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10 December 2007

Mrs S Edwards
Denton CE School
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NG32 1LG

Dear Mrs Edwards

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF DENTON CE SCHOOL

Following my visit to your school on 28 and 29 November 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 February 2007. 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

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Children's Services and the Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Nada Trikić
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF DENTON CE SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 28-29 November 2007

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of staff, representatives of the governing body, pupils, the School's Improvement Partner (SIP), and Senior and School Improvement Advisor (SSIA/SIA) from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last visit in June the acting headteacher was appointed to the permanent headteacher post in October 2007, teaching two days per week. There have also been a number of other changes in personnel. An experienced teacher took up a part-time post in September 2007, to teach the combined Year 5 and 6 class. The Year 3 and 4 teacher, and literacy co-ordinator, has resigned as from December 2007; recruitment for a replacement has been unsuccessful and a temporary arrangement is being made. A new teaching assistant was appointed in September 2007 to provide 1:1 support for a new pupil in the Reception class. Three governors have resigned; one community replacement has been filled. The LA has appointed an additional governor to join the governing body from January 2008 with expertise in literacy. In addition, the structure of day has been adjusted to provide four blocks of teaching time, with the insertion of an afternoon break.

Achievement and standards

Pupils made good progress in the Foundation Stage in 2007. Planning has now been reviewed and revised as a result of variation between boys and girls, particularly in language and literacy.

The results of the most recent National Curriculum tests in 2007 indicate that standards were broadly average overall at the end of Year 2, slightly down from 2006. This resulted from a dip in standards in boys' reading. Girls' performance was above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards declined in Year 6 from 2006 and were exceptionally low in English, mathematics and science. Despite stronger teaching during the final term it was not possible to address deficits in pupils' learning resulting from a period of disruption, and inconsistency in the quality of teaching across Key Stage 2. The numbers achieving higher levels was much lower than the national average. Progress from Year 2 to the end of Year 6 was inadequate overall as a result of the poor achievement of boys.

In the light of Key Stage 2 outcomes the school has taken a number of actions. Base line assessments were found to be over generous. This has led to more rigorous assessment and moderation systems early this term to ensure the consistency of National Curriculum (NC) levels. This has been supported by training, the use of national test papers and optional NC tests, and standardised tests in reading and spelling. This is now providing a more secure reference point for the identification of pupils for a range of intervention programmes, although it is too early to track the impact of these strategies on rates of progress. Subject leaders have carried out an

analysis of test results to identify gaps in knowledge, skills and understanding in the core subjects to inform layered targets in planning. As a result there is recognition that rates of progress will need to be accelerated in Year 6.

The school has identified that the targets set in recent years have been too low; this has been addressed with suitably challenging targets in place for 2008 and 2009. Regular pupil progress meetings are scheduled to measure and monitor progress in English, mathematics and science, and to moderate assessments. The first key progress check is due to take place in the coming weeks.

In lessons observed during this visit, most pupils were making satisfactory progress with many making good progress. However, rates of progress remain too variable across the school. Pupils are responding well to the high expectations set in Years 5 and 6 and the increased level of challenge. These pupils are displaying confidence in the many opportunities provided to extend their vocabulary, and to discuss their learning. They say that they are more aware of their targets and how to use them to improve their work. They comment on the good feedback they receive from assessments and how this encourages them to take responsibility for their learning.

The revised baseline has enabled the school to target intervention work more accurately. Input has been more effectively planned this term with greater emphasis on gathering evidence of impact. Teaching assistants provide more regular feedback to class teachers to ensure a more coordinated approach.

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

- Raise standards and the achievement of pupils by the end of Year 6 - satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Pupils have responded very well to the school's efforts to improve the consistency of behaviour which was a concern raised by parents. They have been more involved in making improvements in the school by taking responsibility, for example by choosing new play equipment for break times. During the visit pupils were well behaved, friendly and displayed positive relationships to each other and adults.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved since the last visit. It is broadly satisfactory with much that is good or better, but is not yet consistent enough to eradicate the legacy of underachievement. Pupils are attentive in class and show positive attitudes towards their learning. Training in the use of assessment for learning techniques are now beginning to increase the involvement of pupils in checking their own progress. Many pupils talk confidently to their partners about what they have learned, and how they can improve. This is particularly effective with older learners where peer assessment is strong, enabling pupils to learn from each other, and discuss the level of their work. The concept of 'editing to improve' is now a routine feature in these lessons which has increased pupils' confidence, and contributed to improved standards. This is having a positive impact on the quality of academic guidance as pupils are more aware of their targets and what needs to improve.

