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18 November 2010

Miss S Torrance
Place Farm Community Primary School
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Dear Miss Torrance

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Place Farm Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 16 November 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Please pass on my thanks to staff and pupils for their participation in the inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2010. 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 – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

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 Suffolk.

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - tackling rigorously the key priorities identified in the school's recent improvement plan
 - providing leaders and managers at all levels with training and additional time to enable them to fulfill their monitoring roles rigorously and regularly
 - using the information gained from monitoring or analyzing data to pinpoint success or where more emphasis is needed
 - increasing all governors' awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in the school's provision so that they can hold the headteacher to account for the pace of improvement.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment to a consistently good level by:
 - rigorous and regular monitoring by the senior team
 - using the outcomes of this monitoring to provide support, training and challenge for individuals.
- Improve attendance to a satisfactory level by:
 - raising parents' and pupils' understanding of the need to come to school regularly
 - working closely with the local authority to ensure parents whose children have high levels of absence are made aware of their legal responsibilities.
- Raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - increasing teachers' and learning assistants' level of knowledge and skill in teaching and assessing early literacy, handwriting and numeracy skills
 - replacing outdated and shabby books with up-to-date reading material, particularly books that appeal to boys
 - using precise assessment to set realistic and challenging targets for pupils to attain
 - monitoring progress carefully and regularly and plan support for groups or individuals who have not made the expected progress.

Special measures: monitoring of Place Farm Community Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 16 November 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Head of School, the Principal of the Castle Partnership, the School Council, the Chair of the Governing Body and a number of teaching staff. Inspectors looked in detail at pupils' work in class and the accuracy of its assessment by teachers. All classes were seen.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the transition to a two-tier school system has continued. The school has taken on Year 5, and will take on Year 6 in September. Building work is nearing completion and those sections now finished have enhanced the school considerably. A significant number of new teachers have been appointed. A deputy headteacher has not been appointed; however new working arrangements within the partnership make this less pressing. The skills base of the governing body has been widened, and the school is adopting much closer and collaborative working relationships with the partnership schools. These are increasingly benefitting pupils.

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

At the last visit, signs of improving attainment were evident though standards were low. These improvements have since been confirmed by the results of Key Stage 1 national tests for those pupils now in Year 3. These indicate that the decline in standards seen in previous years has halted and reversed. Marked improvements in standards are now clear for reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment is now close to national averages for these pupils, with an improving trend that was confirmed in classroom observations. Standards in the current Years 4 and 5 are low but pupils' progress is accelerating as their learning improves. The school's own monitoring data indicate that the current progress made by pupils is satisfactory overall, and better than this in Years 2 and 3 and in reading across the school. Overall, the school is successfully maintaining the momentum of improvement.

These encouraging data mask some variations however. At Key Stage 1, the attainment of boys is close to that for girls, but better than that for boys nationally. Attainment of the significant number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below their peers and the national average for this group. For pupils that have special educational needs and/or disabilities, attainment is similarly low. The school recognises the need to address these differences.

The school has continued and consolidated the work around the monitoring and assessment of pupils' attainment and progress that was seen at the last visit. All teachers now undertake these evaluations for all pupils. Scrutiny of work and records in class indicate that these are broadly accurate. The setting of challenging individual targets is now systematic across the school. The school is able to produce accurate data on standards and how they are changing, both for individuals and groups. The monitoring of progress is also developing although the resulting information is not yet used systematically to set and monitor performance in different groups. The school recognises the need to develop this further so that a more accurate view of the quality of provision and its effectiveness can be gained.

The learning of pupils is improving. In class, they are generally attentive and interested when the lesson is pitched at a level that stretches and stimulates them. For example, in Year 5 classes the teaching is aimed at stimulating pupils of all ability so that all learn well. Progress in these groups is good because pupils are quickly developing skills of independent and collaborative learning. Independent learning is promoted very effectively for pupils in the lower school. Consequently, they are making better progress.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by -- satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Improvements seen at the time of the last monitoring visit have been sustained. The behaviour of children is satisfactory and the behaviour policy has been modified further. Pupils understand the consequences of poor behaviour, and these are now enforced consistently. Associated with this the school has a new 'Reflect and Return' room. This gives pupils that have been removed from class the opportunity to reflect on and amend their behaviour before returning to the classroom. Parents are informed if children are removed from class, and the school monitors this process closely. The number of exclusions remains low. Attendance has improved further since the last monitoring visit and is now very close to the national average for similar schools.

