

6 June 2007

The Headteacher
Netherfield Primary School
Chandos Street
Netherfield
Nottinghamshire
NG4 2LR

Dear Mr Fitzpatrick

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF NETHERFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Christopher Dean-Hall and Joanne Harvey, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 21 and 22 May, 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 January 2007.

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, subject coordinators, groups of pupils, the chair and vice chair of governors and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

The present split-site school was formed in September 2005 from the amalgamation of formerly separate junior and infant schools. Pending the construction of a new school, education takes place in buildings that are no longer fit for purpose and significantly limit the educational opportunities of pupils.

Achievement and standards

The school is unable to provide evidence of consistent improvements to achievement in English, mathematics and science across the school. It is not helped in this regard by the undeveloped whole-school systems for gathering and making the best use of assessment data to promote further and more rapid improvements.

However, work scrutiny and lesson observations during the inspection suggest there have been improvements in the use of assessment at classroom level. For example, where planning and marking have improved and where the best teachers are making good use of clear objectives, success criteria and accurate targets, progress is beginning to quicken. However, practice is too variable; systems are not yet robust enough and have too recently been put in place to measure their full impact. These classroom activities are not underpinned by robust systems at whole school level, where problems remain with tracking the progress that pupils are making.

The school considers there to have been significant improvements at Key Stage 2, where the school data suggests that particularly in Years 4, 5 and 6, there has been an improvement in the amount of progress pupils are making and that more pupils in Years 4 and 6 are on track to achieve the standards expected for their age. At present, these assertions are not based on reliable data and cannot be properly verified. The school is not meeting its own targets for the percentage of pupils reaching the expected levels, particularly in Years 3 and 5. Too many pupils are still making inadequate progress and boys continue to underachieve.

Pupils achieve well in the Foundation Stage. The staff are developing an accurate view of pupils' attainment when they begin their education and ensure that the work is well matched to their developing needs. They are careful to note the steps needed for individual children to make progress and ensure through their planning that these needs are met.

In Key Stage 1, the results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 2 in 2007 are not as good as those achieved in 2006. However, this dip masks a complex situation with a range of unsatisfactory to good teaching and consequently uneven progress combined with a possible lack of rigour to previous assessments. However, for the first time the school now has a set of baseline data which has been moderated and can be used with confidence. Pupils with learning difficulties are well supported by teaching assistants and this enables them to make at least satisfactory progress.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- Raise achievement in English, mathematics and science by using assessment information to ensure that learning builds on previous knowledge and skills – inadequate progress.

Personal development and well-being

The personal development of pupils remains satisfactory though there are some stronger features. These include the successful promotion of positive attitudes to learning and pupils' willingness and confidence to talk about their work. The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and the contribution they make to the community are also strengths. The school is valued by its community and has worked hard to build positive relationships. It is a successfully inclusive school. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Where teaching and the curriculum are good there is an obvious improvement to the enjoyment of learning and pupils are increasingly confident about how their targets for learning help them to improve their work. Attendance remains below that found in most primary schools.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection, but there is still more that needs to be done to provide pupils with consistently good learning opportunities. The school has begun to provide more challenge for pupils but the level is inconsistent and depends entirely on the quality of the teaching. Teachers' lesson planning increasingly identifies differentiated work to meet the pupils' differing needs, but not all teachers are sufficiently skilled to ensure enough challenge in the actual lesson. This is particularly the case for the more able pupils, where not enough is expected of them. This situation is due in part to the limited amount of accurate assessment information held by the school and expectations which are too low in terms of what pupils can do.

Insufficient attention has been given to improving teachers' subject knowledge in science. Limited support has been possible from the LA. In addition, the subject leader has not had enough opportunities to work with colleagues in classrooms with the result that little progress has been made in this area.

Teachers now provide short-term targets more effectively to support learning. They use day-to-day class level assessment more effectively to identify pupils' next steps in learning. An emphasis on clearly defined success criteria allows teachers and pupils to recognise progress. Pupils themselves recognise the way that 'layered' targets are helping them to improve their work in English and mathematics. Teachers have concentrated hard on identifying clear learning outcomes for lessons, which together with clear success criteria are improving pupils' ability to assess their own learning. The focused checking of

this aspect of teaching by the senior leadership team has helped in ensuring and recognising this improvement. However, overall there is too much teaching which is inadequate, which is routine and lacks the sparkle necessary to fire pupils' interests and improve their learning. Insufficient joint planning between teachers and teaching assistants often leads to the latter being under utilised during whole class sessions. This often reduces their impact on pupils' progress. However, pupils who find learning difficult or who have learning disabilities are effectively supported.

