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28 January 2011

Mrs Amanda Benton
Executive Headteacher
Ferham Primary School
Ferham Road
Rotherham
South Yorkshire
S61 1AP

Dear Mrs Benton

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Ferham Primary School

Following my visit with James Kilner HMI to your school on 26 and 27 January 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 – outstanding

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly Qualified Teachers may not 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 Rotherham.

Yours sincerely

Honoree Gordon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the rate of children's progress to raise their attainment in English and mathematics, particularly in Key Stage 2, by:
 - building their vocabulary more systematically, related to the themes being taught in all lessons
 - providing greater challenge in all lessons for higher attaining children and the advanced learners of English
 - increasing opportunities for children to write independently and at length
 - providing frequent opportunities for children to practise their literacy skills in different subjects
 - developing mathematical skills through using and applying children's knowledge and understanding of number in solving practical problems.
- Raise the overall quality of teaching to at least good by:
 - sharing the good practice that exists in the school
 - expecting more of children in lessons
 - planning lessons that capture children's interest
 - making better use of assessment to plan the next steps in learning for individuals and groups of children
 - communicating clearly how children could improve their work.
- Bring rigour to the school's self-evaluation by:
 - improving the monitoring and evaluation skills of all teachers and leaders
 - establishing a framework and timetable for quality assurance
 - using the full range of evidence, including lesson observations, scrutiny of children's written work and in-depth discussions with children about their learning
 - using the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation to secure improvements in provision.
- Improve attendance by:
 - working more closely with parents whose children attend less regularly
 - seeking the cooperation of, and working with, relevant local agencies and leaders in the community.

Special measures: monitoring of Ferham Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 January 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher of the federated schools; the acting head of school of Ferham Primary; leaders and managers in the school; groups of pupils; the Chair of the Governing Body; and a representative from the local authority. On this monitoring inspection, one inspector looked closely at the Early Years Foundation Stage of the school and the links to the next stage, as this had not been observed on the first monitoring inspection.

Context

Ferham Primary School continues to be part of a 'soft' federation collaboration with Thornhill Primary School. The schools retain separate governing bodies, but a strategic planning committee operates across the two schools. The headteacher of Thornhill is also the executive headteacher of Ferham. She is assisted by an acting head of school, who is also head of centre.

There is a local authority children's centre on site, which is part of the school and inspected separately.

Since the last monitoring visit a teacher has left the school.

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

The school's systems for tracking pupils' progress show that there has been some continued improvement in pupils' attainment, although it remains low in both English and mathematics, with many pupils not attaining the levels they should for their age. However, the pace of learning is continuing to improve. Pupils' attainment in reading is noticeably better and this improvement is most marked in Year 2. A greater proportion of pupils are now making the expected rate of progress and, where they are not the school is intervening effectively to help. Pupils are also beginning to make faster progress in writing and some improvement can be seen in their rate of learning in mathematics. Nevertheless, progress for all pupils is not yet good, so that many still have some way to go to get to where they should be by the end of Key Stage 2.

In lessons observed during this inspection, pupils' progress was satisfactory and sometimes good. Pupils' literacy skills are improving because of the school's strong

focus on improving these in all lessons. Pupils are being given better and more frequent opportunities to write at length. Teachers are paying close attention to sentence structure and the development of accurate grammar, punctuation and spelling in all year groups.

Attainment in mathematics is slowly improving. Pupils have a clearer understanding of where they are in their learning and how they can improve to reach the next levels. Classroom assistants provide effective support for groups of pupils under the direction of the class teacher. As yet, however, their role is underdeveloped in lessons in terms of playing a more prominent role in moving learning on at a faster pace for the class as whole.

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage was judged to be good at the inspection in March 2010. Since then staffing has changed, but the staff in the two units plan and work together effectively. Data show that from very low levels of skill on entry, children are continuing to make good progress. Rapid improvement to 'close the gap' has ensured that children are much closer to reaching where they should be for their age by the time they are ready to move into Year 1. A few children are exceeding the early learning goals in written communication, for example, the inspector observed them producing legible, informative invitations to the 'teddy bears' picnic'.

The environment at the time of this monitoring inspection was bright and welcoming. Support for children new to learning English is effective, so that their communication, listening and language, and their social disposition improve quickly. Children play collaboratively and support one another in their learning. Outside learning opportunities allow for some adventurous, messy play. For example, children enjoyed developing their fine motor skills using a soapy solution as their fingers recreated a story to music.

The quality of assessments in the electronic recording of children's achievements is a particular strength of what is being provided. Work, including video footage and photographs, is annotated. This ensures that teachers can make accurate judgements about children's progress and set them appropriately challenging targets to work towards.

There are good links between the children's centre on site, and with families, for those children who join the school from there. Currently, the management of the Early Years Foundation Stage at Ferham Primary is a joint venture between the Children's Centre and the leader of Key Stage 1. The school is now in a strong position to become more self-sufficient in leading this section.

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

- Improve the rate of children's progress to raise their attainment in English and mathematics, particularly in Key Stage 2 – good

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils say that they are enjoying school more than before. They say that they continue to feel safe, because they feel that teachers manage behaviour well. Behaviour in the lessons observed on this inspection and around school was good. Pupils are concentrating for longer in lessons and are taking a much more active part in them than at the time of the previous monitoring visit. Teachers have become much more adept at planning activities and tasks that target the needs of groups of pupils and, increasingly meet the needs of individual pupils. This is helping pupils to begin to make faster progress.

