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21 December 2007

The Headteacher
North Denes Middle School
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Dear Mrs Heywood

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF NORTH DENES MIDDLE SCHOOL

Following my visit with Trevor Watts, Additional Inspector, to your school on 12 – 13 December 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 November 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed

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

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Norfolk.

Yours sincerely

Roger Fry

Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF NORTH DENES MIDDLE SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 12 – 13 December 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, observed lessons in all classes and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and senior team, core subject leaders, a group of pupils, the chair of governors and another governor, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the school has established a subject leader for mathematics.

Achievement and standards

During the first monitoring visit in June 2007, teachers' assessments indicated that Year 6 pupils were on course to meet their targets for English and mathematics. End of year national tests in 2007 showed that pupils exceeded the school's target for English by 4%, but missed the target for mathematics by 7%. In both subjects, fewer pupils than expected reached the higher than average (Level 5) standards.

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is below average. In comparison with national standards in summer 2007, Year 6 pupils' results were well below average in English, mathematics and science. Results showed that the school had not improved the rate of pupils' progress significantly up to that point. Pupils' standards improved slightly in English and mathematics over the previous year, but worsened in science.

The school's data this year shows that seven in ten pupils have begun to make good progress across the school and that they are closing the gap with nationally expected standards. The targets for the present Year 6 to reach in 2008 are realistic but require a high proportion of pupils to make good progress. Evidence from lessons seen during the monitoring visit confirms that pupils make satisfactory and on occasions good progress. In Year 7, for example, the teaching encourages pupils' accelerated progress in that more able pupils in mathematics work successfully with aspects of Year 8 algebra. The improvements in teaching are beginning to show in pupils' better progress but the pace of improvement needs to quicken if the school is to meet its targets.

Pupils who find learning difficult receive appropriate support. Their work is matched to their abilities and they make steady progress. The provision for pupils in the Learning Support Centre (LSC) and in the nurture room (The Haven) is good. These pupils make good progress towards their targets because work is closely matched to their social and academic needs.

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

- Improve achievement and raise standards, particularly in English and mathematics, by accelerating the rate of pupils' progress - satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development continues to improve. Their behaviour is mostly good in lessons and around the school. Lesson disruption is rare, as the teaching is increasingly interesting and motivating. Pupils say they enjoy the greater challenge in lessons over the past terms. Pupils' attendance is average, and the school takes positive steps to reduce pupils' absences. Many pupils have a good awareness of what healthy eating and living involve, and they often take the healthy options at lunch times. The school has achieved 'Healthy School' status.

Quality of provision

The 'Intensifying Support Programme' (ISP) supports teaching effectively. In English and mathematics in every class, pupils have targets that reflect their current learning needs at three different levels of difficulty. There is a high degree of consistency between classes in the way that targets are set, which is improving pupils' progress. Teachers regularly test pupils and moderate their judgements to ensure that the school has a complete picture of all pupils' performances.

The school has responded very well to the identified need to develop a system for tracking pupils' attainment and progress in much more detail. The deputy headteacher, coordinator for assessment, in conjunction with the LA, have developed a good computer-based system that stores information efficiently and allows it to be analysed quickly. Progress has been very good with this target. The school now has the capacity to set accurate short and longer-term targets quickly for all pupils, study the performances of different groups and identify underachievement. The tracking system has already helped teachers decide which pupils need extra support and of what sort, to help them make better progress. There is extensive provision for small groups who have particular needs in English and mathematics to accelerate pupils' progress. The improvements in these pupils' progress can be attributed to this group work. All pupils are also grouped in 'sets' of similar abilities in English and mathematics. This arrangement is working because it helps teachers match the work to pupils' needs more effectively.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last monitoring visit and is close to the school target of 65% good or better. However, the proportion of high quality lessons, where pupils make the best progress, is still not high enough. This is an essential area for further improvement if pupils are to continue to catch up with national standards.

