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29 June 2009

Mrs Paula Martin
Headteacher
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Derby
DE3 9EY

Dear Mrs Martin

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Ravensdale Junior School

Following my visit with Gillian Smith, Additional Inspector, to your school on 24 and 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 the last monitoring visit – good.

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 and the Corporate Director for Children and Young People for Derby City.

Yours sincerely

Judith Matharu
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Ravensdale Junior School

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

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, analysed pupils' work and talked with pupils. They also met with the headteacher, a number of staff, two governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been no substantive changes to the school's staffing. At the time of the monitoring visit, two teachers were absent through illness. A deputy headteacher has been appointed for September 2009.

Achievement and standards

There is an improving picture evident in terms of standards and achievement due to the emerging impact of the school's improvement actions. Most gains are evident in English. Standards in reading are improving, particularly for more able readers, where significant improvements have been made in every year group. Consequently, a significant proportion of more able readers are now working at the expected higher levels. There are also some improvements in writing across the school. This was seen at the monitoring visit when particularly good quality writing from pupils was noted in Year 5 lessons. Despite these improvements, the school recognises that improving writing across all year groups continues to be a priority for action. There are less notable gains in mathematics; the school has not yet implemented interventions here, as the main focus has been on improving literacy. Interventions in mathematics are planned for next term. However, a full range of useful interventions has been introduced to improve reading and writing and the school has been rigorous in evaluating the gains made. In a short period, the results are impressive with targeted pupils making appropriate gains, particularly in reading. In addition, the progress made by pupils across the school is improving. The school's data analysis indicates that the percentage of pupils making expected or better progress in all subjects is improving and is moving to be more in line with reasonable expectations, given pupils' prior attainment. This is particularly evident in the progress made recently in writing in Years 3, 4 and 5. The level of challenge has improved in Years 5 and 6 and this is having an impact on progress levels here. Teachers demonstrate higher expectations of what pupils can achieve and are more successful in providing suitable work for differing abilities. Consequently, most work is pitched more suitably to meet pupils' needs. Teachers are growing in confidence in their own assessments of learning and are less reliant on formal testing. Regular teacher assessments are now being collected and these are used more routinely to plan learning. The school recognises there is more work to do here and plans a new assessment policy and further training next term.

Lesson observations during the monitoring visit confirmed this improving picture of pupil progress. In eight out of twelve lessons observed, pupils were making at least good progress due to good and occasionally outstanding teaching, that challenged pupils, engaged them in interesting activities and sparked their interest in learning.

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

- raise standards and increase the rate of pupils' progress throughout the school
– satisfactory

Quality of provision

The school has achieved the milestone target identified in its post-inspection action plan to improve teaching and learning. This required 50% of teaching to be good or better by June 2009. During this visit, inspectors saw no teaching that was less than satisfactory and 66% of lessons observed were judged to be good or better. Significant progress has been made since the last monitoring visit in moving much of the previously satisfactory teaching to a good level.

Particular strengths of the most effective lessons include better planning to meet the needs of all pupils, and the improved use of assessment, including peer and self-assessment in lessons. Most teachers are beginning to use the available progress data more successfully. This is helping them to plan relevant learning activities that engage and inspire pupils. Teachers more routinely identify learning tasks for higher and lower attaining pupils, although the same detailed attention is not always evident for middle attaining pupils in every lesson.

Pupils are notably more engaged in their learning and the atmosphere in most lessons is lively and productive. Pupils are eager learners and the use of paired and group work is becoming more prominent, including the successful use of talking partners to encourage discussion about learning and encourage independence. Pupils have embraced this well; for example, Year 3 pupils created their essential rules for working sensibly and safely in the wildlife area with sensitivity and maturity.

The use of interactive technology has improved since the last visit. Following training in their use, most teachers display confidence in using the interactive whiteboards in their classrooms to support teaching and learning. These new resources are helping to engage and interest pupils.

Teaching assistants continue to be used effectively to support individuals and groups in lessons. They are deployed well and demonstrate confidence in carrying out their work in lessons. Furthermore, their roles in leading the intervention sessions have been instrumental in improvements noted for these children in reading and writing.

