

12 March 2007

Mr Stringer
Acting Headteacher
Eckington Junior School
School Street
Eckington
Derbyshire
S21 4FL

Dear Mr Stringer

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ECKINGTON JUNIOR SCHOOL.

Introduction

Following my visit with Gillian Smith, Additional Inspector to your school on 27-28 February, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth 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, the school council, the chair of governors, and a representative from the LA.

Context

Since the last visit the school has appointed a Year 3 teacher who has taken on the leadership and management of mathematics. Plans to release the deputy headteacher from her teaching commitment to develop her leadership role did not happen because suitable cover staff could not be found. The school has two part time teachers who provide cover for various reasons. The deputy headteacher and one other teacher were absent on both days of the visit.

Achievement and standards

Children are continuing to make improved progress in English and mathematics. The standard of children's work in writing, mathematics and science is now formally assessed each half term and pupils' progress is closely tracked. The most recent analysis correctly indicates that, although overall standards are slowly rising in reading, writing and mathematics, there are individual year groups where progress is not as strong. The school predicts that the proportion of Year 6 pupils reaching the expected standard in these subjects in the forthcoming national tests will be close to the national average. Evidence in children's books, however, indicates that there is still some way to go.

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's attitudes towards school are continuing to improve and they are especially pleased with many of the recent changes. They speak highly of their teachers and of the way they are making their learning increasingly interesting and enjoyable. Children also speak most positively of the headteacher because he 'plays to win' and has significantly improved the quality of their time at school. He has, for example, introduced singing in assembly and children really like the way this raises their spirits and brings their school together as a community. Lunch and break times have significantly improved since the first visit and are now a real highlight of the day. Children choose from a wide range of activities that includes football, line dancing, hula hoops and a ball wall. This level of activity keeps pupils fit and helps them to return to their lessons feeling refreshed and with their spirits high.

The school council has been re-launched since the last visit and children are very pleased that this has happened. Children's views are now given much more attention and this supports the school's growing awareness of how well it is doing.

Quality of provision

During the visit the teaching in approximately two thirds of the lessons seen was satisfactory. In other lessons teaching was good. No inadequate teaching was seen, which is an improvement compared to the last visit. In satisfactory lessons there were some good features which have obviously become characteristic of regular teaching in the school. For example time keeping in lessons was good and teachers were aware of the clock and kept moving on to the next part of the lesson as they had planned. In most lessons teaching aimed to match work to children's different abilities and it was evident in books that this is usual. Children's behaviour in lessons was good and they are responding well to the positive feel that is currently in the school.

These good features seen in lessons were not capitalised on enough to ensure children made good progress. There was also too much teaching that was satisfactory in lessons and opportunities were sometimes missed to keep children challenged. For example in one lesson the teacher used the interactive white board effectively to teach about pictograms. Children enjoyed this part of the lesson and understood what was being taught. However, when a similar activity followed, children were not challenged enough because teaching was not building on what they had already learnt. In another lesson, although different activities were given to children according to their ability, they did not provide the right level of challenge so that the more able could make good progress.

The use of teaching assistants has again improved. They followed teacher's plans and in many lessons were seen to provide effective help for children who were struggling with their work. During the introduction of lessons teaching assistants helped children to understand by repeating teaching points and asking questions. This was often done well. However, in one lesson excessive amounts of talking and questioning made it difficult for children to concentrate on the teacher.

The school's own recent monitoring found around two thirds of lessons to be good. However the inspection visit found that this proportion of good teaching is not yet happening consistently across the school.

One improvement since the last visit is the school's use of assessment to identify groups of children who need extra support in their learning. As a result, some small groups of children are now being given extra sessions where they are given work that is matched to their needs. The school has had a complicated task to fit these sessions in. Some take place during assembly time so that children miss out on assemblies, which have also improved significantly since the arrival of the acting headteacher. Assessment is also effective in identifying year groups where children's achievement is not

good enough. The senior leadership team (SLT) is using this information well and putting in extra support for teaching to further improve teaching.

