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13 November 2007

Mr P Goulding
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Goulding

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF NEWCROFT PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Rodney Braithwaite and Carol Parkinson, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 6 and 7 November 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in January 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

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

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF NEWCROFT PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 6 and 7 November 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, other staff, groups of pupils, the vice chair of governors, the school improvement partner, and a representative of the local authority (LA).

Context

Since 1 September 2007, a new headteacher has taken up the post to replace the interim headteacher whose contract finished at the end of the summer term 2007.

Achievement and standards

Standards are rising. Children's attainment on entry to the Foundation Stage is broadly average and children make satisfactory progress in most areas. In speaking and listening and personal development, children's progress is good. Standards attained by the end of Year 2 in 2007 were above average in writing and mathematics and slightly above average in reading. Boys achieved particularly well. Standards have now risen for two successive years in Key Stage 1, which is a good improvement. Observations by the LA, the school and HMI indicate that the underachievement in Years 3 and 4, especially in mathematics, is being addressed successfully. This is because action taken by the school is leading to better teaching in these years. Further progress continues to be made in Year 5, where pupils attain broadly average levels in English and mathematics. More pupils than in the recent past are now reaching levels above the national average.

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

There is a positive ethos around the school. The good features reported in the last monitoring inspection continue to be sustained. The pupils' behaviour and attitudes to work are at least good and often very good. Where teaching and the curriculum are good, there is an obvious sense of enjoyment and pupils rise to challenges enthusiastically. They talk about their work confidently and respond well to self and peer assessment opportunities. Attendance is good. Many pupils were seen eating a variety of fruit during the mid morning break. This is an improvement since the previous inspection.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, although there is more widespread good practice throughout the school, with very little evidence now of inadequate teaching. Senior leaders, particularly the new headteacher, are more regularly involved in the monitoring of teaching, and effective advice on how to improve is showing some success. Good teaching is encouraging pupils to think for themselves, to take more responsibility for their work, and to become increasingly independent learners. Teachers, often through the strategy of 'talking partners', are now regularly giving pupils opportunities to discuss their ideas. Lesson objectives are made clear, and some pupils have a greater awareness of what they need to do to improve.

The school decision to cease setting based upon ability in English and mathematics has increased the necessity for teachers to plan carefully for the individual learning needs of pupils. Where this is done effectively, pupils experience a variety of challenging tasks and they make at least satisfactory progress in lessons. However, practice across the school is variable. A mismatch between learning objectives, learning activities and pupils' needs is a barrier to pupils making more rapid progress. In some classes, pupils do not yet have a secure understanding of either their individual or 'layered' targets. Some teaching still lacks pace, with pupils spending too long before becoming involved in their learning tasks. This also leads to a lack of urgency amongst pupils if they are not given clear instructions as to when their tasks should be completed. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are better, but high expectations are still not established across all classes.

The effective use of the recently introduced assessment and tracking data is now widespread, particularly in teachers' day to day planning. The introduction of half termly progress checks is a positive step. The range of assessment tools to check pupils' attainment and progress is being increased, but the school management is aware that teachers will need more training to make the use of these tools fully effective. Teachers work well with some competent support assistants who make many good, and occasionally outstanding, contributions to pupils' learning. Whilst the quality of marking and the presentation of pupils' work have improved, these have had limited impact on pupils' progress because there is inconsistency in the way teachers comment on pupils' work and what they expect from them in the standard of their presentation, especially handwriting and spelling. Suggestions for improvement are not always followed up consistently by teachers.

The school now provides a balanced curriculum. The amount of taught time for different subjects of the National Curriculum has been monitored and all year groups receive sufficient input. The school day has been lengthened so that it meets the minimum recommendation, and all pupils receive English and mathematics teaching every day. Weekly swimming lessons have been reorganised so that they cause minimum disruption. There is an agreement with the local high school that sex education is taught when pupils transfer there in Year 6. At present, arrangements up to Year 5 are informal, and are addressed through science and personal, social

and health education. Whilst there is no sex education policy at present, the matter is under review.

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 – good.

Leadership and management

The new headteacher is increasingly proving to be a catalyst for improvement within the school. After an initial period of coping with the effects of changes in school leadership, there is now a strong momentum in the school to bring about the necessary improvements. Senior leaders share a common purpose which has at its core a drive to improve pupils' progress and to raise standards across the full range of the school's work. Senior leaders have a good understanding about the school's strengths and weaknesses and appropriate actions are being taken to build on improvements already secured. Senior leaders have responded well to training provided by the LA on effective monitoring and evaluation. The impact is that there is less reliance on external support and this indicates an increasingly stronger capacity to improve.

The findings from a range of monitoring activities, such as work scrutiny, pupil interviews and lesson observations, are being used to set higher challenges for teachers, so as to gain an improvement in the proportion of teaching which is judged to be good or better. The findings demonstrate that senior leaders are more confident and competent in undertaking school self-evaluation. The quality of monitoring is sufficiently rigorous but is currently restricted to senior staff. A monitoring and evaluation cycle has been formulated which identifies wider involvement by subject leaders and governors. The implementation of this cycle is at an early stage of development. The quality of governance is improving because governors are kept informed about standards and are being trained in implementing their responsibilities as critical friends.

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 school values the contribution by LA consultants to support improvements in teaching and learning and senior leaders' capacity to evaluate the impact of actions. Resources from the LA have also helped to refurbish and improve the quality of the learning environment. A significant consequence of the refurbishment is the

reduction of noise in some shared class areas. The appointment of two additional governors complements the work of the governing body well.

Priorities for further improvement

The priorities remain those identified in the January 2007 inspection.