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Mrs H Pickin
The Headteacher
Waterside Primary School
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Dear Mrs Pickin

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WATERSIDE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Nancy Walker, Additional Inspector, to your school on 21 and 22 March 2007, 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 June 2006.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, pupils in Years 5 and 6, the chair of governors and members of the governors' review committee, a representative from the local authority and the advisory headteacher working with the school.

Context

In January 2007 the Joiners Square Primary School moved into new buildings near to the old premises. It was renamed Waterside Primary School. Around the same time a number of teachers left the school. At present half of the classes are taught by temporary staff.

Achievement and standards

Improvement to standards and achievement has been satisfactory since the visit in November 2006. Now, achievement is satisfactory although some pupils do not make as much progress as they could. This is especially the case for more able pupils. Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress because of the sustained good quality of provision in Nursery and Reception.

In Key Stages 1 and 2, achievement is sometimes good when learning is practically based or lessons are delivered at a brisk pace. Lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' work show that the two new, temporary teachers in Years 5 and 6 have worked well to improve achievement and that it is accelerating in these classes. Improvement to achievement has also been made in Years 1 and 3, although pupils' progress remains inconsistent here. Visits to lessons show that there is also inconsistency in the achievement of pupils in Year 4. The continuing instability in staffing contributes to the erratic progress made by many pupils.

Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities generally make similar progress to other pupils. It was observed in lessons that a few of these pupils do not receive appropriate support to ensure they make consistent progress. Since November, attention has been given to the support provided for pupils who have English as an additional language with the result that they achieve satisfactorily now.

Whilst standards remain below average, there is evidence of improvement in English and mathematics. It is still unlikely that the pupils in Year 6 will meet their targets by the end of the year, although the proportion expected to do this has risen since November 2006. School leaders realise that there is still much work to do to ensure standards and achievement are good enough.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being are now good, which is a significant improvement since November 2006. Behaviour has been improved well, especially in Years 5 and 6 where lessons are now productive and purposeful and pupils enjoy their learning. The management of behaviour is now improved and is a strength in most classes. Pupils have positive attitudes to their learning and older pupils talk confidently of the improvements they notice in teaching. Relationships are harmonious and pupils show good support and care for each other. Although the rate remains slightly below average, there has been good improvement to attendance this school year.

Quality of provision

There has been satisfactory improvement to teaching and learning since the November inspection. The inadequate provision in Years 5 and 6 has been eliminated and there are signs of good teaching emerging in these two year groups. Teachers' expectations have been raised and there is more challenge in the work. Pupils say that lessons are now more interesting and that the work is sometimes harder than it was.

Whilst the scrutiny of pupils' work shows that the match of tasks to pupils' abilities has improved a little, it remains an area of concern. As observed in lessons and in pupils' books, there are occasions when the more able have to complete exactly the same work as the other pupils. There are also instances when pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make insufficient progress because their support is not well enough tailored to their needs. The school is actively working on improving provision for pupils with English as an additional language and has moved satisfactorily here. Staff training has taken place and specific support, based on more careful assessment, is to be introduced next term.

The school is making satisfactory progress towards its target of 75% good teaching and the overall quality is satisfactory in Key Stage 1 and 2 and good in the Foundation Stage. The continuing temporary arrangements for teaching in Years 1, 4, 5 and 6 mean that the improvement is fragile. However, it is noted that the school is about to advertise for replacement full time teachers and that the temporary teacher in Year 6 is now to remain until July 2008.

Since the last inspection in November, systems to assess pupils' achievement have been improved, although they are not yet fully embedded throughout the school. Marking of pupils' work is inconsistent and not sufficiently helpful in showing pupils how well they are doing or how to improve. Procedures to set targets for pupils and track their achievement have also been improved, although there is still much work to be done to make the system rigorous and ambitious. Assessment and target tracking remain strengths in the Foundation Stage and contribute well to children's achievement.

The curriculum continues to be of satisfactory quality, with improved focus on basic skills in literacy and numeracy, especially writing.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2006:

- improve the accuracy and use of assessment information to ensure all pupils are suitably challenged and shown how to improve – satisfactory
- develop efficient tracking and target setting procedures in order to rectify shortcomings in pupils' achievement more quickly – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Improvement to the quality of leadership and management has been satisfactory since the previous inspection. A significant feature of this has been the headteacher's determination to address the weaknesses identified in November 2006. The headteacher now leads the school with much improved direction and the focus on improved achievement is very obvious in her rigorous monitoring and evaluation of provision and full focus on improved achievement.

Senior leaders meet regularly to review the progress towards the school's priorities. The school development plan has been improved so that it identifies clearly priorities for raising standards and achievement against an appropriate timescale. Generally, the school meets these deadlines in contrast to what was found at the last inspection. Despite this improvement, senior leaders do not yet have an accurate enough view of the school's performance. Monitoring and evaluation are conducted by the headteacher with support from the local authority, but senior leaders do not yet have full involvement in this. Monitoring is, however, much more focused on learning and achievement and the evaluative aspect is now satisfactory. School self-evaluation is now grounded in more robust evidence and, as a result, its accuracy has improved.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2006:

- strengthen leadership and management at all levels by having a more rigorous approach to the evaluation of teaching and its effectiveness in raising pupils' achievement – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority continues to provide satisfactory support for the school, although its nature has changed. No longer is the school dependent on local authority support to plug gaps. The local authority staff now have a quality assurance role and are able to devote less time to shoring up the school. This is because the headteacher is increasingly taking responsibility for leading and managing the school and she now shows greater capacity to bring about improvement.

Main judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Maintain a rigorous monitoring to ensure that work in lessons is suitably adapted for each ability group to provide consistent challenge for all pupils.
- Improve marking so that it identifies how successfully pupils are achieving their individual targets and how to improve their work.
- Make sure that the target tracking system is updated regularly so that any underachievement can be identified at an early stage, especially among the more able pupils and those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, and the Director of Education for Stoke-on-Trent.

Yours sincerely

David Carrington
Additional Inspector