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6 December 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 to your school on 3–4 December 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 third 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 third monitoring inspection on 3–4 December 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, looked closely at documents and met with the headteacher and senior leadership team, groups of pupils, parents and carers, members of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority.

Context

A new member of the teaching staff and four new teaching assistants joined the school in September.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Attainment, at the end of Key Stage 2, while remaining low is beginning to improve. The school's unvalidated data indicates that the proportion of pupils achieving Level 4 and above in English and mathematics has greatly improved. In particular, in mathematics, those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals achieved in line with national expectations. Boys overall achieved above national expectation in both reading and writing. The attainment of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs was also above national expectations in reading and writing. In mathematics, those pupils on school action plus did not achieve as well as other groups in the school. The school understands the reasons behind this and has put in place additional support to improve these pupils' learning. This was observed in lessons. The school is developing its own imaginative interventions for supporting disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, for example 'froggy fingers' which uses art and creative activities to increase pupils' self-confidence, social and manipulation skills.

Pupils are more confident in checking their own work because teachers and teaching assistants ask pupils to explain their understanding and working out. Through this, misconceptions are more quickly identified and addressed. Increased attention is given to ensuring that spellings are corrected and good presentation is stressed at all times.

The school is developing the literacy skills of pupils across all subjects; this is helping to improve pupils' writing. The school has increased the opportunities to help pupils read at home through e-books which give pupils quick feedback on their progress and which they enjoy using. The school is in the early stages of developing pupils' mathematical skills in other subjects.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching continues to improve. More lessons proceed at a good pace and engage pupils' interest. Higher challenge is evident in the majority of lessons and pupils enjoy this. Pupils' understanding of what they need to do in a lesson to be successful has improved. This is because teachers regularly ask pupils to explain how they have done their work and arrived at their answers. These improvements are because of the focus the school has made on improving feedback to pupils and the improved marking of pupils' work. Teachers' comments explain what pupils have done well and what they need to do next. In some classes, pupils write their own comments in response to those of the teacher. Teachers' questioning of pupils has begun to improve. In the best lessons, teachers encourage pupils to talk in pairs about the answer and ask the class if they think the answer given is correct and why they think that. This is helping pupils to become more independent and resourceful in their learning.

In observations of guided reading sessions, the match of different texts and activities is closely aligned to different groups of pupils' needs. Group work is encouraged and pupils understand the work well and what they need to do in their group. As a result, pupils are reading more often and with greater confidence.

In mathematics lessons observed, there is an increase in the extent to which pupils support each other in groups and pairs. This allows pupils to explain their thinking, and spot and correct their own mistakes. Pupils are beginning to use different methods for solving problems, and can choose the mathematical equipment that will help them work out the answer. This is developing their understanding of mathematical concepts.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas 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

The school has asked every class to write their own 'learning laws'. Pupils stated that teachers refer to the learning laws to encourage pupils to understand the sort of behaviour which they and their classmates want to develop. As a result, pupils are beginning to take more responsibility for their own behaviour. Teachers are more confident in allowing pupils to be more active in their learning and pupils are encouraged to take greater responsibility for safe behaviour. Occasionally, pupils are still too passive in lessons.

Pupils' attendance and punctuality are not a cause for concern.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Middle leaders' understanding of their role has improved. Middle leaders lead groups of staff in discussing pupil progress information and sharing teaching strategies and planning. This has helped all staff to use information on pupils' progress more confidently. All teachers take responsibility for identifying the extra support which they are going to provide to help improve pupils' understanding of work. These are closely linked to challenging targets for all pupils and are tracked by class teachers. The senior leadership team regularly monitors the targets and staff tracking, and the results of monitoring are shared as part of staff meetings. A well thought through programme of support and coaching is linked to the school's monitoring information and development planning. The senior leadership team is responsive to the needs of staff and is developing a structure for sharing good practice.

The governing body continue to use its professional expertise in challenging the school. Governors take a keen interest in scrutinising the school's development planning and checking on its progress.

Parents and carers who spoke to the inspector continue to be confident in the progress the school is making. They appreciate the good communication they receive from staff.

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

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

External support

The high-quality support from the local authority is sensitively matched to the needs of the school. Regular monitoring of the school's development plan and the quality of teaching and learning ensure that support offered is effectively managed by the school.