

31 October 2007

Mrs Coy
Springfield Junior School
Springfield Road
Swadlincote
Derbyshire
DE11 0BU

Dear Mrs Coy,

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SPRINGFIELD
JUNIOR SCHOOL

Following my visit with Meg Hackney, Additional Inspector, to your school on 16-17 October, 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 May 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

No additional newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

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

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

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF SPRINGFIELD JUNIOR SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 16-17 October 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met the headteacher, a group of pupils, the chair of governors, representatives from the local authority (LA), the newly qualified teacher (NQT) and the mentor for the NQT.

Context

A Year 4 teacher left the school at the end of the summer. Since the school was judged to require special measures at the time of the last inspection there was an expectation that the school should have obtained agreement from Ofsted before appointing any NQT. The school did not consult Ofsted and appointed an NQT to take up a part time post from July. A teacher was appointed in September to cover maternity leave.

Achievement and standards

Standards, as measured by the Year 6 test results in the summer, improved compared to the year before. This was the case in English, mathematics and science. In writing there was an improvement in the proportion of children achieving the average Level 4 and also the above average Level 5. Compared to the national picture standards were just below average.

In other year groups, standards have been measured by tests and assessments made by teachers. These show that standards and achievement vary and that a number of children attain below average standards.

The amount of progress children made in lessons observed ranged from inadequate to good. In all of the lessons seen, children's progress could have been accelerated.

Personal development and well-being

The majority of children have a positive attitude towards school. Most children behave sensibly and move around the school quietly. When lessons are interesting, children are keen to contribute and work hard. However, there are still too many lessons where children become bored and restless because the teaching lacks pace and tasks are not sufficiently challenging to engage their interest. Many children are too reliant on the support of their teachers. Not enough emphasis is placed on developing independence and on children having the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning.

Quality of provision

Almost all of the teaching observed was satisfactory. Some inadequate teaching was seen where children made far too little progress. Even in a number of satisfactory lessons, teaching failed to engage all children in their learning, so that groups failed to make adequate progress. What was seen during the inspection does not match with the more positive findings of monitoring undertaken by the school and LA.

There is evidence that teaching now uses more strategies to focus on what children need to learn. For example, teachers were seen to effectively use learning objectives at the beginning of lessons and explain to children what they needed to do to be able to achieve these. In some lessons there was effective use made of speaking and listening activities helping children to discuss what they were learning.

However, in too many lessons teachers talk for too long. What should be an introduction to a lesson becomes the main part, resulting in children getting very little time to work independently or in groups. For example, in one lesson the teacher maintained a whole class discussion, albeit inter-dispersed with children talking in pairs or writing notes, for forty five minutes, giving children only ten minutes to work on an independent task. This dominance of teacher input does not allow children to consolidate their learning by completing work which should be matched to their abilities.

Lesson plans have improved since the time of the last inspection but still do not ensure teaching is effective as it could be. All teachers now use the same format for their plans and this has helped to ensure that key features of lessons are thought through. This is especially the case for the new planning format for foundation subjects where clear success criteria has to be outlined for children of different abilities. However, although these new formats are now in place, there is still not enough emphasis made to planning work for different ability groups. Plans indicate that too often children are given the same task, which results in a lack of challenge both for the more able and those that need extra support.

The school has now put in place an electronic tracking system for monitoring children's progress. This has taken some time to set up and as yet needs to be populated with more assessment data to be able to be used to evaluate children's progress. In the meantime the school has used a similar tracking system where the assessments made of children's attainment can be mapped out to highlight where standards are low. Children who have been identified in this way have received extra support. Although there are plans to assess children's progress in December, there is still some uncertainty as to how assessments will be made so that they are accurate across all year groups. However, what is significant is that the new electronic tracking system uses targets for children to achieve by the end of Year 6 which if reached will mean they have made at least satisfactory progress.

Teacher's marking, which could be a useful tool for assessment, is weak in English and mathematic books. Developmental comments are rarely used and therefore children are not helped to see what they need to do to improve.

Judgement

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

- improve the lesson planning, and the quality of teaching, so that the work pupils are given enables them to achieve more and reach the standards of which they are capable by the end of Year 6 – satisfactory
- ensure assessment is accurate, and used more effectively to track pupils' progress and improve target setting for all groups – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and senior leadership team (SLT) have been successful in keeping good morale amongst staff. Since the time of the inspection there have been some improvements which have moved the school forward. For example, the school has installed interactive white boards in all classes and they are now being used effectively. Teaching staff have been deployed in a way to ensure that there is support where teaching needs further development.

However, although these improvements have taken place, the headteacher and SLT have failed to sufficiently develop the rigour of monitoring teaching and learning and, therefore, progress has not been as fast as it could have been. The strongest aspect of monitoring has been lesson observations where both positive features and areas to develop have clearly been identified. These observations of teaching have been undertaken by the headteacher and deputy headteacher, often alongside LA advisers. Further observations have been planned to include other members of the SLT.

Monitoring of teacher's planning, undertaken by the headteacher, literacy and numeracy co-ordinators, has not been very effective. Although strengths have been identified on a monitoring form no comments are recorded as to how the teachers can improve their planning.

There have been no checks made by the SLT of the work in children's books since the time of the last inspection. This has left the SLT not knowing how much work has been completed, the progress children have made in lessons, or the quality of teachers' marking. Plans are in place and this activity was due to take place the week of this monitoring visit.

The school appointed an NQT and have provided satisfactory support. However, the school needs to ensure that this member of staff has all necessary training and has experience of good practice in other schools.

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

- develop more rigorous monitoring and evaluation skills, at all levels of leadership, and use the information gained from this to bring about more rapid improvement to teaching and learning – inadequate.

External support

LA documentation records that it did not agree with the judgement made that the capacity of leadership and management was inadequate when the school was last inspected. Although the LA has taken this view, the support given to the school has been broadly satisfactory. This has been most noticeable in the support given to monitor teaching, develop teaching strategies, the introduction of the electronic assessment tool and the impact of training for the use of interactive white boards. However, in some areas the impact of the LA has been less effective. For example, despite specific training to improve literacy planning in Years 3 and 4, plans seen during the visit were inadequate and did not sufficiently match work to children's different abilities. Furthermore, the LA's target to model rigorous work sampling by the end of the summer term was not met. Likewise, the target to eradicate all unsatisfactory teaching by September 2007 has not been met. These missed targets indicate that the LA's action needs increased rigour to ensure the school improves its rate of progress.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the frequency of monitoring children's work.
- Link the monitoring and evaluation of planning to classroom observations.
- Improve teaching so that children get more time to work independently and in groups.