The management of pupils' behaviour is good in most lessons. Lesson targets are clear and teachers explain what the objectives are to pupils at the start of sessions. The pace in good lessons is brisk and pupils' focus on learning is well managed. References to previous and future lessons help to capture pupils' attention and interest. In Year 5, pupils found the film clips and diagrams about how water is

recycled interesting. Teachers' summaries at the end of lessons have improved. They successfully highlight and revise pupils' gains in skills, knowledge and understanding.

There are improvements to be made in some lessons where pupils lack willingness to do what they have been asked quickly. Frequent reminders are not always enough. On occasions, teachers do not set timescales in which work should be completed, reward good responses or apply sanctions as necessary. The school's scrutiny of pupils' books shows that although marking of their work in most classes is thorough, this is not the case in all. Not all pupils receive clear guidance about how they can improve. Pupils do not have individual targets to reach to accelerate their learning further.

Care, guidance and support continue to be satisfactory. Pupils who have a variety of difficulties in their learning are effectively helped to settle, to join in, to behave well and to learn. This support is evident in class lessons, in the Haven and the LSC. Pupils are gaining a good understanding of their group targets in English and mathematics, through the 'must, should and could' approach. Pupils are not always clear about how these targets relate to the National Curriculum level that they are aiming for. There have been no exclusions.

Judgement

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and use accurate assessment information to set pupils challenging targets and inform teachers' planning – satisfactory

Leadership and management

School leaders continue to put a range of initiatives into place to improve pupils' progress. The Project Board successfully poses direct questions to the school and governors about the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress, guided by the agreed statement of action. This process prompts the school to monitor these vital areas much more closely than previously. Monitoring, such as of lessons, is now carried out regularly by senior staff. As a result, developments in teaching are now more focused on how they will improve pupils' learning. Further assistance from LA consultants has helped to guide teachers in how to identify and develop some areas of learning that are not as strong as they should be, such as aspects of reading and writing. Largely because of this, the coordinators of the core subjects are now in a stronger position than previously to develop more effective methods to improve pupils' learning. They do this through, for example, booster groups for English and mathematics, one-to-one reading, creative writing activities and computer-based learning. The literacy coordinator continues to take a strong, well-focused and valuable lead in this respect.

The headteacher and senior staff have managed school improvement adequately. They react positively to prompts and external directions, but rely on outside support and advice to provide aspects of the direction for the school. The governors, similarly, are supportive of initiatives. They are good at responding to specific tasks

that they are expected to carry out, such as about financial management, maintaining the premises or checking new subject policies. They are increasingly involved in looking carefully at how well pupils make progress and understand more clearly what it means to monitor teaching and learning. The role of the governors is not yet sufficiently strong in challenging the school's leaders, for example, about what the main strengths and areas for development within teaching are or whether improvement is fast enough. Middle managers, who are coordinators of the major subjects, have been effective in improving teaching and learning, and thus in helping to build the school's capacity to improve further.

A significant proportion of the staff has taught at North Denes only. There is a need to establish links with a high performing school, so that the staff can gain first hand knowledge about how another school works and share responses to common issues.

Judgement

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

- Improve the quality of leadership and management, in particular that of middle managers, and develop greater rigour in the checks made on teaching and learning to ensure they are always strongly focused on raising achievement and standards – satisfactory

External support

The project board effectively raises questions for governors and the senior staff to consider, which is helping the school to improve more quickly. The statement of action is satisfactory and continues to have a positive effect on the school's work. The quality of the external support provided for the school is good. There is a range of well targeted support for all three areas where the school needs to improve. The LA provides useful sources of information and practice that the school uses to guide its work, principally through the ISP.

Priorities for further improvement

- Provide a higher level of challenge in lessons for more able pupils, to boost the proportion of pupils who gain level 5 in national tests in Year 6.
- Establish links with a high performing school, so that the staff can share ideas and learn from responses to common issues.