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21 January 2008

Mr J Mason
Headteacher
Belton Lane Community Primary School
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Lincolnshire
NG31 9PP

Dear Mr Mason

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BELTON LANE
COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Sue Hall, Additional Inspector, to your school on 15 and 16 January, 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 June 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Lincolnshire.

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF BELTON LANE COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 15 and 16 January 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, key staff, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the inspection in June 2007, the school's deputy headteacher and two other teachers have left. A number of new teachers started in September 2007, although some are still temporary pending the arrival of the new deputy headteacher at Easter 2008. Several important roles in the management of the school have been reallocated, particularly responsibility for English, mathematics and special educational needs. The local authority has appointed two additional governors.

Achievement and standards

In the 2007 national tests for Year 6 pupils, standards in English, mathematics and science were exceptionally low and confirmed the judgements made by the inspection team in June. Pupils made inadequate progress from their starting points, especially boys. By the end of Year 2, pupils achieved standards in the national tests which were below average overall and well below average in mathematics. Boys performed relatively better than girls in reading but girls outperformed boys in writing.

Pupils' progress is now assessed regularly. The school's data for the autumn term 2007 indicate that the majority of pupils are now making satisfactory progress in English and mathematics and are generally on track to achieve their targets. This matches the headteacher's evaluation of teaching as satisfactory overall. Those pupils who are currently furthest behind expectations make slower progress. In the Foundation Stage, pupils join the school with knowledge, understanding and skills which are below national expectations. They make satisfactory progress and are working at standards below the national average in Year 2. Standards have improved in Years 3 to 6, particularly in mathematics and science but they are still well below the national average. Pupils' progress is affected by their insecure command of basic skills in literacy and numeracy, aspects which teachers work hard to remedy through regular practice and targeted support for particular individuals and small groups.

In the lessons observed on this visit, teaching was satisfactory and pupils made satisfactory progress. They showed interest in their learning and answered questions enthusiastically, though rarely in any depth. They understood what was expected of them and tried hard. For many, although they followed the teacher's direction, they found independent work more difficult, often limited by insecure basic skills which prevented them applying their learning effectively. The sample of pupils' work provided by the school confirms that pupils are making satisfactory progress towards their targets.

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

- Raise pupils' achievement and standards considerably by the end of Years 2 and 6 in English and mathematics by improving significantly the quality of teaching, enabling all pupils to make the progress of which they are capable. – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development has considerably improved since the last inspection largely because they are more interested in the work they are doing and are more confident. Most work and play together well and say they enjoy school, which indicates that older pupils in particular are now much more positive than previously. Pupils say they like the way in which they find things out through problem solving and investigative work rather than simply by listening to information. Most understand how to stay fit, safe and healthy and enjoy active playtimes, although there is more work to be done to convince many of the benefits of healthy packed lunches. Younger pupils settle well to school routines because there are caring relationships which help them make friends quickly and grow in confidence.

Quality of provision

At the time of the inspection in June 2007, a number of teachers were absent with long-term illnesses. As a result, the school had had to engage a succession of supply teachers. Teaching was judged to be inadequate with too many lessons not reaching an acceptable standard. The headteacher has worked hard since then, with the support of the local authority, to resolve these issues. With the arrival of new staff in September, the quality of teaching has improved and it is now satisfactory overall. Pupils' behaviour has improved considerably because teaching is more interesting and better matched to their needs. Around one third of lessons observed on this visit were good but this is not yet enough to ensure that all pupils make the progress necessary for them to improve their basic skills.

Teachers have good relationships with their pupils. Pupils and parents express their appreciation of better lessons and improved learning since September. Teachers plan lessons thoroughly and use the agreed targets in English and mathematics to challenge pupils at an appropriate level. However, although objectives are set for pupils with different levels of attainment, there are not yet enough examples of tasks, materials and activities being matched to the different objectives. In the better lessons, teachers use a good range of strategies which require pupils to extend their thinking and oral skills. These teachers keep the lesson's objectives in pupils' minds and consolidate their basic skills by ensuring that they refresh key points and provide opportunities for them to apply what they have learnt. Where teaching is satisfactory, teachers direct learning too much and do not give pupils sufficient chance to work independently. As yet, there are too few occasions where pupils assess their own progress.

The senior leadership team have set up an effective assessment programme so that staff have a clearer understanding of what is to be assessed, when and how. Pupils' work is now assessed regularly and all staff are involved in checking work across the

age range especially in reading, writing and mathematics. Data is collated into effective tracking systems from which staff identify where pupils are making sufficient progress and what pupils need to do to continue to improve. Data is also used to set more challenging individual and group targets. Parents are now better informed and therefore in a better position to support their children.

