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Mrs Beverley Cordle
Headteacher
Deepcar St John's Church of England Junior School
St Margaret Avenue
Deepcar
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
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Dear Mrs Cordle

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Deepcar St John's Church of England Junior School

Following my visit with Kath Halifax, additional inspector, to your school on 24 –25 June 2009, 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 October 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of Governors, the Director of Children's Services for Sheffield and the Diocese of Sheffield.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Linda Murphy
Additional inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Deepcar St John's Church of England Junior School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 June 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other staff, groups of pupils, a representative of the governing body and two representatives of the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection the deputy headteacher has resigned. The local authority has seconded a full-time associate deputy headteacher and a lead headteacher who works two days a week in the school. One teacher has returned from maternity leave.

Achievement and standards

Standards are improving slightly although remain too low given the level of attainment when pupils joined the school. However, greater proportions of pupils are making better progress in relation to the levels of which they are capable. Work in pupils' books and the analysis of data reflects the increased achievement in English and mathematics. In science, the progress is less noticeable because it has not yet been a main focus. Priority has centered appropriately on English and mathematics. In English, weaknesses still exist in writing. Actions being taken by the school have yet to show strong impact in raising levels in writing to at least match the higher levels in reading. Although pupils have more opportunities to solve problems in mathematics and science, their ability to transfer the basic skills and knowledge required to work out solutions is underdeveloped. The achievement of higher attaining pupils is improving. This is linked to the improved teaching and learning including better lesson planning. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making increased progress due to the improvements in the organisation of provision.

Progress since the inspection in October 2008 on the area for improvement:

- Raise standards and improve achievement across the school – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

More pupils are taking a greater interest in their work. This is demonstrated in their increased concentration and willingness to take an active part in lessons. However, a few pupils still sit back and are prepared to let others do the work. This reduces their

rate of learning. Attendance continues to be above average. Pupils report they are noticing the changes for the better in school. Those in Year 6 say they have enjoyed their time at Deepcar and feel increasingly prepared for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

The common system introduced to assess and record pupils' achievements is more rigorous and now used by senior staff and all other teachers. There is a greater depth of analysis and more intelligent use of data, especially when planning further work. Although the tracking is beginning to identify progress and gaps in learning, some inaccuracies remain in matching pupils' work to levels in the National Curriculum.

The quality of marking remains variable between subjects and between classes. Nevertheless, it is improving. Pupils have a greater understanding of how well they are doing and the next steps in their learning as a result of staff using time well, particularly for daily discussions with pupils about their progress. In addition, pupils are beginning to have a better understanding of their achievement. This is because lessons are split into parts each with simple statements of success beginning 'I can...'. These are an integral part of each lesson to help pupils judge their success.

A teaching and learning policy has very recently been introduced. This sets out clear guidance on the factors that make up a good lesson. Staff are willingly accepting the training being provided on how to meet the raised expectations. Furthermore, this is contributing to an improved team spirit and collegiate approach throughout the school. A significant contribution to improved learning is the introduction of a common planning format for lessons. Teachers complete these conscientiously mostly providing activities that are matched to pupils' capabilities, although at times planning does not always take adequate account of targets in the individual learning plans of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The introduction of 'key questions' to planning has resulted in well targeted, open-ended questions that make pupils think harder and work out reasons for their answers. This increasingly aids their progress. Lessons are more purposeful with displays being used more effectively to support learning. A considerable amount of training has taken place in encouraging pupils to discuss ideas with a partner. This is paying dividends in developing pupils' speaking, thinking and imaginative writing, although skills in listening are not developing at the same rate. In some lessons the over-use of pupils' discussions breaks up the lesson too much. These occasions leave less time for questioning of good quality to the whole class. While some teachers transfer to other subjects their increasingly better practice, evidenced when teaching literacy and numeracy, this is not so in all cases. For example, too many worksheets are used in science. Many of these are incomplete and often not an appropriate match for pupils' individual needs. Teaching assistants continue to be deployed increasingly well for individual and small group work. Their skill in delivering a range of additional teaching is evident in the accelerated progress of pupils who are falling behind or who have additional educational needs.

Progress since the inspection in October 2008 on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that assessments made of the standards pupils are reaching and the progress they are making are accurate and that the information is used to provide effective academic support and guidance – satisfactory.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching so it enables all pupils to learn effectively – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

There is a clearer focus to school improvement since the last monitoring inspection. The headteacher has had the time to establish a more strategic view and systematic approach to monitoring the school's work, for example, in enabling staff to be more thoroughly and regularly accountable for their pupils' progress. This is because of the establishment of a senior leadership team, albeit with a temporary seconded deputy headteacher. This appointee provides a strong lead to important aspects of leadership. The school was unsuccessful in appointing a substantive deputy headteacher and is re-advertising the post. The mentor appointed for the headteacher is well focused and supportive without being intrusive.

Staff have a better understanding of their role in school and a passion to be part of the school's road to success. They realise the need for improvement and, with guidance, are contributing increasingly to school policies such as the way lessons are planned. The quality of teaching and learning is frequently checked and more prompt action taken to address weaknesses. Training is increasingly tailored to the teachers' individual needs.

School evaluation is improving. The quality of the action plan to raise achievement has improved in clarity and is easier to use than in the past. It now shows how each area for improvement is being tackled. Plans to promote English, mathematics and science have yet to follow a similar system, although because of professional training subject leaders are clearer about what needs to be done. They take their responsibilities increasing seriously and leaders for these subjects are building middle management sustainability. Even so, science has yet to be represented at the monthly meetings of the strategic monitoring group which includes senior staff and representatives of the governing body. Plans are well advanced to reallocate some leadership responsibilities to better serve the school.

Governance is developing. The Chair of Governors has made great strides in leading the governing body and is benefiting from working with a mentor from another school. Governors are taking increasing responsibility for their roles and are better placed than in the past to challenge senior staff, for example, about the significance of data and assessment and the quality of teaching and learning.

Progress since the inspection in October 2008 on the area for improvement:

- Ensure that all leaders, including governors, have an accurate understanding of the effectiveness of the school and that they play a full part in improving it – satisfactory.

External support

Progress on the local authority's statement of action and the impact of its support are helping to promote school improvement. The local authority's prompt action following the last monitoring inspection in appointing able support to the school's senior leadership is already paying dividends in aiding the headteacher embed improvement and set the agenda for further development. The local authority is active in providing training, support to the governing body and to improvements in teaching and learning. Additionally, the Diocese has secured the services of a mentor who is also supporting the work of the governors.

Priorities for further improvement

- The priorities for further development continue to be those identified at the school's inspection in October 2008.