progress and their learning needs are met well. However, in the afternoons these children are taught with their year group class and the level of support and involvement in the lesson varies, as does the amount of progress they make.

In English and mathematics lessons most teachers used their assessments of children's progress to provide tasks that enabled different ability groups to make at least satisfactory progress. In some lessons, children learned well because they were challenged to think and work hard. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson, the highest attaining children consolidated their knowledge of angles through solving problems. Others, still getting to grips with measuring angles, had a relevant practical activity. No lessons were seen where children were given work that was too easy. However, in some classes the challenge to individuals was too great and they became confused or reluctant to try. Teachers did not always notice this and step in to correct misunderstandings.

Teachers often used questions well to check children's understanding of what they were learning. In the more effective lessons, they probed and demanded that children thought hard. In these lessons there was also good use made of questions aimed at different ability groups, keeping children alert and refocusing any signs of inattention. However, in a small number of lessons children who were opting out of learning, for example, doodling or not bothering to raise their hands and answer questions, were not tackled. This resulted in these children not learning enough.

A number of lessons offered opportunities for children to enjoy their learning. For instance, Year 3 children had great fun identifying strengths and weaknesses in the school environment, taking great care to record their observations neatly and building well on previous learning in geography. Interactive whiteboards also added interest when they were used to their full potential.

Although there has been an overall improvement in the amount of work children are completing, a concern raised at the last visit, there is a distinct variance. This variance, linked to specific classes, is not only in the amount of work completed by children, but also in the quality of work. The gap between the best work, and the increasingly smaller proportion of books where work is at times poor, has grown. The reasons for children not being able to complete much work were evident in a small number of lessons where teachers gave too much time for introductions and explanations and then little time to complete recorded work. Teaching in a few classes continues to lack rigour in this section of the lesson.

There are inconsistencies in teacher's marking. Whilst some work was annotated carefully and helpfully, other books showed only cursory ticks or even pages of unmarked writing. Teachers' comments were often general and did not relate to the purpose of the activity and how successful children had been.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, through better planning and challenge, so that lessons are inspiring and engage pupils more fully - satisfactory progress.

### Leadership and management

Compared to the last visit, the senior leadership team (SLT) is more confident that improvements across the school are gaining momentum. This is a realistic evaluation and evidence such as improvements in teaching and achievement and standards indicate that weaknesses are being tackled. Although this is positive, the SLT also recognises where a small proportion of teaching is still not good enough and is holding back the overall progress of the school.

The school's action plan has been redrafted since the last visit and is now much more detailed and clearly focused on dealing with areas where weaknesses persist. This work has been led by the headteacher who shows through the plan that she has an accurate evaluation of provision and is determined to raise expectations. This much improved plan is broken down into small targets which have enabled the SLT and governors to measure the rate of progress the school is making.

Following the last visit the governors have become far more involved in evaluating the work of the school. There is a heightened awareness of issues surrounding achievement and standards which has led to challenging questions being asked. These developments have improved the effectiveness of the governors who are now in a stronger position to track further progress.

Subject leaders for English, mathematics and science have increased their activity and are more involved in monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning. Lesson observations have taken place and there have also been checks on children's work. The focus of this work has improved since the last visit. For example, the English subject leader has identified key tasks to work on and has written a clear action plan to follow. A positive outcome of this work is the improved guided reading sessions that take place every morning.

The SLT members are closely monitoring and supporting a number of teachers. This coaching approach has been effective in improving teaching but has yet to eradicate all inadequate teaching.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- Develop the leadership roles of the subject leaders to establish rigorous monitoring procedures with a clear focus on raising achievement – good

#### External support

The LA has continued to provide satisfactory support for the school. Specific support has been given to subject leaders and governors which have led to improvements. Ongoing pertinent discussions are being held as to the progress the school is making and the LA recognises that the school's capacity is increasingly more secure. The LA is confident that they will continue to maintain the level of support provided at a time when they will be reorganising the way they work next term.

#### Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Focus efforts on improving teaching where it remains inadequate.
- Further improve teaching and learning in the middle section of the lesson where children work independently or in groups.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Corporate Director for Children and Young People.

Yours sincerely



H M Inspector