

Suite 22
West Lancashire Investment
Centre
Maple View
White Moss Business Park
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524 **Direct T** 01695 566 933
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk **Direct F** 01695 729 320
www.ofsted.gov.uk **Direct email:** abrady@cftb.com



27 September 2010

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 Naila Zaffar, additional inspector, to your school on 23 and 24 September, 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 first 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

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 first monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 September 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents; met with the headteacher and senior members of staff; attendance officers and the family liaison officer; groups of children; two governors; and a representative from the local authority. The inspectors did not look at the Early Years Foundation Stage on this first visit as its overall effectiveness had been judged to be good at the time of the inspection in March 2010. The monitoring visit did not include the children's centre on site.

Context

Since the previous inspection an executive headteacher has been appointed. The executive headteacher is also headteacher of Thornhill Primary School. Since January 2010, Ferham Primary School has been in a 'soft' federation with this school. There is a joint strategic governing body. A number of links and some shared staff posts, such as for attendance and for the management of special educational needs, operate across the two schools.

The executive headteacher is assisted in the day-to-day running of Ferham by a head of school, who took up post in September 2010. The former headteacher continues in the role of class teacher. Several class teachers left in July 2010 and a number of new teachers took up post in September 2010.

The school's management structure has been reviewed. A deputy headteacher post was created from September 2010, and a new management structure for middle and senior managers began at the same time. A part-time home-school family liaison worker has recently taken up post.

Children's achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

As a direct result of swift action taken by the executive headteacher, children's attainment in the statutory tests at the end of Year 6 in 2010 rose in both mathematics and English, compared to 2009. The proportion of children gaining the nationally expected level in English rose significantly. This proportion increased by 30%. The figure for mathematics also rose by 10%, but this figure had been better in the first place. These results mean that children now are gaining at least the minimum 'floor' targets set by the government for primary schools.

The proportion of children gaining nationally expected levels in these two subjects is getting nearer to the national average, although the school has some way to go yet. Close tracking of children's progress and direct intervention over the summer term to

support the learning of groups of children and individuals meant that a good number of children made faster progress than in the past. Those children were successfully helped to catch up to where they should be.

The school's data on children's progress show that by July 2010 all children in Key Stage 1 were beginning to make the rate of progress that they should, as were all but a few, in Key Stage 2. This is borne out by inspectors' observations of lessons, where most children were observed to be currently making satisfactory progress. In lessons where teaching was good, children often made even better progress, because their learning was good. In order for all children to catch up to where they should be, they need to make up the gaps in their previous learning. This requires both the quality of teaching to continue to improve and a longer period of time to build on this most encouraging start.

Identification of children's needs is improving quickly and securely so that better provision is now being made to support and challenge further those children who have particular difficulties, for example, with literacy or who are at risk of underachieving.

A number of initiatives have begun that are improving children's literacy and numeracy skills well. These are specifically directed at developing reading skills and at building up language and vocabulary to underpin their learning in all subjects. A strong focus on writing is also evident in lessons. The school has clear structures and plans in place for developing these skills further. Of note is the potential offered by a newly constructed and equipped room for information and communication technology (ICT), with lessons timetabled for all classes. The school has good ideas for how to use this room; not only to develop children's basic skills in ICT, but also to provide more frequent and exciting opportunities for them to use and extend skills in other subjects, to help their writing, or to apply their skills in mathematics. Planning for this is, as yet, in the early stages.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas 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

A number of measures have been put into place to help tackle low attendance. Attendance officers, drawing on good practice at the partner school, have brought in more efficient systems for recording attendance. The importance of regular attendance is being increasingly stressed to parents and carers and a system of incentives to reward good attendance has been introduced. A family liaison officer is working alongside the attendance team to see how barriers to attendance for some children and their families might be broken down. However, it is too early for the school to be able to demonstrate much impact of all these new procedures.

Nevertheless, there has already been a slight improvement in attendance figures compared to the same period last year and the new school year has begun well.

The school understands fully, the important link between enjoyment and attendance. Children are keen to talk about their learning. They know their targets and how to improve their work. In discussions, children in both key stages talked animatedly about what they could do and had learnt. They are showing much greater enjoyment of school and engagement in their learning.

Behaviour around school and in lessons is improving. It is often good, especially when lessons are well paced. Teachers manage behaviour well. Children comment that behaviour is much better than before; that teachers supervise them carefully and so they feel safe in school. They readily quote the five rules for behaviour. The school is successfully encouraging children to take responsibility for their own behaviour. As a result, the atmosphere in school is calm and conducive to learning.