The headteacher and key stage leaders collate and use the assessment and tracking information to compare the progress of different groups. They identify whole school or year group issues and any additional support needed for particular pupils. This is beginning to have a positive impact on progress. However, it is not entirely secure because there is still variation in how well teachers use this information to inform their lesson planning.

Teachers have recently improved the ways in which pupils assess their own work. For instance younger pupils use a 'traffic light' system where they indicate how well they have understood the work they have done. This enables staff to offer further support in specific areas. There has also been some improvement in the marking of pupils work by staff to indicate to pupils what they have done well and what still needs to be improved. However, older pupils assess their own work against targets less frequently. There is still a lack of consistency in approaches overall.

Curriculum planning has improved and pupils are now provided with more stimulating activities that capture and maintain their interest. There is a considerably improved range of enrichment activities that interest and involve pupils, including work with a range of organisations and themed days or weeks based on historical and geographical topics. This ensures that pupils' needs are met through carefully planned activities that build on their knowledge and understanding.

The school has rightly prioritised the development of literacy and numeracy skills. These are now generally planned well including a better range of practical activities such as role-play and drama that inspire writing tasks. Staff also make better use of resources to interest younger pupils in learning how to use their calculation skills. However, the links between subjects, including information and communication technology (ICT), are not yet fully developed.

The school has taken effective action to resolve the shortcomings in its provision for safeguarding pupils, reported at the time of the inspection. Training on child protection has been provided and a health and safety audit conducted. Procedures for appointing and vetting staff now meet national requirements.

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

- Ensure assessment is accurate and always used to inform planning. – satisfactory
- Involve pupils in assessing their own work so that they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. – satisfactory
- Improve the curriculum to ensure that pupils encounter stimulating activities to sustain their interest and make sure that their developing needs are met through well-planned progression of knowledge and skills in all subjects. – satisfactory

Leadership and management

At the time of the inspection in June 2007, the headteacher had been in post for only a few weeks. Since then he has provided clear direction for the school and set high expectations for teachers and pupils. The headteacher has strengthened the teaching staff wherever possible and reorganised responsibilities for key areas of work that needed improvement. He has accurately assessed the school's strengths and weaknesses. With the local authority, he has developed a clear and well-structured action plan, strongly linked to training and support for teachers. As a consequence, the overall quality of teaching has improved and pupils are now making generally satisfactory progress.

The headteacher has established effective systems for monitoring provision and evaluating performance. He uses the school's assessment information systematically to review progress and to target additional support for particular pupils. The senior leadership team are mostly new to the role and work well together. They have an enthusiastic approach to teaching and the curriculum. They organise and deliver effective training. Increasingly, the subject leaders take on the responsibility for monitoring teachers' planning, scrutinising pupils' work and analysing assessment data. They also are beginning to observe teaching. A new deputy headteacher joins the school at Easter to expand the senior team and share some of the significant responsibilities and workload. There is now a greater coherence in the leadership of the school, stronger direction and, as a result, better capacity to improve.

The governing body has been strengthened by the addition of governors with considerable educational experience. The chair of governors has ensured that there is an appropriate structure to monitor the school's progress and a small group has begun to review the school's performance against the agreed indicators for improvement. The headteacher submits detailed reports to the governors and there are opportunities for them to consider external data and school assessment information.

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

- Strengthen governance, senior and middle management by adopting a robust approach to self-evaluation, delegating roles and responsibilities and building the skills necessary for effective leadership. – good

External support

The local authority has developed an effective plan to support the school. Key areas for improvement have been identified and appropriate staff and resources allocated to ensure that there is relevant training for teachers and teaching assistants. Two additional governors have been appointed to the governing body bringing significant educational experience. The authority also arranged for an experienced and effective lead literacy teacher to join the school. The school has benefited from support and training in assessment, teaching and learning, English, mathematics, the teaching of phonics and improving behaviour.

The local authority has provided effective support for the headteacher and the school. The school improvement adviser and other authority staff have reviewed teachers' planning and pupils' work with key staff. They have also conducted joint lesson observations. The local authority has helped to confirm teachers' assessment of pupils' levels and provided training to ensure that all staff understand the current regulations on the safeguarding of pupils' welfare. They have contributed well to the establishment of the school's new assessment and pupil tracking systems.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that teachers' lesson planning reflects the needs of pupils and their prior attainment by providing different levels of tasks, materials and activities to enable them to achieve their objectives.