

Tribal Education
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524 **Direct T** 0845 123 6001
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk **Direct F** 0845 123 6002
www.ofsted.gov.uk **Direct email:** sarah.cartlidge@tribalgroup.com

14 December 2010

Mrs D De Wolf
The Headteacher
Elmhurst Junior School
Dunsham Lane
Aylesbury
Buckinghamshire
HP20 2DB

Dear Mrs De Wolf

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Elmhurst Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 7 and 8 December 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in July 2009. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. 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 interim executive board (IEB) and the Corporate Director of Education and Young People for Buckinghamshire.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2009

- Raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensure that middle-ability and more able pupils are set work that challenges and extends them.
- Focus leaders' monitoring on the progress that pupils make in lessons and over time, on rigorously analysing performance and on identifying where provision can be improved.
- Ensure that in all lessons pupils have a clear understanding of what they are expected to learn and that they all know their targets for improvement.

Special measures: monitoring of Elmhurst Junior School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 December 2010

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior and middle managers, a group of pupils and parents, the chair of the interim executive board and the School Improvement Partner.

Context

There have been a few changes in staffing since the previous monitoring visit in July. At the start of the new school year in September, the headteacher returned to the school. The newly appointed deputy headteacher was appointed to the permanent post and given a remit to develop teaching and learning and assessment. All key appointments to senior and middle leaders' positions have been made. At the start of the new academic year, three new teachers joined the school. Currently, two additional supply teachers provide extra support to raise attainment; one works part-time as a specialist drama teacher. A few pupils have either joined or left the school other than at the usual times, but mobility is considerably more stable.

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

There was a significant increase in the number of pupils reaching the levels expected nationally in the national tests in 2010. The unvalidated results in Year 6 were the best in the last four years, particularly in English. Although attainment is still significantly below average in Years 2 and 6, there is a clear indication that the gap with the national average has closed significantly in Year 6, and pupils made satisfactory progress. Assessment records show that the school is sustaining the upward trend in the rate of pupils' progress. Targeted work, including intervention programmes and support for individuals and groups, is contributing to the large majority of pupils making better progress than in previous years. Children achieve satisfactorily in the Early Years Foundation Stage, but the school recognises that there is still more to do to develop their communication and number skills.

Across the school, tracking records show that most pupils are meeting their targets, with a small minority exceeding the challenging levels set for each year group. Evidence from this monitoring inspection and work in pupils' books confirm this improving trend in performance. Since the start of the current school year, increased partnership work with parents, combined with improvements in curriculum development, teaching and learning and assessment, is leading to the pupils making better progress.

During this monitoring inspection, observations of pupils in lessons confirm that

they are motivated and enthusiastic about their learning. Pupils enjoy challenging work, as seen in the Year 3 mathematics lessons on fractions. In this lesson, pupils grappled with dividing fractions and rose to the challenge because of expectations of work and behaviour were high.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour in and around the school is good and pupils have good attitudes towards their learning. They listen well in lessons and work well together, in pairs or in groups, with most taking an active part. Within the school community, older pupils in Year 6 speak positively about the level of responsibilities they hold as 'be-frienders' to others identified as 'loners'. Pupils enjoy carrying out their duties as helpers and monitors, as well as applying for positions as librarians. Much good work has been done to increase pupils' aspiration and to prepare them for the next stage of their learning through developing their basic numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology skills. Similarly, the school has also worked with pupils to promote independent learning and their ability to empathise with others. Despite pupils' clear enthusiasm for learning, attendance has ranged from being poor to average. During the inspection, it was below average. The school recognises that there is still more work to do within the different communities to persuade parents of the negative effect extended holidays and time off to take part in different celebrations can have on their child's progress.

The effectiveness of provision

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the school, with the support of the School Improvement Partner and consultant, has done much good work to increase rapidly the proportion of teaching and learning that is good. As a result, the school has exceeded its target, as set out in the action plan, to ensure that at least 53% of teaching is good or better. The senior team recognises that there is still more to do to secure a higher proportion of consistently good or better teaching and learning.