Pupils are confident around the school. They are polite, helpful and inquisitive of both visitors and each other. Older pupils act as buddies for younger ones. Pupils feel safe and trust adults. They are able to identify aspects of healthy eating and like the school dinners. Pupils are proud of their own achievements and their school. The school continues to build stronger community links through the partnership, for example by raising money for cancer research and involvement in 'Jeans for Genes' day.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve attendance to a satisfactory level - satisfactory

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching and learning have improved, and as a consequence so have standards. In collaboration with partnership schools, much development work has been undertaken. Local authority subject specialists have made effective contributions to this process. The characteristics of good lessons have been clearly defined, and planning much improved. The improved assessment of standards is helping to ensure that teachers now address the specific needs of individual pupils in class. In most lessons this information is used to group pupils for learning activities. However, teachers' use of this grouping to ensure that they meet the needs of all pupils in the class is inconsistent. Where it is done well, for example in Year 5, all learn effectively and behaviour and progress are good. In these classes this process is aided by the well-focused activities of learning assistants.

The school, in collaboration with partners, has improved lesson observations markedly since the last monitoring visit. The process is now applied systematically and accurately evaluates the characteristics of teaching and learning. It is broadly accurate and is giving all staff clear areas for improvement. These areas have informed professional development and a significant number of events have been held as a result. The process places an appropriate emphasis on learning. However, the standards attained in class are not often discussed or evaluated.

As a consequence of the improved lesson observation system, the identification of best teaching is now secure. This has resulted in informal opportunities for teachers to observe and learn from each other's practice. However, it is not yet done systematically and so opportunities to maximise the benefits of this are sometimes missed, in particular, for peer observations between partnership schools.

Care, guidance and support and the curriculum remain sound as at the last monitoring visit. The success of intervention is monitored regularly. For learning assistants, the highlighting and sharing of good intervention practice is being well developed. The curriculum is benefitting increasingly from the collaborative partnership. For example, Year 2 pupils have received visits from media students at the partnership high school to help with their assembly presentations.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment to a consistently good level - satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the last monitoring visit, the partnership has developed further. A close collaborative leadership is emerging with clear plans to consolidate further. The school is benefitting from expertise available within the partnership. For example, the much improved lesson observation system is a collaborative development. School improvement plans are clear and precise, recognising the issues that need to be tackled. Self-assessment is realistic. Increasingly challenging but achievable targets are being set and progress towards them effectively monitored. Priorities for improvement are correctly identified.

With assistance from within the partnership, the Head of School has more time to devote to her management role. Plans to appoint a deputy headteacher have not come to fruition. However the intention to combine and harmonise management structures across the partnership in the near future offers a sensible alternative.

The drive for improvement is now well-established. The availability of reliable attainment and progress data is increasingly enabling effective monitoring and target setting at all levels. For example, the performance management of staff now includes precise targets around the attainment of their classes. In addition, job descriptions and accountabilities have now been made more precise.

Because of all these changes, standards are beginning to rise and the quality of teaching is improving. However, the school recognises that there is still work to be done. The use of assessment data in class is inconsistent, and the sharing of best practice in this area is under-developed. In addition, the attainment of those eligible for free school meals or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is not consistent with that of their peers.

Increasingly, the governing body is adopting a closer working relationship with that of the main partner school. Under careful chairmanship, new and experienced governors have joined and bring valuable skills to their role. Increasingly, governors are challenging weak or inconsistent performance and are holding the Head of School and staff accountable for it.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management - satisfactory

External support

The local authority continues to provide effective support. In particular, the work of subject-specific advisors in mathematics and literacy is well-regarded by staff.

Priorities for further improvement

- Address issues of low attainment for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.