

Mrs S Edwards (Acting Headteacher)
Denton CE School
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10 July 2007

Dear Mrs Edwards

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF DENTON CE SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 25 and 26 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 February 2007.

Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you, other members of staff, representatives of the governing body, groups of pupils and two school improvement advisors from the local authority (LA).

Context

The substantive headteacher was absent through ill health prior to the last inspection. The LA arranged for an experienced headteacher to support the school through the inspection process. Once the LA became aware that the substantive headteacher would not be returning to work for the summer term, arrangements were made with governors to appoint a seconded headteacher, initially for two days per week. From September 2007 the seconded headteacher is confirmed for five days per week for up to one year as an interim arrangement. Following a succession of teachers for older Key Stage 2 pupils, a temporary full time replacement was engaged for the summer term. A permanent appointment has been made commencing

September 2007. A new chair of governors has been elected within the last few weeks.

Achievement and standards

At the time of the last inspection standards in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 were above average, with children making good progress from their entry to the school. This pattern continues.

The lack of rigorous systems to support progression from Key Stage 1 means that the gains made in literacy and numeracy are not systematically built on over Key Stage 2. However, there have been some improvements in standards and achievement in Key Stage 2 as a result of the school's actions since the last inspection. Stability in the teaching of older learners in Key Stage 2 in the summer term has enabled a sharper focus on planning to meet individual needs. This is already challenging these pupils to make good progress in lessons.

The school has taken suitable steps to implement better systems for target setting, assessment and tracking of pupils' progress. As a result, teachers are beginning to develop a better understanding of pupils' levels of attainment and the progress they are making. Although pupils have targets for literacy and numeracy, these are not used consistently with pupils to plan work that is matched to their different needs, and little reference is made to these targets in lessons.

The introduction of more rigorous tracking profiles, although new, has supported the identification of underachieving pupils by the SENCO, such as those requiring booster sessions in Year 6. These have been very well taught with work samples demonstrating improved standards. Intervention programmes have now become integrated into the work of the school. Teaching assistants are used more effectively to deliver these tailored programmes to match needs although it is too soon to fully evaluate the impact of this work.

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

- Raise standards and the achievement of pupils by the end of Y6 – satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

The acting headteacher has sensibly prioritised pupils' attitudes to learning and standards of behaviour as an additional area for improvement. This has been welcomed by governors, parents and pupils. Consequently there is a greater consistency of expectations with agreed rewards and sanctions. Pupils report that behaviour has improved in lessons and around the school. In the observation of lessons and around the school, pupils behaved well, were polite and welcoming.

Quality of provision

Aspects of teaching have strengthened since the last inspection but the overall quality of teaching and learning remains inconsistent. There has been intensive training on the use of assessment for learning. This has led to improvements in planning, particularly the use of learning objectives which are shared with pupils to guide their learning. This has begun to sharpen the focus on progression in lessons. Pupils report that they use the success criteria to check how they are progressing or to help them to keep on track. In the most effective lessons observed the teacher planned a good range of activities to stimulate interest and make pupils think. Questions were used effectively to probe and assess understanding.

Some weaknesses remain in short term planning, the use of assessment, and in the way learning is managed. Planning is not focused precisely enough on the learning needs of mixed age classes, and this makes it difficult for teachers to measure learning and progress. Another consequence is that pupils spend too long listening, waiting for others to finish, or completing undemanding tasks. The lack of differentiation leads to an overdependence on adults and slows pace and progress. The school is at an early stage in co-ordinating planning across the key stages.

Teaching assistants are now more effectively deployed. In the Year 5 and 6 class for example the teaching assistant worked well with a group of learners to enable them to tackle 'inverse operations' at a level which supported their understanding.

The curriculum has been revised to increase opportunities to develop basic skills through different subjects. The introduction of thematic work to promote independence is developing, is well received by pupils and providing opportunities for them to take initiative and responsibility for their own learning.

Curriculum targets in English and mathematics have recently been introduced for each pupil. These are linked to National Curriculum attainment levels and have the potential to help teachers and pupils know what needs to be taught and learned in order to raise achievement. Pupils are beginning to make use

of target books and learning journals to link tasks and assessment. This is developing more effectively with older learners who say they are now more aware of how they are progressing.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring all work is sufficiently challenging and provides enough opportunities for independent learning – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

Since her arrival in March for two days per week, the acting headteacher has transformed the school's leadership and management. She has provided good strategic leadership and very effective management at a difficult time for the school. She has brought rigour to school self-evaluation and clarity to improvement planning. These actions have provided firm foundations for future improvement. There is still a long way to go in fully developing leadership capacity at subject leader level although the roles of literacy and numeracy co-ordinators are beginning to develop suitably, supported by training and good practice visits.

Although there is a clear and accurate view of strengths and weaknesses, the time allocation in the summer term has not provided the capacity to follow through systematic monitoring, the checking of progress, and intervention to secure improvement. Plans are in place to strengthen this key area in September when the staffing complement is complete, and leadership and management is shared more effectively across the school.

In addition to focusing staff on key priorities for improvement, the acting headteacher has sensibly addressed developments and concerns on a wider front, including improvements to the learning environment, pupil behaviour, communication and consultation with parents. She has worked very effectively with the Senior and School Improvement Advisors from the local authority to ensure that external support has been tailored to meet the specific needs of the school and that it is used effectively to build capacity within the school.

Direction has been set for improvement; staff understand their roles, and express confidence about the future of the school.

The governing body has been strengthened since the inspection and is therefore in a stronger position to hold the school to account. A committee structure has been established and there is a clearer focus on raising

achievement and monitoring the work of the school. This is the result of good quality training by the local authority and the appointment of two experienced governors to demonstrate how to gather evidence and evaluate the school's work. The new chair of the governing body has a full understanding of its role and requirements, and has already established a regular meeting pattern with the acting headteacher to maintain a productive dialogue. Governors have been identified to monitor each improvement area, and to report progress to the full governing body. It is too soon to see the impact of these early developments which provide a foundation for future work.

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

- Strengthen the leadership of the school by improving the strategic planning and the self evaluation – satisfactory progress
- Improving the role of the governing body in evaluating, challenging and planning the work of the school – satisfactory progress

External support

The LA's statement of action is satisfactory. There is a secure programme of monitoring, intervention and support with a clear commitment to regular evaluation of progress, with input from the School Improvement Partner. Since the time of the last inspection governors have made good use of LA support and advice to secure stability within the school. The School Improvement Advisor has worked effectively with the acting headteacher to produce an improvement plan which has clear milestones by which to track progress.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures– satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

There are no further priorities for improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Nada Trikić
H M Inspector