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2 February 2012

Miss S Peters
Headteacher
Harlescott Junior School
Featherbed Lane
Shrewsbury
SY1 4QN

Dear Miss Peters

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Harlescott Junior School

Following my visit with Daniel Kilborn, additional inspector, to your school on 31 January and 1 February 2012, 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 on 26 September 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 – satisfactory.

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 Shropshire.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching as a matter of urgency in order to raise levels of attainment to at least the national average by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - making better use of information from assessments to set tasks that pupils of all abilities find suitably challenging
 - ensuring that the curriculum for individual pupils builds progressively on what pupils already know, understand and can do.

- Ensure leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, are effective in driving forward improvements by:
 - Using assessment and tracking information to identify weaknesses in teaching, particularly in those classes and subjects where pupils make the slowest progress
 - Using the results of such checks to set more precise and challenging priorities for improvement
 - Implementing plans to address these priorities and accurately evaluating their effectiveness in driving improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.

Special measures: monitoring of Harlescott Junior School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 31 January–1 February 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with staff, pupils and their parents and carers. The team observed 12 lessons, and meetings were held with the headteacher and senior staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since becoming subject to special measures in September 2011, the school now has a full governing body with the addition of two parent governors. A member of staff has left the school and a long-term supply teacher is covering for a teacher on maternity leave.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is low. In 2011, all groups of pupils failed to make at least satisfactory progress in English and mathematics. In 2011, 81% of pupils gained Level 4, which was in line with national expectations, but only 21% of pupils achieved Level 5 in English, which is below the national average. In mathematics, only 64% of pupils achieved Level 4 and 10% gained Level 5, this is well below national expectations. These results are part of a downward trend in mathematics. Pupils who are disabled or with special educational needs also achieved less well than nationally. However, the school has implemented a wide range of measures to address these weaknesses. For some of these initiatives, it is too early to measure the impact. However, inspectors noted in the English and mathematics lessons observed that the progress of all groups of pupils was satisfactory.

Guided reading sessions every morning are increasing pupils' confidence and enjoyment in reading. Teachers ensure that tasks in guided reading for higher attaining pupils are suitably challenging. Teachers are beginning to use pupil progress data to monitor learning and are matching tasks more accurately to pupils' needs. Consequently, pupils did not sit for long periods of time, having completed work, with nothing to do. Teaching assistants are more effectively deployed and quickly intervene to support pupils and help them understand what they are expected to do. Teaching assistants keep a log book recording how well pupils are working and any difficulties they experience, so that the special educational needs coordinator can monitor and check progress. The school runs a range of booster classes in both English and mathematics to support pupils in Year 6. The Year 6

classes have also been divided to provide three smaller groups with work carefully tailored to their different needs. This is mirrored in Years 3 and 4, with small group support and extra phonics work (the sounds that letter make). A new assessment system has been introduced which helps teachers focus on gaps in learning. For example, teachers have correctly identified that pupils do not know their multiplication tables, and, as a result, pupils now have to learn these for homework.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has improved and is satisfactory. The school has worked hard to ensure that all classrooms are attractive learning spaces. Teachers' planning now reflects more closely pupils' starting points and tasks are much better matched to pupils' interests. Teachers are beginning to use questioning effectively to help pupils understand and explain their learning. In the best lessons observed, questioning extended and challenged pupils' understanding well and allows higher attaining pupils to develop their thinking. However, opportunities are missed for pupils to demonstrate how well they have worked or how they have added to each other's explanations. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils answered questions on probability accurately. The teacher skilfully asked challenging questions which pushed pupils to think hard and apply their understanding of probability from flipping a coin, rolling a dice or picking a particular coloured cube from a bag.

On occasion, teachers talk for too long and this slows the pace of learning. Although work is better matched to disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, teachers sometimes lack a range of strategies to help to keep these pupils engaged in their learning, particularly when there is no supporting teaching assistant at that time.

