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29 November 2007

Mrs C Newton
The Headteacher
Kingsley Primary School
Wallace Road
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Northamptonshire
NN2 7EE

Dear Mrs Newton

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF KINGSLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit to your school on 21 and 22 November 2007, 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.

Newly qualified teachers may not 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 for Children and Young People for Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF KINGSLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 20 and 21 November 2007

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, nominated staff, representatives from the governing body and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Although the Reception and Key Stage 1 classes have very recently moved into their newly refurbished accommodation, the school is still in the middle of its major rebuilding programme.

Achievement and standards

The school recognises that standards of attainment remain too low and that pupils' achievement is inadequate. In the most recent Key Stage 1 assessments, standards declined, continuing the downward trend of recent years. Although the school exceeded its targets, attainment was well below age related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. Results in the most recent Key Stage 2 national tests showed a slight overall improvement. However, standards here were also well below national figures and represent inadequate achievement, even given the pupils' low starting points. Although the quality of some pupils' work is in line with the standards expected for their age and some is above this level, there are fundamental weaknesses in pupils' basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics that will take time to address.

The school has taken suitable steps to implement better systems for the tracking of pupils' progress. Training in assessment and improved tracking have ensured that teachers have a clearer understanding of where pupils are and the expected rates of progress that they should make. Pupils' progress is systematically monitored through the regular recording of assessments in English, mathematics and science. These systems are relatively new and are yet to have sufficient impact on teachers' planning. However, data is now used to identify, more reliably, target groups of children for intervention.

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

- develop teachers' skills in making accurate assessments so activities can be matched to the range of pupils' needs – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

In general, pupils are well behaved and have positive attitudes to learning. Around the school they are generally considerate and friendly. Although rather boisterous in

the playground, they are sensible and care for one another. Pupils really enjoy their lessons when learning is fun, such as in the dance sessions, and when they are given opportunities to investigate for themselves. The youngest children in the Reception/Year 1 classes are already showing good progress in developing their social skills. They make sensible choices, sustain their concentration well, and generally cooperate well when working or playing. However, this is often not the case with older pupils, some of whom are unaccustomed to working collaboratively in pairs or small groups. Teachers apply the school's positive behaviour management strategies effectively, but when the pace of teaching is pedestrian, particularly in starter sessions when pupils are sitting on the carpet for too long, pupils become inattentive or restless.

Attendance, at 93.3% for the last academic year, remains stubbornly below the national average and has declined during the autumn term.

Quality of provision

The overall quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection, but the school has not achieved its target for the proportion of good and satisfactory lessons because pockets of ineffective teaching remain. Several teachers have strengthened their classroom practice in response to the school's higher expectations and the support and guidance provided. Some teaching is consistently good and elements of outstanding practice are emerging.

In general, lessons are more sharply focused and use learning objectives to share with pupils more precisely what they should achieve. The most effective lessons also set out ambitious success criteria for different groups of pupils and plan a good range and variety of learning activities, the best of which promote more independent styles of learning. Work on assessment is having a positive impact on pupils' progress. During lessons, teachers are developing common strategies to assess pupils' understanding, marking is more effective in guiding what pupils need to do to next, and regular assessments in English, mathematics and science also help pupils and teachers to know what needs improving. Marking and target setting have improved considerably. All pupils have targets for English and mathematics, and some are beginning to use these to check their own work and to guide their improvement. However, although teachers implement the revised marking policy, too many pupils do not respond to the guidance given, and marking often misses opportunities to make reference to the pupils' individual targets.

In the weaker lessons, the pupils are not suitably challenged by the level or pace of the work. This was particularly the case in whole class sessions that were over long and when teachers relied on a more didactic approach. In these lessons the pupils were patient and sustained their concentration well, but neither the higher attaining pupils nor the lower attaining pupils in the group were adequately challenged. Moreover, the teaching assistants were unable to support the pupils' learning in these sessions because their roles were not properly planned.

The most significant improvements in the school's provision have been in the Foundation Stage where the reorganised staffing and vertical grouping of Reception

and Year 1 children have transformed the quality of learning for the youngest pupils. The Foundation Stage curriculum has been revised to ensure suitable coverage of each of the areas of learning, and joint planning and shared teaching give pupils a good balance of teacher led and child initiated activities. Teaching assistants are well deployed, assessment is rigorous, and communication with parents has improved significantly.

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

- improve provision in the Reception class – good
- improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to raise standards and achievement in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has shown real determination to improve provision and raise standards. She has identified and confronted weaknesses in teaching and leadership, but has had to assume too much responsibility for strategic planning and day to day management, particularly as the building work, which is behind schedule, creates an additional management burden. Other senior managers, although responding to advice, do not take sufficient responsibility for driving up standards either through their own teaching or through their leadership roles. Subject leaders have received training on their roles and are developing portfolios. Although they are beginning to understand their responsibilities for raising standards, they are unable to produce evidence of ways in which they are impacting significantly on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Subject leadership in English and mathematics is weak because it does not drive improvements with sufficient energy or urgency and because the monitoring and evaluation roles are underdeveloped.

The school's improvement plan is sound and is suitably underpinned by a systematic programme of monitoring. This has helped to strengthen the school's provision. The headteacher's evaluations of the quality of teaching are robust and accurate, and these have been used to target suitable support.

Governance has strengthened and provides effective challenge and support for the headteacher. Governors now undertake termly monitoring visits to support the school and to gather information for themselves. This has given governors greater insight and understanding of the day to day working of the school.

The school has worked very hard to strengthen its provision and has made important changes and improvements. Weak subject leadership and the pockets of inadequate teaching are significant barriers to the school's recovery and further development.

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

- strengthen governance – satisfactory
- strengthen the leadership and management skills of subject leaders so the headteacher receives more effective support to eradicate weaknesses in provision – inadequate.

External support

Since the last inspection, the local authority has responded positively to the school's needs. The LA's statement of action sets out an appropriate programme of support and the advice and guidance from LA consultants, including the School Improvement Partner, has been suitably focused and is valued by the school. The appointment of a mentor headteacher has been a very positive move. However, the target date for removal of special measures is ambitious, given the barriers to further improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Strengthen the areas of leadership that are ineffective, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Eradicate weak and ineffective teaching by ensuring that all lessons are challenging and well paced.