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31 January 2011

Mrs B Nicholson
Acting Headteacher
Halfway Junior School
Halfway Centre
Halfway
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S20 4TA

Dear Mrs Nicholson,

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Halfway Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 1 and 2 February 2011, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is 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

Newly Qualified Teachers may be appointed.

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 Sheffield.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Katrina Gueli
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2011



Annex

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

- Focus all leaders on accelerating progress by:
 - setting ambitious targets and making sure that all staff have high expectations of all pupils
 - using the outcomes of accurate self-evaluation to highlight priorities and produce focused plans which are regularly monitored and evaluated.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - enabling teachers to recognise National Curriculum levels in core subjects and use these levels to help plan challenging lessons
 - ensuring that all teachers use assessment data about pupils when planning lessons to match pupils' learning needs.
- Increase the rate of pupils' progress so that attainment is raised, particularly in the core subjects by ensuring that teachers:
 - monitor pupils' progress more closely in lessons and take quick and effective action where there is underachievement
 - provide pupils with clear feedback so they know exactly what to do to improve.

Special measures: monitoring of Halfway Junior School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 February 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with staff, a group of pupils, representatives of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the time of the last inspection two members of staff who remain absent due to illness have resigned with effect from the end of February 2011. One further member of staff is also still absent due to illness. One permanent, experienced teacher has joined the school. The fixed-term contracts of two temporary teachers have been extended until August 2011 to increase staffing stability and teaching continuity.

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

The school's assessment of pupils' current attainment indicates that standards are rising and pupils are making consistently better progress in all classes. Pupils are increasingly on track to reach the challenging targets set by the school and in some instances individual pupil targets have been raised, reflecting the school's aspirations for pupils' achievement. Pupils made at least satisfactory progress in all lessons observed during the visit which is a significant improvement when compared to the last monitoring inspection.

Pupils have grown in confidence as learners and are responding much more positively to teachers' expectations that they will take responsibility for their own learning, particularly when required to work independently without direct adult support. Pupils are also developing their ability to reflect on their own learning and identify how their work can be improved. While good progress in developing effective learning habits has been made by the large majority of pupils, a few still need to improve their listening skills and the consistency with which they work at a brisk pace.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement.

- Increase the rate of pupils' progress so that attainment is raised particularly in the core subjects – good

The effectiveness of provision

The profile of teaching quality across the school has been significantly improved with examples of good teaching seen during the monitoring inspection. In addition, satisfactory

teaching is now regularly featuring stronger elements as teachers refine their skills and embed successful approaches to teaching. However, in a small minority of lessons seen some less-effective aspects were observed including: over-complex planning that did not support the intended learning well; lost learning time during transitions between different activities; insufficient support or challenge to ensure all learners, particularly higher-attaining pupils can make good progress; and instances of too much teacher talk. Teachers are considering pupils' different learning needs in their planning and more use is being made of National Curriculum levels to match activities better to groups of pupils with differing abilities. Teachers' exemplification of successful learning has improved and they are checking pupils' understanding more carefully during lessons in order to adjust teaching or provide additional support. However, the degree of challenge in some lessons could still be higher, especially where teachers identify through initial assessment that pupils' prior learning is secure. Teaching assistants continue to make a better contribution to supporting pupils' learning. This has been achieved through their increased involvement in planning and reviews of pupils' progress and by providing feedback on pupils' achievements in lessons to inform future teaching.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning – good

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The seconded acting headteacher and assistant headteacher continue to be key drivers in promoting the school's rapid improvement. Their effective leadership has ensured that all staff are committed to improving their practice and pupils' outcomes. Systems to monitor pupils' progress are more embedded and data relating to pupils' current attainment are rigorously scrutinised. Consequently, the school is very aware that there is still some variation in pupils' rate of progress between identifiable groups and different areas of the curriculum. Intervention strategies to raise pupils' attainment including additional in-class support and one-to-one tuition are continuing to have a positive impact. Similarly, swift action has quickly addressed a small increase in the proportion of pupils identified as persistent absentees. Approaches to monitoring provision have also been improved and consequently evaluation is more incisive. This is ensuring that teachers receive thoughtfully individualised support to improve their classroom practice to complement whole-school training on common areas for development. Other leaders are developing a greater understanding of their subject leadership role ensuring they are more able to contribute to the school's improvement. The governing body is using detailed information to monitor the school's progress closely and is asking questions with an increasing degree of challenge as its knowledge of the school develops. Governors have also been proactive in seeking advice and guidance to ensure they are well placed to make informed decisions about the future leadership and staffing structure of the school.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement

- Focus all leaders on accelerating progress – good

External support

The local authority continues to provide effective support to enable the school's improvement. The acting headteacher and the governing body are appreciative of the ongoing partnership work with the local authority. They note in particular the positive impact of local authority support in addressing long-term staff absences, managing school budgetary matters and in working towards an effective model for the substantive leadership of the school. The School Improvement Partner is ensuring a good degree of regular external challenge and support for the school's leadership. The local authority review in December 2010 was helpful in providing an accurate perspective of the school's progress and where areas for development remained.