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12 November 2010

Mrs S Newman
Donisthorpe Primary School
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Derbyshire
DE12 7QF

Dear Mrs Newman

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Donisthorpe Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Thursday, 11 November 2010 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, the staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, the local authority representative and the headteacher of Ashby Hill Top Primary School for their help during the visit.

Since the school's last inspection, there have been some significant personnel changes. The substantive headteacher took up her post in June 2010. One teacher left at the end of the summer term and a new member of staff was appointed for the start of the autumn term. Another teacher is away on long-term absence. The class is being taught by a supply teacher, until her return. A second teacher reduced her teaching commitment at the start of September. Two teachers on fixed-term contracts are covering the shortfall until the end of term. In January 2011, a new deputy headteacher joins the school and will take responsibility for teaching the class. Two members of the senior leadership team have decided to relinquish their management roles. Two current members of staff have been appointed to take on the roles of numeracy subject leader and special educational needs co-ordinator. An additional teaching assistant joined the staff in September 2010.

As a result of the inspection in April 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex at the end of this letter.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The drive to improve the quality of teaching is having a positive impact on pupils' learning and increasing the progress they make. Teachers working in parallel classes are increasingly planning lessons together. This initiative is successfully engaging pupils in learning through practical activities and increasing the level of pupils' enjoyment. The impact of this approach was seen in the high standard of work from pupils in Years 3 and 4, who used role-play activities well to empathise with characters from a fictional story. The introduction of themed topics to the curriculum has provided greater opportunities for teachers to link pupils' learning from different subjects. Each topic begins and ends with an 'inspiration day', which is planned carefully to generate enthusiasm and excitement in learning and to celebrate achievement. Themes are chosen carefully to appeal to both boys and girls. Recent work undertaken during the 'pirate' theme was particularly successful at capturing pupils' interests. The benefit of this approach is clearly evident in the quality of work pupils are producing and the standards they are attaining. For example, in a Year 2 literacy lesson, pupils were using speech marks correctly to punctuate their version of Jack and the Beanstalk.

The strong emphasis teachers are giving to engaging pupils in lessons is proving increasingly successful. The pace of learning is good, with an appropriate balance between teacher direction and pupil activity. Pupils are focused on their work and remain on task throughout lessons. Pupils' behaviour is good across the school. Teachers display good levels of subject knowledge and are confident in their usage of subject specific vocabulary. In mathematics lessons, teachers discussed two-dimensional shapes and challenging place value problems using focused language, which increased pupils' level of understanding.

The improved quality of teaching is already showing an improvement in pupils' attainment. Standards being attained now are higher than in previous years. The quality of work in pupils' books is also of a higher standard than in previous years. Teachers' expectations of both the quality and quantity of work required are clear. Through focused questions, they ensure pupils understand their work and can complete the activity with confidence. Teachers are tracking pupils' progress more regularly and with increasing accuracy. This information is used well to ensure lessons are targeted to provide challenge for the different ability groups, including the more able pupils. The recently introduced marking policy has yet to be fully embedded across the school. Teachers' marking is not yet consistent enough, as only in the best examples are pupils given clear guidance about how their work could be improved.

The school is taking increased responsibility for driving forward improvement. The school's strategic improvement plan sets out appropriate actions to bring about better pupil outcomes. The numeracy and literacy subject leaders are developing their capability to strengthen the leadership well. Through their monitoring activities, they have developed a clear understanding of strengths and the areas needing improvement. The science subject leader's absence has meant that not as much progress has been achieved in this area. However, the headteacher is using external

support to build up the school's capacity to strengthen the quality of science teaching. The governing body is making a significant contribution to the school's development. The Chair of the Governing Body is providing strong leadership and is leading developments to raise the school's profile in the community. The recently introduced 'stay and play' afternoon, for parents and carers with pre-school children, proved very popular. The school leaders are aware that they have yet to publish the school profile on an annual basis.

The local authority's statement of action meets all the requirements and provides an appropriate programme to support the school's development. The authority's consultants and advisers are making a significant contribution to the school's capacity to improve.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ken Buxton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2010

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching by:
 - ensuring a greater emphasis on engaging and practical activities to inspire children
 - making more effective use of assessment to tailor lessons better to individual pupils' needs
 - using time better so less is spent listening to teachers and more on learning activities
 - ensuring the subject knowledge of teachers is stronger, especially in mathematics in Years 3 to 6
 - increasing the emphasis on literacy in all subjects
 - better questioning and higher expectations of pupils.

- Improve the attainment and progress of pupils by:
 - helping all pupils, especially boys, to develop better writing skills
 - ensuring that standards in science reach at least national averages
 - giving pupils greater opportunity to use their calculation skills in investigative and problem solving activities in mathematics
 - providing more-able pupils with more frequent experience of challenge.

- Strengthen the strategic planning by increasing the contribution of subject leaders and the governing body in writing a new school improvement plan and planning the frequency and focus of monitoring activity.

- Enhance the curriculum by developing a far more stimulating and coherent set of activities for children to experience.