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Thursday 21 October 2010

Mrs Joanne Evans
Acting Headteacher
Causeway Green Primary School
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Dear Mrs Evans

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Causeway Green Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 and 20 October 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 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.

Newly Qualified Teachers may be appointed. A maximum of two newly qualified teachers may be appointed and there is no restriction on the year groups in which they may work.

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Sandwell.

Yours sincerely

Michael Merchant
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Accelerate pupils' progress and raise their attainment, particularly of boys at Key Stage 1 and all pupils at Key Stage 2 by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving
 - providing pupils with work that really stretches them, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Ensure that leaders monitor teaching and learning robustly, to identify and tackle weaknesses.
- Improve marking and other feedback given to pupils so that they know precisely what they need to do next to improve their work.
- Improve attendance so that it is at least average, to improve the progress of pupils who miss too many lessons.

Special measures: monitoring of Causeway Green Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 19–20 October 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work over two days and scrutinised a range of school documents. Meetings were held with the acting headteacher, the consultant headteacher, a range of senior and middle leaders, a group of pupils and a representative of the local authority. Pupils were observed at break times and generally around the school. A telephone conversation was held with the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the inspector also spoke to a number of parents and carers who were present at the beginning and the end of the school day.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the local authority has been unable to appoint a substantive headteacher and the school is currently being led by the former deputy headteacher in the capacity of acting headteacher. She is being supported by a consultant headteacher from a neighbouring school for 0.5 of a week. There are plans to appoint a substantive headteacher who will take up appointment in September 2011. One assistant headteacher is off school on long-term sickness. Two teachers have returned from maternity leave and a new leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage has been appointed.

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

The standards of work seen in lessons and in pupils' books confirm that attainment is beginning to rise, particularly in English, but remains low overall. Higher proportions of pupils are now working at the levels expected for their ages, especially in English, and pupils' progress is starting to lift. The difference in attainment between boys and girls is much smaller than at the previous inspection visit. School data show that attainment is highest in Year 3 where 66% of pupils are on track to reach the expected level in both English and mathematics. In Year 6, school data indicates that attainment is close to the national average in English but below average in mathematics. In all other year groups, more than half of all pupils are working at age-related expectations in English and mathematics. The 2010 test results were the best the school has had in over five years.

The school has set ambitious and challenging targets for all year groups to accelerate progress. Regular meetings to check class and individual progress are helping to ensure that far more pupils are making the expected progress than at the time of the previous monitoring inspection. Data shows that pupils are making accelerated progress in Years 5 and 2, especially in writing and reading, but less than the expected progress in mathematics in Year 4. Work in English and mathematics books supports this overall more positive picture of progress. Progress

made by pupils in the lessons observed demonstrates that achievement continues to improve at a satisfactory rate overall, reflecting the improvements made in teaching. Pupils in six out of the eleven lessons observed made good or better progress because of good and sometimes outstanding teaching.

Pupils say they enjoy coming to school and are increasingly keen to learn. They are friendly and polite, and relationships are good. Most behave well in lessons and around the school. A few become restless and disengaged from learning when teaching is not active or practical, or when lessons proceed at too slow a pace.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- accelerate pupils' progress and raise attainment, particularly of boys and all pupils in Key Stage 2 by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving
 - providing pupils with work which really stretches them, especially in writing and in mathematics – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Imaginative and rigorous strategies have continued to have success in improving attendance. The improving picture in terms of both attendance and punctuality reflects determined leadership and management. The school monitors closely the attendance patterns of groups of learners and has an effective system to alert staff to changes in pupils' attendance. Effective partnership work between the educational support worker and parents and carers has been particularly effective in reducing persistent absence. Attendance this term is above average, much higher than at this time last year.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve attendance so that it is at least average, to improve the progress of pupils who miss too many lessons – good.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with much that is good and outstanding. This has resulted in pupils making more progress than they have in the recent past. The school has worked hard in continuing to improve the quality of teaching and this is being strongly accelerated by the excellent coaching and mentoring skills of the acting headteacher and the consultant headteacher. They have a very clear vision of what makes effective teaching and share this persuasively with staff. School leaders are quick to recognise and praise good practice, as well as being alert to areas of weakness.