Attendance continues to improve, although it remains below the national average. Some factors, such as heavy snow, illness and the observance of major religious festivals, held back attendance last term. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has fallen as the school's strategies to encourage attendance have begun to take effect. The school tracks attendance carefully, helped by closer links with families. This includes sending letters home in some of the languages spoken in pupils' families when there are concerns, and visiting homes. Partnership working, through two attendance officers and with the local authority, has been very effective in establishing appropriate systems that now operate effectively to track attendance. Rewards encourage pupils' attendance further. Figures for attendance during one month in the autumn term rose to above national average and at points attendance has been better than in the previous year. These are encouraging signs.

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

- Improve attendance – satisfactory

The effectiveness of provision

The school's records of teaching and inspectors' observations show that the quality of teaching throughout the school is relentlessly moving from satisfactory towards good. Senior leaders and leaders of subjects have conducted a systematic programme of joint lesson observations with personalised feedback to teachers, enabling the teachers to address specific areas of their practice where they could improve. As a result, they are growing in confidence. Teachers show good subject knowledge.

Lessons start promptly, with all pupils ready and enthusiastic to learn. In the better lessons, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do and set a good pace. They typically make good use of the school's information and communication technology (ICT) systems to engage pupils in learning and to help explain the teaching points. In these lessons teachers take time to assess where pupils in each group are in their learning before moving on to the next section. Relationships and behaviour in lessons are good.

Pupils are confident when talking about their targets and usually have a clear understanding as to how to achieve them. This is partly as a result of the 'learning champions' initiative, where adults in the school take time to discuss individual pupils' targets.

Teachers' plans for lessons, while consistent in format, do not readily identify pupils' individual additional needs, whether in learning or in their acquisition of the English language. Consequently, the rate of progress for some pupils is not as marked as that of their peers.

Effective links between the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 ensure that pupils make a successful start to Year 1. A revised curriculum in this key stage is providing more exciting opportunities for pupils to explore their learning through a variety of media, including some innovative ICT cross-curricular work involving modelling in three dimensions, photography and writing in 'comic strip' format. Consequently, pupils in Key Stage 1 have a much clearer understanding of the purposes of their writing than before, are able to write much more confidently and do so at greater length. As a result of regularly assessing pupils' work, teachers have a good understanding of the individual needs of their pupils. Appropriate provision is being made for those pupils who have recently arrived in the country, or who are new to learning English.

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

- Raise the overall quality of teaching to at least good – good

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders and managers continue to drive forward improvement at a fast pace. Nevertheless, they have wisely chosen to allow time in the autumn term to ensure that initiatives to improve teaching and learning have carried forward and become more established in teachers' practice, such as those for improving literacy. Alongside this, new actions have been taken, for example, additional provision has been made to support individual pupils in all year groups who are shown by the tracking system to be falling behind the school's expectations. This earlier intervention is beginning to have some impact, as pupils are being helped to catch up to where they should be for their age, for example, in reading.

Day-to day leadership and management are increasingly effective. Leaders have identified suitable priorities for improvement and are ensuring that the school's action plan is being implemented swiftly. Following on from the priority given to improving pupils' literacy skills, the school has begun to focus also on how to improve attainment in mathematics. Leadership of this subject has been effective in introducing more interesting, activity-based lessons, with hands-on activities that develop better pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts and encourage them

to think more for themselves. This is promoting pupils' enjoyment of mathematics and their concentration in lessons.

The school has created a new role of coordinator for special educational needs. Leaders now have a clearer understanding of which pupils speak English as an additional language and are able to make specific provision for them to help to develop their skills in English. The progress of these pupils is beginning to be tracked more rigorously, although the school does not yet have a complete picture of how fast individual children are improving in learning English from their various starting points. This insight is, however, developing. The school has accurately assessed that further training is required for all staff on how pupils develop language and on how best to promote the speaking skills of all pupils and has arranged to provide this in the very near future.

The provision and outcomes for pupils who have other special educational needs or difficulties are not sufficiently clear. For example, how teachers use the information the school holds about pupils' differing needs when planning lessons to ensure that these pupils can make maximum progress.

While focusing on improving the core skills of literacy and numeracy, the school has not neglected other subjects. New curricular elements have been introduced, such as dance and more extensive opportunities for pupils to enjoy music. These creative aspects are adding to pupils' overall personal development and increasing their enjoyment of school.

Pupils' involvement in learning and in what is happening in school is being encouraged well through the regular reviews of their learning that teachers conduct with them and through initiatives such as the 'learning champions' working across class groups. The school council is successfully ensuring that pupils across all year groups have a growing voice in decisions that affect their well-being. These structures and systems are helping to develop much more positive attitudes to learning than previously. Pupils are proud of their school. Links with families continue to be strengthened to support learning, for example, through getting parents increasingly involved in reading with their child when books are sent home.

Governance is growing stronger. Governors' awareness and skills in self-evaluation have developed well through training sessions and meetings held with the school's leaders. These are enabling governors to feel more confident in understanding the school's data on pupils' progress. Governors are more directly involved in strategic planning than before. For example, in small groups together with the school's leaders they are reviewing the school's objectives and updating the self-evaluation information. As yet, governors' overview of the Early Years Foundation Stage and of the provision and outcomes for pupils who speak English as an additional language or who have special educational needs is more sketchy.

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

- Bring rigour to the school's self-evaluation – good

External support

The local authority and the School Improvement Partner have continued to provide good support to the school in the actions and decisions the school's leaders have taken to bring about improvement. They have supported the school effectively, for example, in staffing matters and in providing advice and consultancy to enable the school to continue to improve the quality of teaching. In this, the federation of the two schools plays a crucial role. This is evident not only in the excellent strategic direction provided by the executive headteacher, but also in the continued appointment of an acting headteacher as head of centre. These arrangements are ensuring that initiatives are implemented swiftly and their impact is being carefully analysed. Additionally, staff have benefited from further helpful advice and the sharing of good practice from the partner school on how to manage the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and on strategies to promote attendance.