Children who speak English as an additional language are being helped to settle in quickly. They comment that they are growing in confidence and so feel able to achieve more. Where need has been identified, a programme of support in developing reading skills, has begun. The school draws on some local authority services and support, such as for translation, to help in communications with home.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve attendance - satisfactory

The effectiveness of provision

The executive headteacher has taken a decisive stance on eliminating weaker teaching. Teaching is improving well. Although a good number of staff were new to the school at the time of the monitoring visit, they were quickly getting to know the children in their classes and finding out what they already knew and could do. As a result, many lessons were well paced and enjoyable. Learning is improving and in the lessons observed, was at least satisfactory for most children. Children, in discussion, commented that their first impressions of their new teachers were good and that they were happier than before.

Teachers' approaches to planning their lessons are consistent: the 'non-negotiables' that the school's leaders have put into place in how to deliver a good lesson were evident. This is helping the quality of teaching and learning to improve quickly. From their regular observations, leaders add to the list of points teachers must consider each half term. This provides a clear focus for all staff on how to improve further. Such approaches demonstrate the good practice that is being shared from the partner school.

Less successful lessons were characterised by a lack of challenge or an insufficiently wide range of activities and tasks for the children to do. In those lessons, time was not used wisely and children became restless. Sometimes they appeared busy, but were doing things that did not sufficiently stretch them. Their progress then was satisfactory, rather than good. Lessons are long: often one hour fifteen minutes. Such lessons need to be better planned with a balance and change of activities if children's learning is to speed up.

Teachers have identified 'focus' groups of children for whom specific, additional provision is being made. However, as yet, teachers' planning does not extend beyond this sufficiently to individual children. As the systems now in place start to give better information to inform teachers' planning, there will be opportunity to extend these good approaches.

Good lessons drew on varied methodology and activities that involved working with others; practical tasks where children could move around and explore or find out for themselves by doing; and questions that made them think. These lessons promoted children's independent thinking well and so children were better engaged. They were clear about how they could improve their work.

Learning starts the minute children arrive at school. The start to the day is well organised with a range of short, meaningful and enjoyable activities. These often pick up from the day before and are tailored to individual children and groups. For example, children were reading, working on the computer or involved in literacy activities. Children who speak English as an additional language were absorbed in tasks to reinforce language learning.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive headteacher brings significant relevant expertise and experience to the school in leading and directing improvement. She shows outstanding vision, determination and direction. She has introduced tighter processes and systems to monitor and evaluate the work of the school. The impact of these can already be demonstrated, especially on children's progress and attainment.

A new team of senior and middle managers has been appointed to share this important workload. A planned programme of training for them and for all staff is ensuring that self-evaluation skills are improving quickly across the school.

Lines of responsibility and accountability for leaders and managers are clearer. Many leaders are new, but they share the executive headteacher's clear vision, understand their responsibilities and convincingly explain the plans they have for

improvement within their area of work. Good advice and the sharing of good practice from the partner primary school are enabling the school to tackle its problems with vigour.

There has been swift diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and decisive action has been taken, with the good support of the local authority, to eliminate inadequate teaching. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is improving rapidly. Through regular monitoring, leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. Inspectors' judgements aligned very closely with these.

The senior leadership team benefits from additional strengths in the management of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities through the advice and work of a senior member of staff from within the federation. As a result, the school now has a much more accurate picture of children's needs. Their needs are identified earlier and better provision is being made to support and challenge them. The new head of school brings relevant expertise in the promotion of literacy and the new deputy headteacher in mathematics. These new appointments are all helping to build up the capacity that will be needed within the school to ensure that the recent improvements observed will continue.

Easy-to-use systems for logging assessments are allowing leaders to see the progress that children make more easily. In this way, leaders are increasingly able to pinpoint earlier those who are falling behind and are intervening to effect faster progress.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

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

External support

After the inspection in March 2010, the local authority submitted an action plan to the Department for Education outlining how it would improve the school. This plan was judged by Ofsted to be fit for purpose.

The impact of this action plan has, thus far, been outstanding. The plan is detailed, addressing each action point in turn, but very workable. It is supported by an excellent school development plan that is known and understood by the staff. The plan has identified suitable priorities and timescales and is being swiftly implemented. A comprehensive review at the end of the summer term provided an accurate evaluation of progress thus far and identified suitable next steps.

The school has made an excellent start to the plan for improvement. The impact is most noticeable on improving children's achievement. Furthermore, the groundwork

has been laid well for tackling the other areas that were specified for improvement at the time of the previous inspection.

The support of the local authority and other partners is good. The local authority has assisted the school well in tackling underperformance in teaching. The local authority has supported the federation of the two schools that is bringing considerable benefits to Ferham. The appointment of the executive headteacher has resulted in rapid improvement and she is assisted well by the School Improvement Partner. Additional consultancy support has helped the school further on specific aspects, such as children's writing.

Governors are 're-invigorated and re-energised' and so feel better able to challenge and support the school's leaders. They have more secure information to enable them to do this. A joint strategic governors' group provides good direction and support.