Overall, the majority of teachers are now demonstrating a marked degree of confidence in organising and structuring their lessons. All classrooms are organised well to support pupils' independent learning. Planning has improved and is far more consistent from lesson to lesson. There is a consistently clear reference to learning objectives and expected outcomes in all lessons, and teachers are now explicit about the learning that will take place. Some very good and exciting teaching was observed in Year 6 when, for example, pupils made exceptional progress in acquiring knowledge relating to compound and complex sentences. Similarly, in Year 2 the teacher's high expectations, high quality exposition and encouragement of pupils' curiosity enabled all groups to make exceptional progress.

Good questioning techniques are starting to be seen which assess, support and extend pupils' learning. The school ensures consistent use of this good feature by using 'lollipop sticks' to select pupils' names during question and answer sessions. Because the teachers target questions to individuals rather than relying on volunteers putting their hands up, this makes it difficult for pupils to disengage. However, when posing questions, some teachers accept responses that are often brief and expressed in partial sentences. This approach does not enable teachers to challenge individual pupils' understanding or track their progress.

Teachers have good and consistently applied strategies to check how well pupils are learning during lessons and amend their planning for the next day when they have reflected on how well the lesson went. Teachers are highlighting what they want pupils to achieve in lessons, and there is increasing evidence of detailed and constructive marking in English and mathematics that refers to pupils' success in meeting their learning objectives. Pupils know their individual targets, which are clearly displayed on desks in all classrooms, and many know precisely what they need to do to attain them. In many classes, pupils have opportunities to respond to their teachers' comments and to assess the work of their peers. Other good practice includes the effective use of 'talk partners' to stimulate discussion. The management of pupils' behaviour is a strength.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve marking and other feedback given to pupils so that they know precisely what they need to do to improve their work – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The leadership provided by the acting headteacher and consultant headteacher is very strong and provides clear direction and purpose. They have quickly established their shared and congruent vision, and lead the school with enthusiasm, dedication and a clear commitment to improvement, especially in relation to the progress pupils make. This is beginning to raise staff and pupil morale, and increase parent confidence. The many changes in staffing have hindered and slowed the pace of developments in the school. Currently, staffing is stable and the school has worked hard to develop the contribution of middle managers to school improvement. For example, they are now involved more effectively in monitoring the school's work.

Senior leaders have begun to implement a range of useful systems to keep the work of the school under review. For example, the rigorous monitoring of teaching has led to weak practice being challenged. Support provided to remedy weaknesses and the sharing of good practice has successfully raised the overall quality of teaching. Regular monitoring of planning is beginning to ensure tasks are more closely matched to the needs of different groups and abilities of pupils, particularly in mathematics and English. The development of a new system for monitoring pupils' progress, together with well-focused support to meet the needs of all pupils, is having a positive impact on pupils' progress. However, senior leaders acknowledge that the system is in its infancy and there is still some way to go before every pupil is making consistently good progress throughout the school. Additionally, they are aware that training is required to ensure that all teachers have a clear understanding of the standards required for each National Curriculum level in order to ensure that the new tracking proves sufficiently robust.

The school improvement plan is well focused on the key issues identified by the previous inspection and identifies appropriate actions to address them. Success criteria are linked well to pupil outcomes. The Interim Executive Board is committed to the improvement of the school and takes its responsibilities seriously. They are beginning to hold the school to account for its work, key issue by key issue. School leaders are very clear about the challenges facing the school and the steps required to make improvements.

Evidence from a small group of parents suggests that, under the new management, pupils feel safe at school; incidences of unacceptable behaviour are dealt with increasingly effectively, there are improvements in communications between home and the school, and senior leaders are more visible around the school. The school fulfils all requirements to ensure that pupils are safe and secure.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that leaders monitor teaching and learning robustly, to identify and tackle weaknesses – good.

External support

The local authority provides good support. The consultant headteacher, who is contracted to the school for 0.5 of her time, has been particularly instrumental in adding strength and experience to the senior leadership. The acting headteacher has greatly benefited from this mentoring and together they work highly effectively as a team. Targeted support for a number of subjects and initiatives, in particular mathematics, literacy and aspects of assessment has contributed to staff's growing confidence in these areas. This support is judiciously delivered to take account of improvements made and to address remaining areas of weakness.

Priorities for further improvement

- Accelerate pupils' progress in mathematics.