Learning objectives are now used consistently across classes to focus pupils on what they need to do, but too often they relate simply to tasks. Pupils then view them as work to complete rather than new areas of knowledge or understanding that they need to acquire. Where lesson objectives are used well they have become a stronger reference point to reinforce learning during and at the end of lessons. The use of success criteria has become a more routine feature to enable pupils to identify measures to assess progress, and this works best when pupils are involved in the process. The review of progress at the end of lessons has become more regular but too often this consists of the teacher providing a summary of learning, rather than involving pupils.

Improvements have been made with long term and medium term planning with the inclusion of layered targets to meet the needs of mixed-age classes. The school recognises that there is further work needed to improve the consistency of daily plans, particularly with a focus on challenge for high ability pupils, and to ensure that gaps in knowledge and understanding are rectified. Where teaching is satisfactory the match of work with pupils' prior knowledge is not sufficiently developed. Classroom displays provide a rich resource for learning with key vocabulary, facts and guidance for writing. Year 6 pupils describe their classroom displays as 'amazing', as they support them to improve the quality of their work.

The school's provision has been strengthened by important curriculum changes since September. The introduction of the afternoon break has divided the day into four blocks of teaching time, which has structured teaching time more purposefully. Religious education is now timetabled each week for one hour, to improve consistency. The whole school now takes part in sporting and physical education (PE) activities each Monday morning at a local school which has a wider range of facilities, and the extension of PE activities has been recognised recently through the Sportsmark award. The audit of science has resulted in an increase in curricular time to two hours per week for Years 1 to 4, and three hours for Years 5 and 6, to consolidate pupils' learning and address their more limited experiences in previous years. A cross curricular themed approach has also been adopted, including French, which is helping pupils to make connections with the local community, and is developing their independent learning skills.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring all work is sufficiently challenging and provides enough opportunities for independent learning – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The headteacher has continued to provide good strategic leadership as demonstrated through the actions taken following the review and evaluation of the 2007 Key Stage statutory assessments. Having identified weaknesses in the baseline data gathered during the summer term, early actions were taken to ensure reliable base level assessments in order to track progress more accurately. This has led to a delay in providing progress information as intended in the LA plan.

The school's self evaluation is now informed by more accurate sources of evidence, validated by the SIP and SIA. Information gathered has been used to make improvements in the curriculum, and the structure of the school day. The headteacher has continued to seek feedback from parents about developments within the school, to provide governors with appropriate information to support their role.

All members of the school are now involved in school improvement, as demonstrated through the school's successful assessment as part of the Investors in People programme earlier this term. Subject leaders have an improved view of their roles and, with support, have compiled a file of their activities. Training has enabled them to gather appropriate information through work scrutiny and test analysis, and to provide initial feedback to staff and governors. Subject leadership is variable and at an early stage in its development. There remains a high level of dependency on the headteacher and on external support. Subject leaders are accessing appropriate training in leadership and subject knowledge to extend their roles, capacity and impact within the school.

Despite the very active lead of the chair of governors, very limited progress has been made on the designated area for improvement. Meetings have been scheduled and there have been improvements in the management of meetings and use of agendas. Expectations have also been raised to ensure that governors are adequately prepared for governing body meetings. Although there is greater clarity about roles and responsibilities, many governors lack confidence in the monitoring activities required to evaluate the work of the school. There have been governor visits linked to the priority areas, but reports have varied in quality, with more emphasis on task completion rather than evaluation linked to the area for improvement. The exception is a concise report on special educational needs by the nominated governor.

Governors recognise the need for further training and support with their monitoring role. Although there have been some adjustments to governor link roles, there is a need for greater clarity to ensure that visits are focused, have a clear outcome and are linked to an agreed programme. It is evident that the work of the governing body needs to be shared more fairly across governors. The nominated governor appointed to join the governing body in January 2008 will provide welcome expertise in literacy.

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

- Strengthen the leadership of the school by improving the strategic planning and the self evaluation – satisfactory
- Improving the role of the governing body in evaluating, challenging and planning the work of the school – inadequate

External support

The headteacher has made effective use of external support to sharpen self evaluation, and to tailor LA packages to meet the school's needs. This has related particularly to the analysis of performance and the setting of more rigorous systems to assess and track progress. The SIA and SIP have supported an accurate view of teaching and priorities through classroom observations, and the scrutiny of work and planning. Training in assessment for learning and in developing a shared view of

good teaching has assisted the school in planning improvement. Input with respect to subject leaders has helped them to make a start on developing their role through a number of monitoring activities. Input has been less successful with the governing body. Although the chair of governors has accessed training to effectively sharpen her contribution, commitment across the governing body has not been achieved.