

28 March 2006

The Headteacher
Eckington Junior School
School Street
Eckington
Derbyshire
S21 4FL

Dear Mr Weld,

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ECKINGTON JUNIOR SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with John Brennan, Additional Inspector to your school on 15 and 16 March 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 2005.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, a representative from the local authority (LA) and the chair of governors.

Context

Since the last inspection two teachers and two teaching assistants have been absent because of ill health. The deputy headteacher will be leaving the school at the end of the term to take up the post of headteacher at another school. The numeracy coordinator has been appointed to be the acting deputy headteacher and is expected to take up the post next term.

Achievement and standards

The standards children attain are not good enough; they are below average overall and well below average in writing. The progress children are making is inconsistent across the school and weakest in Years 3 and 4.

In Years 5 and 6 children have begun to make satisfactory progress and in some cases in Year 6, good progress in writing. However, standards still remain below average. In Years 3 and 4 the rate and amount of progress in writing is patchy and some children have made very little progress since the last inspection. Work in children's books in Years 3 and 4 shows a lack of challenge in their learning. Improvement in English needs to be more consistently embedded in all of the work the children do.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2005:

- Raise standards in English and particularly in writing – inadequate progress.

Personal Development and well being

Children generally behave well, except in lessons where activities are often uninteresting and when they have to sit and listen to the teacher for too long. On these occasions children become restless and inattentive. In contrast children rise well to the challenge of lessons that makes them think. They become eager to answer questions and share opinions. Improvements in how behaviour is managed in the playground have eased the concerns some children had about bullying. Children now say that there is very little bullying and they play happily and co-operatively during playtimes. When the school council meets it makes things happen, for example introducing equipment for indoor playtimes.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching overall is inadequate because it is too inconsistent and children do not make enough progress. Better teaching takes place in Years 5 and 6 and is helping children catch up in their learning. In Years 3 and 4 inadequate teaching prevents children from making satisfactory progress. In inadequate lessons teaching lacks pace and children are not given enough time to work. Whole class teaching at the beginning of the lesson does not engage children, they are not encouraged to take part in discussions and they lose concentration.

A number of strategies to improve teaching have been introduced including using a standard planning format and sharing learning expectations with children. Although these strategies and other expectations for teaching are developing, they are not yet being effectively used in all year groups.

Setting in Years 5 and 6 is beginning to match teaching more effectively to children's abilities. In Year 6 this is further refined with the use of a part-time teacher so that there are three ability groups. However, within each group work is not always differentiated enough to meet the full range of ability.

The school has put in place thorough systems for assessing children in reading, writing and mathematics. This has given a clear picture of children's current abilities and teachers have begun to use this assessment well to set writing targets for children. However the school is only at the beginning of using assessment data to help teachers identify where progress is not good enough so that appropriate action can be taken.

Management of teaching assistants is inconsistent. In some lessons they are used well especially to help children with learning difficulties. However in some lessons, for example in Year 3, the impact of the teaching assistants work in raising standards is unsatisfactory.

The organisation of the morning sessions is having a negative impact on the children's learning and behaviour. By the third session too many children, especially in Years 3 and 4, have lost interest and are tired.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2005:

- Continue to improve assessment and the checking on pupils' progress - satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are inadequate because insufficient work has been done to resolve the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning across the school. There is not a sufficient sense of urgency to make the improvements required by the previous inspection. With support from the LA, a number of initiatives have been put in place to improve teaching and the way the school checks how well it is doing. These have yet to make enough impact because the school's leadership has been slow to take advantage of the help provided by the LA. Where lessons have been monitored there has not been enough support to address the specific

weaknesses identified. Further monitoring has not checked that the weaknesses have been tackled. There is an urgent and pressing need for the school's leadership to implement a far more rigorous and systematic evaluation of teaching and the progress children make.

The senior leadership team has become more aware of the school's strengths and areas for development. They have had some useful discussions on improving the quality of education but have not been given enough opportunity to undertake their responsibilities for raising standards and increasing the rate of the children's progress.

Through effective support from the LA the literacy and numeracy coordinators have developed their roles and have improved their teaching. They have successfully led staff meetings. Although they appreciate more needs to be done they have not been given sufficient opportunity to monitor and evaluate their curriculum areas or be used as role models for improving the quality of teaching.

The chair of governors has a realistic view of the school and is determined to improve the role of the governors in supporting the school and holding it to account. There has been a complete change in the governors' committee structure and meetings and actions have now been planned for. This revitalised role of the governors is beginning to challenge the school more effectively.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in September 2005:

- Instigate a programme of monitoring, evaluation and support in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning and improve the systems the school has to check on its own effectiveness – inadequate progress.
- Develop the leadership skills of subject leaders and strengthen those of the senior leadership team – inadequate progress.
- Improve governance, particularly the way governors hold the school to account for its standards and their involvement in planning for improvement – satisfactory progress.

External support

The LA's statement is good and clearly identifies appropriate action and timescales. It has provided considerable support to the school, particularly in

monitoring teaching and developing the roles of coordinators, particularly the English and numeracy coordinators. Although this support has been effective the school has become somewhat dependent on it and the LA now recognises the need for the headteacher to take more of a lead and use the systems for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning. The LA have also provided the school with extra funding to pay for a part time teacher to support work in Years 5 and 6 which is having a positive impact.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Quality of LA's statement of action – good.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Strengthen the school's leadership so that the most pressing priorities for improvement are tackled with more rigour and urgency.
- Urgently improve the quality of teaching and learning in Years 3 and 4.
- Make better use of the skills of the English and mathematics coordinators.
- Review the structure of the morning sessions.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Chief Education Officer for Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Cook
H M Inspector