Where lessons remain satisfactory, there are a number of underlying factors. Lesson objectives are sometimes expressed as activities rather than identifying the expected learning from the lesson. The level of challenge can be variable, with some missed opportunities when teachers might intervene and extend pupils' thinking. Furthermore, these lessons are often too one-dimensional with insufficient opportunities for all ability groups to engage at an appropriate and suitably challenging level.

Progress on the areas identified for improvement by the inspection in October 2008:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning by making effective use of accurate assessment information to plan work that presents a suitable challenge for pupils of all abilities - good

Leadership and management

The leadership capacity of the school is improving. The headteacher demonstrates sustained vigour and enthusiasm in the drive for ongoing improvement. She continues to tackle the issues arising from the inspection robustly and leads the staff with purpose. There is clarity about the priorities for improvement. In response to this determined leadership, the staff team are working hard to embrace the necessary changes required in practice. Good teamwork is evident. There is growing shared understanding of the school's improvement priorities and staff members demonstrate a willingness to reflect on and improve their work in order to play their parts in moving the school forward.

The leadership skills of the senior team are significantly improved. There is increased clarity about roles and responsibilities and a sharper focus on monitoring the impact of improvement actions. This is having a direct impact on the improved quality of action planning and subsequently on the quality of teaching and learning. There is evidence of increased monitoring and analysis of the outcomes of interventions. The impact is evident in improved learning in lessons, the emerging use of assessment in all year groups and the more regular and effective use of interactive whiteboard technology in classrooms to support teaching and learning. Some good practice is emerging, although this is not always shared as fully as it might be.

The role of the governing body has strengthened. Governors, under the direction of the local authority consultant, have undertaken an extensive amount of training. This has proved beneficial; governors are increasingly clear about their roles and responsibilities and the priorities for action in the school. A number of strengths are emerging in their practice. They are well organised in appropriate committees, know the school well and feel able to challenge as well as support its work.

The school recognises that there is a need for leadership in assessment at a whole school level in order to continue to strengthen staff confidence in this aspect of their work. The recently appointed deputy headteacher will assume this role in September.

There has been significant improvement in establishing a whole school system to track pupils' progress. A robust system (Polly) is now in place. This provides staff with clear indications of pupils' attainment and progress. This information is routinely used during the termly progress meetings between the headteacher and class teachers. Teachers are now far more accountable for the progress of children in their classes. There is now a sharp focus on tackling underachievement.

Following the collection of this information, a good range of interventions has been introduced. These have focussed on reading and writing and the 'softer' skills of social skills and comprehension. These show clear, demonstrable added-value and significant gains in standards over the period of the interventions. The school is at the implementation stage of its intervention with gifted and talented pupils and this provision has yet to be evaluated.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2008:

- ensure governors and staff with leadership responsibilities are able to contribute effectively to self-evaluation and school improvement – good
- develop a robust system for monitoring and evaluating pupils' progress in order to identify underachievement and take appropriate action where progress is insufficient – good

External support

Since the last monitoring visit, the local authority has continued to work in close partnership with the school to support its ongoing improvement. In particular, the deployment of extensive consultant support for teachers has improved the quality of teaching and learning, as this visit has confirmed. Further, the training with the school's governors has had a significant impact on their effectiveness and improved the leadership capacity of the school.

However, a practical concern has emerged following a recent buildings survey at the school. Accommodation in the school is notably tight; the school is currently very creative in utilising every available space for small group intervention work, the impact of which has been good so far, as noted in this monitoring report. The recent buildings survey has recommended that these spaces should be cleared. This clearly threatens to limit intervention work, as alternative spaces are currently not available. Similarly, a small space currently used for joint staff planning has been deemed unsuitable for this purpose and is due to be cleared as a walk-through exit. The joint team planning approach has improved lesson planning and the means to continue with this strategy is a priority. This is an issue for action, to be resolved in negotiation between the school and local authority.

Priorities for further improvement

Resolve the various issues associated with accommodation so that this does not hinder improvement, in consultation with the local authority.