The quality of provision continues to be negatively affected by the unfortunate high levels of staff absence. Some year groups, especially Year 6, have had a number of teachers resulting in their learning being interrupted.

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

At the time of the last visit you had only been in post for two days but had already identified some key actions to move the school on. Now having been in post just over twelve weeks it is very evident that your very enthusiastic leadership has been effective and the school is much more confident about its future.

The monitoring of lessons has been robust and rigorous. Good features of teaching are celebrated and areas for improvement clearly identified. A monitoring timetable has been established which involves all members of the SLT. The quality of both the observations and feedback has significantly improved when compared to previous visits. Through these lesson observations as well as additional support given, weaker teaching seen in the last inspection has been tackled and is now satisfactory. On a few occasions this monitoring has involved the literacy coordinator. However, although planned for the near future, the deputy headteacher and numeracy coordinator have yet to monitor lessons.

Children's work has been scrutinised and both the literacy and numeracy coordinators have been involved. This work has not been done in as much depth as the evaluations of teaching but nevertheless has resulted in judgements being made and areas for improvement identified.

The deputy headteacher has continued to build up a secure picture of standards across the school through recording the outcomes of regular tests. She has met with staff to analyse the results and has used the information effectively to identify groups of children who are not making sufficient progress. This analysis was to be discussed at a SLT meeting just before this visit but had to be cancelled and so the SLT have still to discuss in detail the any issues raised.

SLT meetings have taken place on a weekly basis and there has been a clear focus on improving the school. Discussions have been recorded and action

has been allocated to different team members, holding them to account effectively. Governors have also been involved in meetings where data on standards has been discussed and these have successfully raised their awareness of the school's progress.

Since the last visit the school has completed an evaluation of its effectiveness and reviewed all improvement plans. In the light of findings, plans have been redrafted and given clearer time scales, and specific staff have been allocated responsibilities.

Overall your very good leadership and management skills have been used effectively and all of the priorities identified for further improvement at the last visit have been successfully achieved. However, the current members of the SLT have not all had a range of opportunities to prove they have similar skills that are sufficiently effective. Furthermore, there is still work to be done to improve the impact other subject leaders have. The recently completed review of who leads and manages subjects or other areas of work in the school has been a useful start. Areas of responsibility have been highlighted and tasks have been given with clear direction. For example, coordinators have been asked to produce an action plan and given a good exemplar.

The chair of governors continues to drive forward the work of the governors, who have become better at holding the school to account. An excellent governors' letter to parents has been produced. Governors have also engaged parents through a questionnaire and have drawn up a plan of action to put right some of the concerns raised. Having spoken to a number of parents during my visit, it is very clear that this improved communication is welcomed, as well as the new air of optimism the school now has. Governors are right to appreciate that the school has some challenges ahead in terms of sustaining the improvements in leadership and management and extending these within the SLT. They have diligently begun the process of appointing a substantive head to start in September 2007 and plan to continue their work with the SLT to ensure the school's effectiveness does not regress.

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 – satisfactory progress.
- Improve governance, particularly the way governors hold the school to account for its standards and their involvement in planning improvement – good progress.

External support

Following the last visit the LA have been more focused on challenging and supporting the school, helping it to get back on track in terms of improving provision. The link adviser has undertaken good lesson observations in year groups where teaching needed to improve further. The LA literacy consultant has worked alongside teachers effectively, giving good advice. The arrangements to bring in an acting headteacher have been successful. However, the LA appreciates that the impact of current plans to reduce the amount of support from the acting headteacher following the Easter break will have to be monitored closely.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Resolve the issues surrounding the position of substantive headteacher to ensure the good progress made since the last visit is sustained.
- Minimise the disruption to staffing especially in Year 6.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Strategic Director for Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely



H M Inspector