

11 July 2006

Mr Weld
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 Ann Taylor, Additional Inspector, to your school on 22 and 23 June 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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, senior leadership team, school council, chair of governors and a representative from the Local Authority (LA).

Context

Since the last visit the deputy headteacher has moved to a new post and the numeracy co-ordinator has taken on the role of acting deputy headteacher. A teacher took up a temporary post to cover one Year 4 class three weeks before this visit. In the other Year 4 class, since May, there have been a number of temporary teachers covering the first two and a half days of the week whilst the rest of the week is covered by a temporary teacher who had been teaching small groups in Year 6.

Achievement and standards

The standards the children attain are still not high enough; there is still a large amount of work that needs covering in order to help them catch up to where they should be. Standards remain below average overall and well below average in writing. Teacher assessments for the 2006 statutory tests confirm this unsatisfactory picture of standards. However, there are now the green shoots of recovery, especially in Years 3, 5 and 6 where at least satisfactory progress is being made. Overall progress in Year 4 remains unsatisfactory partly due to the inconsistency of staffing.

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

- Raise standards in English and particularly in writing - satisfactory progress

Personal development and well being

Children continue to behave well. There is still an element of restlessness in some classes, which teachers generally deal with well. When given the right encouragement, pupils are enthusiastic and keen to work hard, for example, when researching their Viking projects. They particularly enjoy lessons involving use of the interactive white boards. Year 4 children continue to be disappointed by and unsettled with the changes in teachers.

Behaviour at playtimes is generally satisfactory and the atmosphere in the dining hall is much improved. However, playtimes can be quite sterile. Playtime resources are not routinely available in order to encourage positive play. This would help counteract the sometimes over-boisterous behaviour from boys.

The school council is largely inactive at the moment but is to be re-launched in September.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved and overall is satisfactory. It is most effective in Years 5 and 6. In Year 4 however, the high turnover of temporary supply staff has caused disruption to children's learning and this has resulted in one class being very unsettled. Although better teaching is beginning to have a positive impact on the progress children make, the school recognises that more good and outstanding teaching is needed if children are to bridge the gap between the standards they currently reach and ones which are expected.

The best lessons are well organised, focused on clear learning objectives and move at a brisk pace. Children enjoy what they are doing because work is interesting and tasks are appropriately challenging. In an outstanding mathematics lesson no time was wasted and the teacher's skilful questioning accelerated the pupils' learning. In satisfactory lessons there was limited differentiation of work and the pace of teaching, although satisfactory, did not enable the children to make sufficiently rapid gains.

The use of assessment in lessons is developing. For example teachers are beginning to check how confident children are in their learning by asking them to evaluate their progress against the learning objective or a target. In one good lesson the teacher effectively introduced evaluative criteria for performance poetry so that children could assess each other's work. They did this honestly and it was an effective way for the teacher to ensure children understood how much they had learnt. The school continues to develop the use of other assessment to build up a picture of children's progress. Records of assessment are increasingly being transferred to electronic systems with extended possibilities for analysis. Work has been done on plotting value added data which can be used to track progress from starting points in Year 3. This data has only recently been generated and the school is beginning to make use of it.

Teaching assistants are not used as effectively as they could be. Although they provide satisfactory support for group and independent activities, they are less clear as to their role during whole class teaching.

The school has changed the way it organises lessons in the morning which has led to a slight improvement on teachers' time-keeping and the pace of learning. However the organisation of the morning continues to have a negative impact on some children because they find it difficult to settle in the last session of the morning.

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

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

Leadership and management

The senior leadership team (SLT) is now aware of the need to deal with issues more robustly. Following a period of time when the literacy and numeracy co-ordinators were not effectively deployed by the headteacher they are now working well and having a very positive impact on improving teaching. An extensive programme of monitoring, evaluation and support is in place. All members of the SLT has undertaken monitoring lessons with a focus on areas where inadequate teaching had been identified. There have also been checks

on children's work and teachers' planning. It is evident that staff are responding well to the increase in monitoring and the SLT has been successful in building a more self critical culture. However there is still some way to go and senior managers recognise that they must continue to improve teaching so more is good and outstanding. They also appreciate that the instability in staffing in Year 4 must be addressed.

Much of the increased volume of monitoring work has only just begun and needs further development and embedding as part of the ongoing self evaluation processes of the school. For example not enough monitoring has taken place to revisit some areas identified for improvement in order to evaluate the effectiveness of support and challenge. The quality and depth of evaluative comments varies and could be developed so that they become increasingly effective in promoting good teaching. Different formats are used for recording comments and the school has yet to produce criteria that are consistently used for similar monitoring.

Alongside monitoring the school has organised a range of good support strategies to improve teaching. Teachers have observed good practice, and have received training on lesson planning and delivery.

A good example of the increasing urgency of tackling underachievement is the recent work done on the analysis of standards in writing. Following tests done in May, the acting deputy headteacher has identified groups of children in each year group who have made inadequate progress in writing. These small groups now receive extra support and their progress is monitored.

The LA continues to support the school, but it is noticeable that the school is taking greater ownership of the direction of the improvement work. LA advisory teachers have effectively worked alongside the literacy and numeracy co-ordinators in order to model monitoring and support strategies. At the end of the summer term the numeracy co-ordinator, who is also the acting deputy headteacher and responsible for leading and managing assessment, is moving to a new post. The school is aware of the impact of this change and has some plans in place to ensure continuity of leadership in these key areas.

The governors continue to be aware of areas in need of further improvement. They are involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and, with an increase in the quality and amount of data on standards, are challenging the school 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 - good progress

- Develop the leadership skills of subject leaders and strengthen those of the senior leadership team - good progress
- Improve governance, particularly the way governors hold the school to account for its standards and their involvement in planning improvement - satisfactory progress

External support

The LA continues to support the school and has been more successful in facilitating the SLT, especially the literacy and numeracy co-ordinators, so that their skills have developed and their confidence to drive improvement has increased. Further work is planned but there is a healthy acknowledgement that this should be proportionate to the school's capacity to improve.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that each year group has stability in staffing.
- Evaluate the morning sessions and take action to improve the quality of learning that takes place.
- Increase the proportion of good and better lessons, and continue work with underachieving groups, so that the progress children make is accelerated and they reach the standards expected.
- Ensure the induction of the new deputy headteacher quickly results in further developing the effectiveness of the senior leadership team.

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