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Thursday 15 July 2010

Mrs Margaret Barnfield
Shaw Hill Primary School
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Dear Mrs Barnfield

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Shaw Hill Primary School

Following my visit with Marion Thompson to your school on Tuesday 13 July 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 2009. 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 – 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 the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Davies
Additional Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Shaw Hill Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on Tuesday 13 July 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, visited lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, groups of pupils and parents, the Vice Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

There have been few changes to staff since the last monitoring inspection. A teacher working in Key Stage 1 has returned from maternity leave and is currently working three days a week, prior to returning full time in September. The temporary member of staff covering this absence has now left. One other teacher has had some protracted absence and has now returned to school.

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

Progress has continued to accelerate since the school's last visit. In particular, the proportion of pupils making good progress has increased, enabling many to begin to catch up on their slower learning in the past. Pupils now make good progress in more lessons than they did before and their happy, willing and interested participation continues to lend valuable support to their achievement. For example, they readily strive to find the more interesting word or turn of phrase to improve their writing, or to explain how to work out a mathematical problem. Parents recognise improvements and feel involved in their children's education. They are much pleased with their children's faster progress, reporting more rapid gains for both higher and lower attaining pupils.

The impact of these accelerations over the course of this school year is illustrated in higher attainment in English and mathematics. The school's data for results at Year 2 and Year 6 show increases at the expected Levels 2 and 4, and at the higher Levels 3 and 5, in both subjects. These outcomes bring attainment closer to national averages, especially for English at Year 6. The school's higher expectations of what pupils should achieve are, for instance, shown in work with Year 5 pupils, who are already tackling appropriate work at Level 4 in mathematics, thus proving valuable preparation for next year. Attainment at the end of the Reception year has also increased, in particular maintaining a steady upward trend in the key areas of communication, language and literacy; personal and social skills; and mathematical development.

Despite these important improvements, the school is well aware that achievement remains variable across and within year groups, and that there are still some pupils making less progress than they should. For example, overall progress is relatively



slower in Years 3 and 4 than it is higher up the school, and more rapid in the Nursery than the Reception classes. Achievement in reading also remains stronger than it is in writing and mathematics, although the gap is beginning to close. In particular, the school knows that it has more to do in promoting correct grammar and sentence construction, particularly in spoken language. Role play areas in Reception have yet to be fully used to promote children's speaking skills through imaginative activity.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise pupils' achievement, especially in writing in all key stages and in mathematics by Year 6; increase the proportion of pupils who exceed the levels expected for their age in all subjects and key stages; raise attainment and progress in all areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage – good.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes have been maintained. Sometimes lessons are a bit noisy, but usually because quieter working habits have not been fully encouraged rather than due to poor behaviour. Pupils report some noisiness around the school, too, but agree that fighting or bullying are things of the past and no longer occur. Pupils talk about their ideas and work together well in lessons. Their motivation continues to be much enhanced by knowing which National Curriculum level they must reach next and what they must do to get there. This knowledge is strongest for English. When the exceptional circumstances of the snow earlier in the year and absence caused by the volcanic dust are taken into account, the school's attendance figures are now edging close to the above average range.

The effectiveness of provision

The school's determination to lift the quality of classroom practice has succeeded in increasing the proportion of good teaching and learning. Teaching was good in many more lessons seen this time, while practice was judged to be good in just a small minority during the last visit. No inadequate teaching was seen during this visit and there were good elements in some lessons where the quality of teaching as whole was satisfactory. Improvement is most marked in the match of work and in the relevance and interest of activities. In many cases, teachers are now adapting their planning to address gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding based, for example, on assessments of what pupils did the day before. In order to make work more meaningful, content is now placed more often within a context, such as using real data about temperature locally for work constructing line graphs and interpreting information. Too little time given to sustained activities, such as independent writing, has also been successfully tackled. These improvements give lessons a much greater degree of stimulation and challenge, including for the more able. However, such features are not yet consistent to all teaching. Some reading



and writing activities to reinforce basic skills, for instance, lack the imagination of those in other lessons. In addition, there are missed opportunities to use topics and sources from cultures and traditions represented within the school's community.

Where practice is strongest, there is a passion to the teaching that encourages focused attention from pupils. Such motivation is crucial when developing higher order skills, such as using more sophisticated techniques to embellish writing. Similar success is gained when pupils are shown how to approach their mathematical calculations methodically. Subject vocabulary is promoted extensively and pupils are often asked to explain what they have done. However, they are not sufficiently encouraged to speak slowly and clearly, in order to ensure fluent English speaking skills for use in the wider world. Occasionally, staff do not 'model' correct grammar in their own speech when talking to pupils.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that the majority of teaching is good or better and, as a matter of urgency, ensuring that all inadequate teaching is eliminated; ensure that work is matched carefully to the capabilities of more able pupils so that they receive sufficient challenge – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher and senior managers remain wholly committed to improvement. They work closely with staff and, in particular, play a key role in supporting teaching. Together with assistance from the local authority, they have responded quickly to weaknesses and their work with individual members has been successful in improving practice. As a result, the proportion of good teaching seen during this visit was just within the majority.

The efficiency and usefulness of assessment continues to evolve, so that staff are becoming increasingly accurate in their evaluations and more competent and refined in their analysis of data, including of different groups. These skills have been fostered in strong measure through maintaining robust discussion with phase leaders, and such debate is directing more challenging targets and focused intervention work. Leaders are clear that they must still do more to pick up remaining variability in provision and academic achievement, including where pupils are making slow progress. Plans have been laid in some key areas in advance of next term so that the school can make a rapid start in September. For example, a new marking policy is ready so that checks on spelling and grammar, and the involvement of pupils in assessment, are implemented consistently across the school. In addition, the leader for the Nursery and Reception classes will have more time working in this phase and with its teachers to improve practice further and support members of staff new to the school next year.



Governance has taken some significant steps forward. Key members of the governing body have high aspirations for the school and its academic outcomes, providing valuable direction for other governors. They are ensuring that information about attainment and progress is given in an accessible form, so giving greater potential to ask questions and challenge outcomes. Early links have been created with important areas of the school's work, such as English, mathematics, special educational needs and/or disabilities and the Early Years Foundation Stage, enhancing governors' monitoring activity and feedback about the school's work. The governing body's strategic involvement in helping to plan the school's future, however, remains underdeveloped and is recognised as a major priority for improvement.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that leaders and managers at all levels and in all key stages use the self-evaluation information more rigorously to identify precisely the reasons why pupils' attainment is not rising; set challenging targets for improvement; monitor the progress made by all groups of pupils; hold staff to account for pupils' progress – good.

External support

The school continues to benefit from focused and challenging support from the local authority. Representatives work closely with staff members to improve teaching and learning, supporting both the quality of classroom practice and the development of leadership skills. Rigorous debate with staff about assessment data in Years 5 and 6 has backed up and supported the discussions teachers have each half term with senior managers in school. It is now the intention to extend debate next term to include those in Years 3 and 4, in order to sharpen further accountability for progress. A senior member of the education welfare support team has been assigned to the school and is providing valuable assistance in its efforts to raise attendance.