The curriculum increasingly meets the needs and interests of pupils in Year 2. In Year 1, whole school planning has improved but teaching is not good enough to ensure that the planned learning opportunities are provided in lessons. In addition, there is a lack of accurate assessment of pupils' attainment levels and information gained is not used sufficiently well to enhance pupils' learning and progress. In Key Stages 1 and 2 there is improved team planning which is helping to ensure coherence to the whole school planning for learning.

In the Foundation Stage there is an effective balance between teacher initiated and child initiated activity and learning opportunities are suitably practical. However, older children do not have sufficient access to the same quality of outdoor curriculum as younger children.

The quality of care, guidance and support has been maintained since the time of the last inspection. All the necessary procedures to safeguard pupils are in place. Academic guidance and support are now having a beneficial impact on pupils' ability to know what they have to do to improve. The school is inclusive, and personal and social education is well catered for, particularly for older pupils. The school is at the centre of its community and works increasingly closely with parents and carers.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by: providing more challenge; improving teachers' knowledge of science and by enabling pupils to reach their short term targets – satisfactory progress
- Provide a curriculum that meets pupils' needs and interests, particularly in Key Stage 1 – satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The school lacks a sufficiently clear and focused strategic direction and drive in order to improve quickly. Planning on the key issues facing the school is detailed, but there is a lack of planned timelines. Different strands of activity are not prioritised and therefore impact is dissipated. This has meant that those with responsibility for key areas of work lack a clear understanding as to how and when they will carry out their improvement activity.

Although job descriptions have been drawn up for managers that better reflect the priorities facing the school, these have as yet had limited impact on teaching and learning and little impact on the achievement of pupils. Subject coordinators are not empowered or enabled to lead change, although some of them are prepared and able to exemplify good practice.

The monitoring of teaching is now regular and planned, but it is only recently, through joint observations with an external consultant, that the senior leadership team has been able to make reliable judgements of quality. Further training in observation is planned but has been slow to progress in practice to other managers and subject coordinators.

The support for teachers in terms of subject knowledge and pedagogic skills has not been fully put in place. Subject coordinators, alongside LA consultants, are capable of working in the classroom alongside teachers in order to develop practice. The deputy headteacher has recently taken on the role of assessment coordinator, but much work remains to be done for the school to be able to evidence pupils' progress accurately and to underpin the improving use of assessment information at classroom level.

Self-evaluation is largely accurate in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the school. However, feedback from evaluation is not being sufficiently well used to improve practice in teaching and learning in particular.

Governors have a realistic view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They could make existing subject links more effective by engaging in dialogue with coordinators as well as seeing lessons in progress. This would give them a stronger first hand view of how effectively teaching and learning priorities are being tackled.

Accommodation is poor and not fit for purpose, with older children in teaching spaces designed for infants. ICT infrastructure is largely missing and outdoor play for young children inadequate.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- Strengthen leadership and management by more effective delegation of responsibilities and rigorous monitoring evaluation of teaching, learning and pupils' progress – inadequate progress

External support

The LA statement of action is comprehensive in its support for the priorities identified at the last inspection. The LA has, however, offered variable support to the leadership team, governors and teachers since the inspection. There has been a positive impact in respect of development planning, the monitoring and evaluation of provision through joint observation and general

training for staff on teaching and learning. Paired working with another successful infant school within the authority has had a positive impact on curriculum development at Key Stage 1. However, the support for core subject development in the classroom through consultants has faltered through changes in LA personnel. This has led to a slow rate of improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and subject knowledge.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed until further notice.

Priorities for further improvement

- Create a simple strategic overview of developments for the coming academic year that clearly prioritises initiatives within appropriate timescales.
- Enable all managers to: audit need; prioritise action; have an agreed focus for improvements; play a full part in evaluating their impact.
- Ensure that the recording of pupils' attainment levels throughout the school is accurate so that progress at whole school level can be measured.
- Subject coordinators and external consultants need to work alongside classroom teachers in order to develop subject knowledge and skills, raising the overall quality of teaching.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Nottinghamshire.

Yours sincerely

David Martin
H M Inspector