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2 May 2012

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

Dear Miss Peters

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Harlescott Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 30 April – 1 May 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in 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 – good.

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 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 second monitoring inspection on 30 April – 1 May 2012

Evidence

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

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit the member of staff on maternity leave has returned and the maternity cover teacher has left. An associate governor has joined the governing body.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 remains low. The school's tracking data and evidence from lesson observations indicate that all pupils' progress is improving including those pupils with disabilities and special educational needs. Standards in reading have begun to improve because of the resolute determination of staff to engage pupils in enjoying reading. Daily guided-reading sessions are well planned and enable all groups of pupils to read with increased confidence and fluency. Parents and carers have had guided reading explained to them, so that they are better able to support their children's reading. Strong links have been made with the local library and families are encouraged to use it and the holiday reading schemes. In addition, the special needs coordinator has observed all letters and sounds sessions to identify and provide support to those pupils needing extra help, such as boys known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils with disabilities and special educational needs. An audit of all school reading books has identified the reading ages the books are matched to and the school is ordering the type of books needed to provide a wide selection of different reading materials which will engage and interest pupils.

Opportunities for writing have been extended and all pupils are enjoying writing activities. Staff encourage pupils to correct their own work and each other's. Good use is made of 'Magpie' boards which encourage pupils to identify vocabulary which they can use in their writing. Pupils understand how to improve their writing through using their writing targets. For example, one boy in Year 6 explained he had to use 'Level 5 connectives' to improve his diary writing about the Normans. Classroom displays in all rooms are of high quality and support learning activities well. Teachers and teaching assistants are using guidance displayed on walls to encourage pupils to work independently.

Pupils' progress in mathematics has improved because the work is better matched to pupils' prior learning and builds on this well. All staff now follow the calculations policy, which ensures there is greater consistency across the staff in the methods pupils are taught. Parents and carers have also had a workshop to help them support their children in improving mathematical understanding. The focus on pupils' understanding of multiplication tables is beginning to reap rewards as pupils are increasingly confident in 'mental maths' sessions and Year 6 pupils can work increasingly quickly and confidently to complete 'mental maths' problems.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has continued to improve. Although teaching is satisfactory overall, every lesson observed had elements of good practice. Teachers' planning clearly identifies pupils' starting points and provides good challenge, especially for higher-attaining pupils. Learning objectives are understood by pupils and are not task specific, which enables all pupils to achieve at higher levels. Pupils understand the success criteria for their work and staff are confident in asking pupils to think of their own success criteria.

Classrooms are well organised learning environments which support pupils in using aides to help them be successful. Teachers' questioning has improved and helps pupils explain their thinking. There are still occasions when staff talk too much and miss opportunities for pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning. Pupils are encouraged to review their learning during the lesson and this helps improve the pace of learning. For example, in a literacy lesson in Year 3/4, pupils could explain how to improve the teacher's writing. This enabled them to understand how to use higher-level words. The teacher valued pupils' responses and encouraged them to talk about how to improve the text so that they were better able to use these words in their own writing.

The use of mathematical resources has helped pupils improve their confidence as independent problem solvers. Teachers encourage pupils to use more sophisticated methods for solving problems. For example, in a Year 3/4 mathematics lesson, higher-attaining pupils were challenged to find the answer to $196 \div 6$. Working together, they quickly identified that the 'chunking' method they had been using for division needed refining so that a more complicated problem could be solved. This enabled them to make good progress.

The impact of training staff have had on the use of assessment is evident in pupils' books with clear steps identified to help pupils improve their work. Although a few parents and carers are concerned that misspelt words are not always identified in all children's written work, they are pleased with the better progress their children are

making. They find it helpful to know what their children are going to learn, as they like to do things at home which support this.

The training that teaching assistants have had has increased their confidence and effectiveness in the classroom. They work well with small groups of pupils. Pupils are no longer immediately withdrawn from the beginning of lessons, which ensures they understand the context for the lesson. This helps promote and encourage the learning of all groups of pupils and narrows gaps in attainment. Opportunities are sometimes missed for teaching assistants to discuss with their small group of pupils, the teacher's questions to the whole class.

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

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

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour around school and in lessons continues to be of a good standard and contributes to the positive ethos for learning, although there are not enough opportunities to enable pupils to manage their own behaviour in the classroom and around the school.

Pupils show high levels of awareness in how to keep themselves and each other safe. Bullying is a rare occurrence and pupils stated it was swiftly dealt with. They are keen to be helpful and are courteous both to each other and to visitors, who are warmly welcomed.

Pupils' high level of enjoyment in learning is reflected in their significantly improved levels of attendance, which is currently over 95%. The school has successfully developed a range of strategies, including letters home to parents and carers, if attendance slips to 90% and it has significantly reduced the number of days pupils are allowed to have for holidays during term time.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and her senior leadership team have been successful in raising expectations and driving ambitious plans forward. The senior leadership team rigorously monitor the school's progress against its action plans and has an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Middle managers have clear roles and responsibilities and work well together to drive school improvement. For example, work on extended schools has really taken off and is used effectively to involve parents and carers as part of their children's learning. All staff understand the school improvement plan and its impact on school improvement. This shared understanding has ensured that whole-school planning has positive impact on all

staff as it provides a clear rationale for change. Consequently, the school is better able to identify and share its good practice through, for example, regular staff meetings.

The governing body has continued to develop its confidence in holding the school to account. It has a detailed knowledge of the school and its daily workings.

Parents and carers who spoke to the inspector are right to be pleased with the developments and progress the school has made. Inspection findings support their views. They appreciate the good quality of information they receive through weekly newsletters home which update them on all aspects of school life.

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

- ensure that leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, are effective in driving improvement and rigorously checking on the performance of the school – good.

External support

The support from the local authority is well matched to the school's needs. The partnership primary school continues to effectively support the school.