

23 September 2014

Mrs Ruth Bessant
Headteacher
Wath Victoria Primary School
Sandymount Road
Wath-on-Dearne
Rotherham
South Yorkshire
S63 7AD

Dear Ruth Bessant,

Requires improvement: second monitoring visit to Wath Victoria Primary School, 22 September 2014.

Following my visit to your school on 22 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2013. The first monitoring inspection visit took place in March 2014. This second visit was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

The visit was prompted by concerns about low achievement at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2014, and the failure of the proposed academy partnership.

The findings of this inspection will result in Ofsted carrying out a further monitoring visit or the bringing forward of the next section 5 inspection.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, a parent governor and local authority governor representing the governing body, and two representatives of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. School plans and your headteacher's report were scrutinised. I made a tour of all classes with you.

Context

The school was due to become an academy sponsored by the Steel City Schools Partnership. This academy sponsor withdrew in April 2014, following difficulties in resolving legal issues in relation to the ownership of land. Following a review by the

local authority, the future of the Children's Centre, managed by the governing body, has been assured and will remain open. A shadow governing body has been in place over the last term and took over from the Interim Executive Board in September 2014. A member of staff has been off sick since Easter. A pastoral manager left in the summer term and was replaced promptly. A teacher and a newly qualified teacher took up post at the beginning of September.

Achievement

In 2014, at the end of Key Stage 2, attainment declined in reading, writing mathematics, grammar, spelling and punctuation. The proportion gaining Level 4, or above, was low in all subjects compared to the provisional national averages, especially in mathematics. The proportion gaining at least Level 4 in mathematics, reading and writing combined declined significantly and was low.

In 2014, a lower percentage of Year 6 pupils made expected progress in reading and mathematics than the previous year. This proportion was much lower than the provisional national average in reading and was particularly low in mathematics. Progress in writing was similar to the previous year and close to, but below average. The school will not meet the government's floor standard for 2014, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress.

The school was disappointed with the results and had expected better. Leaders highlighted the particular personal difficulties and challenging behaviour of a number of pupils. Leaders also analysed pupils' performance in mathematics and identified that those who entered Key Stage 2 with insecure basic skills in mathematics failed to make enough progress. Gaps in knowledge and understanding were not identified and overcome by the teaching they received during Key Stage 2.

Through recent training and development, school leaders have acquired a clearer understanding of strategies to tackle some of the weaknesses in mathematics. Over the first three weeks of term, staff have begun to make greater use of models, diagrams and practical activity to improve understanding, for example of place value. This is at a very early stage of development.

Results in reading were also affected by the personal circumstances of individual pupils, but to a lesser degree. Pupils are reading more often as a result of new programmes that encourage reading at home and in school. However, pupils lack skills in interpreting text and do not have a wide enough vocabulary. For example, in the reading test, several pupils did not understand the meaning of the word 'drowsy'.

In the first few weeks of this term, the school has introduced a new approach to reading by teaching sentence forms and terminology to give pupils the language to think and talk about the meaning of text. This was being used successfully in a class observed in Key Stage 1.

A programme to improve the teaching of writing in Key Stage 1 by using talk to develop pupils' ideas and language was introduced in the summer term. This has been extended to Key Stage 2 this term but it is too early to evaluate the impact. In the last three weeks, the introduction of the use of line guides for handwriting has had a positive impact on the quality of presentation.

The proportion of children at a good level of development at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage increased in 2014 and was above the 2013 national average. These outcomes were checked by the local authority.

In 2014, the proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the expected standard in letters and sounds increased and was closer to the 2013 national average. A higher than average proportion of pupils met the standard in the Year 2 re-takes. These improvements are the result of more expert teaching of letters and sounds supported by the training, development and monitoring of support staff.

At Key Stage 1, in 2014, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was lower than the previous year. Year 2 results were affected by weaknesses in teaching that have since been tackled.

Teaching

From school evidence and joint observation, the quality of teaching remains inconsistent. Teaching has not resulted in sustained improvement in achievement over time, especially at the end of Key Stage 2.

In joint observations of teaching, weaknesses were seen in the clarity of mathematical learning objectives, the planning for different abilities, and in the level of challenge for the more able. A group of pupils was slow to start a mathematical task because they lacked written instructions to tell them what to do. An exercise to identify prepositions in a text lacked a written definition to help pupils understand the purpose and use of prepositions. At the end of lessons, teachers did not regularly summarise what pupils had achieved or clarify how learning would move forward in the next lesson. Some teaching is enthusiastic and purposeful and prompts pupils to making thoughtful verbal responses to mathematical challenges and to questions about the meaning of text.

Behaviour and safety

In 2014, attendance increased due to more rigorous follow-up to absence and greater insistence on punctuality at the beginning of the day. The larger numbers attending breakfast club and the early morning reading sessions have also made a difference. Attendance is still affected by holidays in term time and the mobile nature of some families. Leaders report improved behaviour at the beginning of this term with fewer incidents recorded. The pastoral manager plays an important role in supporting pupils and their parents and in managing links with external agencies.

Leadership and management

In the spring and summer term, uncertainty about the proposed academy partnership, followed by its abrupt end, affected the headteacher's scope to make and implement long term plans. The headteacher has accurately prioritised improvements in the teaching of basic skills. Tinsley Junior School in Sheffield has recently provided helpful strategies for improving the teaching of reading and writing. The school lacks a strong partner to provide on-going support for implementing improvements in teaching reading, writing and mathematics.

Last year, managing and supporting the Year 6 class absorbed a disproportionate amount of leadership time and energy. Leaders increased the provision of extra support for pupils but there has not been enough focus on improving the quality of classroom teaching. Teaching assistants have been trained in programmes of additional support outside the classroom but they lack training and development in their classroom support role. From September 2014, the deputy headteacher has been allocated time to coach and support staff. The very early signs are promising. A new initiative to improve the teaching of mathematics is at an early stage of implementation. Some improvements have been made through new appointments.

Governors on the newly formed governing body have taken on new responsibilities for investigating and reporting on different subjects and aspects of the school. Governors demonstrate strong commitment and are becoming better informed through first-hand visits to the school. They are keen to support improvements and to promote closer relationships with parents.

The local authority expected the academy proposal to provide the necessary support to the school. It has taken five months for the local authority to identify a potential alternative and it is currently negotiating a new partnership. The local authority has recently re-categorised the school as a cause for concern.

Further Action

Recommendations for action, which we discussed, include:

- Urgently establish a strong partnership with another school to support leaders in bringing about improvements in teaching, behaviour and achievement.

I would be grateful if you would forward a copy of this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the headteacher consultant from Rotherham local authority.

Yours sincerely,

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector