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Mrs Lorraine Roll
Acting Headteacher
Highfields Primary School
Market Street
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Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN6 7JE

Dear Mrs Roll

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Highfields Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 10 and 11 March 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Assistant Director of Children and Young People's Services, Education and Inclusion, for Doncaster.

Yours sincerely

Christine Harrison
Additional inspector



Special measures: monitoring inspection of Highfields Primary School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 March 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, executive headteacher, associate deputy headteacher, deputy headteacher, a group of pupils, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and a representative from the local authority. Most lesson observations were conducted as paired observations with members of the school's temporary leadership team.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, the school has enjoyed a period of increased stability in staffing. There has only been one change of classroom teacher, with a permanent teacher from this school returning after a period working in another school. However, there has also been an important change in the overall situation because the headteacher, on long term absence at the time of the last visit, resigned her post from the end of January. There are further changes due in the near future. In particular, the associate deputy headteacher leaves at Easter to be replaced by another experienced deputy headteacher. The Key Stage 1 teacher, also a senior leader, who was absent at the time of the last visit, is in the early stages of a phased return to her post.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Pupils make satisfactory progress in an increasing proportion of their lessons. This is particularly apparent in Key Stage 2 where the quality of teaching is now more secure. The atmosphere for learning is generally good, concentration is improving and pupils are increasingly keen to learn. Pupils say that they now 'learn more' in their lessons. However, the progress of lower attainers and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities is generally better in relation to their starting points than that of higher attainers. Despite improvements, there is still a tendency for lessons to lack the higher level of challenge needed by more able pupils.

Progress in Key Stage 1 has been a weakness ever since the inspection in 2008, though there has been some improvement. Recently, skilled support from the school's temporary leaders, together with valuable input from visiting experts, has helped to maintain some progress in literacy and numeracy, but pupils' progress in lessons remains inconsistent and, occasionally, inadequate.

The monitoring visit coincided with the school's planned assessment week, so only limited tracking data was available beyond what was scrutinised at the last visit. The



available information does, nevertheless, confirm that pupils in Year 6 are making better progress across all subjects. However, it also indicates weaknesses in the long term progress of pupils in Years 4 and 5 in mathematics and reading. In reading, this appears to relate to inconsistencies in assessments for those pupils at the end of the previous year. The weaknesses in mathematics are more difficult to explain and are not reflected in the lessons observed or in pupils' current work. The school's leaders are well aware of these issues and have made successful adjustments to classes in order to enable some Year 5 pupils to make faster progress in the Year 6 class. Forthcoming assessments will provide vital further information about the progress of these groups and will be a focus for the next visit.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Raise standards and improve achievement for all pupils in all subjects – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour is usually at least satisfactory and they are polite and friendly in their dealings with visitors. The school council takes its responsibilities seriously and its meetings indicate that pupils have a mature understanding of the importance of everyone behaving appropriately outside the school.

Since the last visit, the school has introduced, and then further improved, a new system for monitoring and analysing attendance. The emphasis on encouraging good attendance has increased, with new rewards for good attendance and an additional trophy for the class with the best record of punctuality. Partly as a result of these initiatives, together with the efforts of the parent support worker, the school has significantly reduced the number of persistent absentees. Nevertheless, the overall attendance remains broadly the same as it was at the last visit and remains a major area of concern for the school.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Increase the efforts to improve attendance – satisfactory

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 is significantly better than it was. All teachers working in this key stage are now permanent members of staff. Lesson observations, together with scrutiny of pupils' written work, reveal no evidence of any inadequate teaching. Teachers have worked hard to develop skills and strategies that engage pupils' interest and enable them to learn effectively. Teachers have good subject knowledge and manage pupils well. All lessons are now planned in order to provide different learning activities to match the needs of the various groups of pupils. While not all lessons are entirely successful for all groups, the main structures and procedures that underpin good teaching are in place. It now remains for teachers to



become more skilful in using these techniques so that more lessons are good rather than satisfactory. Conversations with pupils reveal that, although they are informed of their current and target levels of attainment, many have only limited knowledge of how well they are doing in terms of those levels. Teachers are not yet making enough use of assessment information to involve pupils more closely in the drive for improvement.

The last monitoring visit showed some improvement in teaching in Key Stage 1 and this trend of improvement has continued, mainly as a result of the high level of support provided for the temporary class teacher. However, weaknesses remain at this stage. The quality of the activities planned, together with the effectiveness of the adult support, varies from group to group and is, occasionally, inadequate.

Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage was satisfactory at the time of the 2008 inspection and is steadily improving. Teachers' use of assessment is developing and the environment that they create is becoming more exciting and more conducive to children's learning.

The major features of the curriculum, in terms, for example, of ensuring full coverage of the National Curriculum, were secure at the time of the last visit. The school is now working to broaden pupils' experience and increase their enjoyment by incorporating more visits into the work on cross-curricular topics. For example, pupils in Year 6 speak highly of their experiments on the River Idle and work with real enthusiasm when presenting their findings. Extra-curricular activities, which have recently been very limited, are slowly increasing again, particularly in sport.

In the last monitoring letter, it was noted that many pupils were reluctant to write, slow to start writing and did not write enough. The acting headteacher was quick to introduce 'Time to write', a title chosen by pupils. This initiative ensures that all pupils have frequent, short opportunities to talk about a topic and then write to a tight time schedule. Pupils enjoy this: 'we write about stuff we like' and books show that the quantity of writing is improving. Carefully chosen activities to improve handwriting are another valuable initiative to increase pupils' confidence in their writing.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and ensure that assessment information is used to match work to pupils' needs more closely to enable them to learn more effectively – satisfactory
- Ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils, through improving the range, challenge and variety of learning activities – satisfactory



The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school's temporary leaders work very hard to overcome problems as they arise and do not miss an opportunity to make improvements and move the school forward. They have been successful in encouraging teachers to work as a team. The recent emphasis has been, quite rightly, on developing sustainable leadership for the school. The executive headteacher, acting headteacher and associate deputy headteacher are all temporary appointments and they are fully aware of the need to develop the leadership skills of the permanent post holders. With this in mind, there has been much training in the use of data, lesson observation, performance management and subject leadership. The result has been a significant improvement in the confidence and understanding of those permanent leaders who remain in school. Hence, in this respect, the school's capacity for further improvement is getting better. However, the lack of a permanent headteacher and uncertainty about the future arrangements for the school's leadership make it difficult to judge capacity to improve at this stage.

The monitoring of the school's performance by the temporary leaders is meticulous. The school's first draft of its new self-evaluation form is fiercely accurate and leaders know that some of the judgements will need to be modified as increasingly accurate assessment information indicates improvement. Most importantly, leaders take action on any identified weaknesses and the impact of their work on pupils' experience and their progress is steadily becoming apparent.

This monitoring visit included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures and found them to be secure and meeting current requirements.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Ensure that leaders, managers and governors rigorously monitor all aspects of the school's work and take effective and swift action to remove weaknesses – satisfactory

External support

The local authority has maintained its commitment to the school through many difficulties and has enabled the school to move forward, recently and most importantly by providing a very effective temporary leadership team. The current emphasis is on planning for the future of the school and in this respect, as in others, the close collaboration between the IEB and the local authority is exemplary. The quality of provision for pupils is now steadily improving after five years of constantly changing leadership and frequent staffing difficulties. Therefore, it is now vital to ensure some continuity between the present and future leadership of the school so that this improvement can continue with as little disruption as possible.



Priorities for further improvement

The additional priority, identified in the previous monitoring letter, remains important for the school.

- Increase the efforts to improve attendance.