Teachers have responded positively to the intensive coaching, observations and feedback; the opportunities to observe good practitioners in other schools; and, to the performance management criteria to accelerate pupils' progress. These moves to develop practice have led to staff receiving clear messages about improvements required and have been supplemented by additional support. Two further major thrusts in improving the quality of teaching and learning have been first to make sure that teachers plan together as a team. This has increased the quality of planning, which is well structured with clear learning objectives, success criteria and reminders to check the quality of learning. It has brought about more consistency in practice. For example, in lessons observed, teachers routinely explored the learning objectives and criteria with pupils and ensured that they were clear about the skills being developed. The second thrust, led by the senior team, has been to identify and model the key features of good or better teaching to other members of staff.

This work has been helpful to teachers identifying areas for improvement in their own practice. Eleven lessons were observed and the school's evaluation of teaching and learning are broadly in line with the findings of this inspection.

In the most effective lessons, activities were well balanced and teachers built on pupils' skills well. The teachers used targeted questions and short interventions to assess how well pupils understood the skills and to deal with misconceptions before moving on. Group or paired work was used to promote talk during whole-class teaching and independent learning was encouraged. Expectations of what pupils could achieve were reasonably high. Teachers demonstrated and provided clear explanations of the different stages of work to help pupils understand how to reach the success criteria. Pupils were given opportunities to talk to the class about their work and at the end of lessons, summaries and 'brain feeders' were used well to consolidate learning. Progress was slower in lessons where expectations were not spelt out clearly, or where the teachers talked for too long and activities were rushed. Consequently, pupils did not build on their skills and understanding at a fast rate.

Effective assessment systems have been developed and the school is embedding the different steps of tracking and recording pupils' progress before identifying the most appropriate actions to support their learning. The school now has reliable assessment data that it is using to identify how well individuals, different groups and classes are making progress. There have been significant improvements to the way in which teachers understand and are using assessment information to underpin their day-to-day planning. Marking is much improved, it is informative and pupils are given clear comments about how to improve their work. Pupils and parents say that they understand the clear targets.

The school has also taken steps to review and introduce a new curriculum model which is focused on developing skills and better matched to the needs of the pupils. The pupils have noticed the changes in the topics covered and say that they enjoy their lessons and the work covered has increased their confidence and their skills as independent learners because they have to find, use and present information in an interesting and informative way.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensure that middle-ability and more able pupils are set work that challenges and extends them – good
- ensure that in all lessons pupils have a clear understanding of what they are expected to learn and that they all know their target for improvement – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has built on the previous work of interim post holder very well.

Planning is of good quality and targets the right priorities for improvement. There has been clarity about the ambition and vision to improve achievement. Approaches to leading and managing change have been simplified, as have the systems for recording and holding staff to account. This improvement has been possible because of the increased rigour of accountability from the interim executive board. In turn, the headteacher has demonstrated her determination to instigate change and sustain the improvements to raise achievement further. As a result, she has not hesitated in taking tough actions, as necessary. The senior team of the school has also been strengthened by the appointment of an effective deputy headteacher. In addition, the senior team has been restructured with all members having clear responsibilities for managing, monitoring and evaluating the work of staff. There are direct reporting lines that extend from the interim executive board through to all levels of staffing. As a result, managers have improved their management skills and there is increased ownership and capacity to improve provision for pupils. The recent action for each member of staff to mentor small groups of pupils and accelerate their progress is increasing their monitoring skills and accountability.

The interim executive board has a very good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. It is instrumental in driving improvement through its monitoring and directives as well as its work with parents. A good range of actions, including the parents' forum, has led to better communication with parents. They recognise the changes and say that the school is listening to them and implementing their suggestions. However, they wish to see the improvements sustained and their children making even faster progress. School leaders are more focused on pupils' learning and achievement and have a good understanding of where the strengths and weaknesses lie. The priority given to the monitoring of lessons by the headteacher and senior team, the external consultant and the School Improvement Partner has helped individual teachers to improve their work. The school is aware that good quality provision for pupils has to underpin its work and is demonstrating its commitment to improving achievement further.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- focus leaders' monitoring on the progress that pupils make in lessons and over time, on rigorously analysing performance and on identifying where provision can be improved – good.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve communication with parents by keeping them well informed about the planned changes and involving them in their children's learning – good.

External support

The local authority continues to provide good and much appreciated support. Clear guidance and advice have contributed to the school increasing its capacity to make

further improvement. Consequently, the local authority has started to identify its exit strategy, while maintaining a supportive approach to the school's work.