There is evidence of pupils beginning to frame their own questions for learning and this is helping them to become more independent learners. However, opportunities are missed to use these in lessons so that pupils are able to follow up their interests. Teachers have received training in improving their confidence and use of assessment. This is positively reflected in the improvements and in the frequency and rigour of teachers' marking. The school has asked pupils' opinions about teachers' marking. It has used this information well to improve feedback, especially regarding written work. Books are frequently marked and comments are positive on the whole but they do not always explain pupils' next steps in learning. Some teachers ensure that pupils have opportunities to practise any areas of weakness. This helps pupils consolidate their learning. Parents and carers are very positive about the school and the progress their child is making. In particular, they commented on the increased confidence their child had in reading. This is in part because of the concerted effort the school has made to improve the quality of guided reading. Pupils enjoy these sessions and are making good use of their reading logs. Teachers are ensuring that pupils have more opportunities to write at length. Pupils stated how much they enjoyed writing about the rainforest and having

their work displayed. However, presentation of work is not always of the highest standard and pupils' handwriting is sometimes rushed and untidy. In particular, work in mathematics is less well presented than in English books.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- improve the quality of teaching as a matter of urgency in order to raise levels of attainment to at least the national average – satisfactory.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils enjoy learning and work well in groups and in pairs. Behaviour in lessons and around school is good and the school now has a positive climate for learning.

The school has ensured that all staff have received up-to-date training in child protection and follow all school procedures with regard to health and safety and safeguarding. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe. For example, not running in corridors and classrooms. Pupils report that there is no bullying in the school, and they could go to any member of staff if they had a concern. The school has worked hard to ensure that all staff are developing good behaviour management strategies which are used consistently. Pupils enjoy coming to school and are punctual.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and deputy headteacher are working diligently to promote school improvement. Senior leaders have a more secure view of how well the school is doing. They have a detailed school improvement plan, together with a raising achievement plan and a school self-evaluation document. This is a duplication of planning. Opportunities are missed to use one document which allows the school to evaluate its progress against measurable targets, both for learning and quality of teaching, and has regular milestones which would enable the school to celebrate its successes.

Leaders have established and monitor a list of 'non negotiables' for every class teacher and classroom. This has improved the classroom environment and displays in the corridors. As a result, teachers are making better use of the displays and teaching areas to encourage and reinforce learning. Senior leaders have an accurate view of teaching and learning. However, teachers do not have a shared understanding of the qualities that make a good lesson.

The senior team are keen to listen to and encourage pupils' own views of their learning and use their ideas to strengthen the emerging good practice in the school. Tracking data is used to hold teachers to account more effectively. The school are in the process of changing to a new system which is intended to enable them to use

data more effectively, particularly at a teaching level to quickly identify any weaknesses and address them. A wide range of interventions have been introduced to help pupils in Year 6 make better progress, particularly in mathematics. Well-considered interventions in lower Key Stage 2 are helping to improve the progress of different groups of pupils. The school is beginning to evaluate the impact of these interventions and, as a result, pupils in Year 6 reported that they are very enthusiastic about the changes in mathematics and they enjoy these lessons.

Middle leaders are beginning to gain in confidence in their roles, but they have done very little monitoring of classroom practice. This is an area which the school is still developing. The school has introduced a more creative curriculum which is engaging pupils well and links together mathematics and English. In particular, the school is working hard to ensure that all learning has a meaningful context and gives pupils a real purpose for their activities. For example, the successful topic on the Second World War began with the arrival of a helicopter on site and ended a few weeks later with the school being 'evacuated' to RAF Cosford. This provided a very memorable learning experience for everyone.

The governing body has had considerable training and is more confident in analysing data and challenging the school. The standards committee meet regularly and scrutinise data. Thus the school is now being held to account more effectively. Parents and carers are well informed about their child's progress and the initiatives the school is engaged in to promote more effective learning.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- ensure leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, are effective in driving forward improvements – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has provided timely and well-judged support to the school. There has been a particular focus on improving the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills. This has had a positive impact on teachers' confidence in using assessment tools and has improved planning so that it better meets the needs of all pupils. There is an appropriate statement of action.

Priorities for further improvement

- To have a clear and shared understanding of the qualities of a good lesson.