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8 December 2011

Ms A Wilson
Headteacher
Heathfields Infant School
Saxon Close
Wilnecote
Tamworth
Staffordshire
B77 5LU

Dear Ms Wilson

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Heathfields Infant School

Following my visit with Marion Thompson, additional inspector, to your school on 6 December 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in 28 June 2011. 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 – inadequate.

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 Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Ceri Morgan

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2011

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management in securing ambition and driving improvement by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders adopt a clear, united and consistent approach to all aspects of school improvement
 - developing the knowledge and skills of the governing body to enable closer scrutiny of the school's work, so that weaknesses and inconsistencies are resolved
 - developing the role of subject leaders in order to improve the quality of self-evaluation and extend opportunities to model good practice.

- Raise pupils' levels of attainment in reading and writing and accelerate the rate of their learning and progress by:
 - ensuring greater consistency and quality in the teaching of letters and sounds (phonics), reading (comprehension) and writing
 - improving pupils' attendance levels to at least the national average.

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better in all classes by:
 - ensuring that teachers swiftly identify, within lessons, when pupils are ready for the next steps in their learning
 - ensuring teachers' marking and feedback clearly identifies the next steps pupils need to take in their learning in order to improve
 - sharing best practice to eliminate inconsistencies between classes in the pace of learning and the level of challenge provided to pupils.

Special measures: monitoring of Heathfields Infant School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 6 December 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and held meetings with the headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, the consultant headteacher working with the school and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors also reviewed a sample of pupils' work.

Context

Heathfield is passing through a period of significant change. The deputy headteacher is absent from school and the role is being covered by an acting deputy headteacher from within the staff. There have been several other changes to teaching personnel and some classes are currently being taught by temporary staff. Nine pupils in Year 1 are being taught alongside Year 2 pupils each morning for additional literacy and numeracy support. Years 1 and 2 moved into a new building during October. There is a children's centre on site which is independent from the school and was not inspected on this occasion. A Local Leader in Education, who is a headteacher in a nearby school, is currently working alongside the leadership team at Heathfield to offer greater capacity. The school also receives considerable support from a range of external consultants and advisers. During this inspection, the school put on two delightful nativity plays for families and carers which restricted the amount of lesson observations possible. As a consequence, inspectors only observed literacy and numeracy sessions.

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

Pupils' attainment remains low and, despite some glimpses of promise, progress is too slow. The school assesses pupils' attainment accurately and is expecting around 89% to reach the expected levels in English and mathematics by the end of Year 2 by summer 2012, although few pupils are anticipated to reach the higher levels. Despite improvements, some significant and intractable concerns remain. Pupils' attainment in reading and writing is low and their progress, despite the promise seen in the focus on phonics, is too slow.

In mathematics, most pupils can recognise and count accurately up to 100 but few are able to use this knowledge to solve simple number problems. Older pupils lack confidence in addition and subtraction, whether mental or written. Behind this lack of confidence is a fragile grasp of place value. This prevents pupils from being able to explain their thinking clearly, despite being given opportunities to do so. Nevertheless, the school is beginning to offer greater challenge. In one successful

lesson, pupils in Year 2 started to explore more complex ideas such as combining fractions but, although recognising a half and a quarter of a regular shape, struggled when halving whole numbers.

In literacy, sentence construction is weak, although many older pupils can use capital letters and full stops accurately. The school works hard to develop legibility but standards of writing remain a cause for concern, especially for boys. Presentation of written work is scruffy at times and too little is produced. The recent increased emphasis on teaching phonics is starting to pay dividends but is too recent to have secured consistent improvement in all classes. In one example, a good session, led by a teaching assistant, helped pupils sound out, read and then spell unfamiliar words well. As a result of similar experiences, pupils are increasingly using a wider vocabulary, although oracy skills remain low. Pupils are keen to come to school and they enjoy the range of activities.

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

- raise pupils' levels of attainment in reading and writing and accelerate the rate of their learning and progress – inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Attendance is improving and is at least average in all classes and above average in some. The leadership team recognises and appreciates the help and support of families in achieving this improvement. There remains around 20 pupils who show patterns of significant and persistent absence but the school now analyses trends of attendance in detail and acts accordingly in such cases.

The effectiveness of provision

Teachers work hard to implement a wide range of changes rapidly. There is a willingness to change practice, accept advice and improve provision. Adults have attempted this change whilst maintaining a focus on pupils' well-being and care; teachers know their pupils well. However, there are some common and key weaknesses in teaching. Pupils spend too long on lengthy introductions, thus limiting the time available to practise writing or number work. Questions are sometimes confusing and complex, and teachers accept a pupils' initial response too readily instead of asking for greater exploration. This means they do not always accurately assess pupils' understanding and neither do they always resolve pupils' misconceptions.

Marking is up to date and provides targets for pupils but some work is not marked thoroughly enough to help improvement. As a consequence, presentation continues to be poor and mistakes and misconceptions remain. Feedback from teachers to pupils is inconsistent and, occasionally, over congratulatory. Too often, teachers praise effort rather than achievement. Although staff benefit from additional

consultant input and share some good practice in teaching, this is not done routinely or frequently. The support offered by teaching assistants is variable, with some very supportive and sensitive work for pupils with additional needs but also some examples of passivity during the lengthy introductions to lessons.

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

- improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better – inadequate.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership in school is in a state of considerable flux but all are working hard to build capacity. Some members of the leadership team are unclear about their role. The governing body has recruited additional expertise and has arranged training. The work of the acting deputy headteacher is adding considerable value to wider leadership. The headteacher has an accurate view of the school's relative strengths and weaknesses. However, leaders are constantly distracted from their attempts to raise attainment and progress by continued problems around staffing and parental engagement which require quicker resolution. This is impeding improvement.

There is monitoring but it is overly generic and carried out by both the headteacher and deputy headteacher together, which is an unnecessary burden for all. Subject leaders are not fully involved in monitoring and, as such, their roles remain underdeveloped. The school's strategic plans are appropriate in content but lack precise targets and are not revised in the light of the findings from the various monitoring activities. The additional capacity now available through the support of the consultant headteacher offers much promise but is relatively recent and too limited in time allocation to have achieved rapid progress.

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

- improve the effectiveness of leadership and management in securing ambition and driving improvement – inadequate.

External support

The local authority action plan is satisfactory and the level of support provided is generous and appropriate. However, this has yet to secure sustainable improvement and the wide range of advice offered risks overwhelming the school. The school and local authority are appropriately keen to redefine the nature and extent of additional support to reflect current priorities.

Priorities for further improvement

- Secure greater clarity and consistency in the roles and membership of the wider leadership team.

- Refine the monitoring programme to focus on pupils' learning and secure greater consistency across classes.

- Improve the quality of teachers' questioning and their response to pupils' answers, allowing greater opportunities for pupils to articulate their thinking and expect higher challenge.

- Review the extent and purpose of external support.