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19 March 2008

Ms R Beckett
The Headteacher
Grange Primary School
Normacot Grange Road
Meir
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Dear Ms Beckett

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF GRANGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Nancy Walker and Robin Gaff, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 11 and 12 March 2008, 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 June 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring visit – 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 Children's and Young People's Services for Stoke-on-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Anthony O'Malley
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF GRANGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 11 and 12 March 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, nominated staff, four representatives from the governing body and representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the last visit in December 2007, a new headteacher has taken up post. The successful applicant had been leading the school as acting headteacher since January 2008. She has also taken over responsibility for mathematics. In addition, three teachers have left the school and two newly qualified teachers appointed.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are rising, but there remain pockets of low attainment in year groups where unsettled and inadequate provision in the past has resulted in a legacy of underachievement. There is good improvement in the progress of pupils in Year 6 and standards are close to the national average. In English, mathematics and science pupils are on track to achieve the school's best ever results. The school's own data, and work in books and in lessons, suggest that this positive picture continues in Year 5.

In other year groups, pupils have continued to make satisfactory progress, but this is not sufficient to close the gap between their standards and those achieved in schools nationally. This gap is greatest in Years 2 and 4 where, for example, fewer than half of the pupils have the writing skills expected. Both year groups also have a high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The interventions implemented by the school have had some success in accelerating the progress these pupils are making. In recognition of the need to secure greater progress, teachers and teaching assistants have recently received training on the effective delivery of programmes for pupils who require additional support.

In the spring term there has been a strong focus on raising standards in science. Teachers do now track progress in science, but they are not yet as secure in their judgements as they are in English and mathematics. Pupils' work recorded in books shows standards are broadly average and progress is satisfactory.

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

- raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Most pupils enjoy school and behave well. They comment that lessons are more interesting now and that the responsibilities pupils themselves have for maintaining a friendly playground help everyone feel safe. Attendance is still below average but continues to improve and very few pupils arrive late. The pupils have a good knowledge of what constitutes a healthy diet but many do not apply this knowledge in their choices at lunch time.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection. Teachers have raised expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving and over half of the lessons observed were good. The remainder were satisfactory. A particular strength is the ability of teachers to explain clearly the skills they wish the pupils to learn and this has increased the pace of learning. In mathematics, for example, teachers have good subject knowledge and they balance sharp explanations of subtraction and fractions with sufficient opportunities for pupils to practise their new learning.

Lesson planning in English, mathematics and science reflects the better provision as it now clearly outlines the learning outcomes for the different abilities within a class. In these subjects, teachers and teaching assistants implement the planning successfully to ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are fully included in lessons and make at least sound gains in their learning. In other subjects, this match of activity to the pupils' abilities is less evident. For example, in a physical education lesson there was a lack of challenge for the higher ability pupils. In the Foundation Stage, children do not learn as much as they could when they choose their own activities because planning lacks precision and the range of choices is too wide.

Pupils confirm the overall improvement in teaching and learning. They are enjoying lessons more and feel that they are making better progress. This is because they are taking a more active part in their learning and have a much better idea of how well they are doing, what they should be aiming for, and what they need to do to improve. They value the displays in the classrooms that give them a clear visual image of their progress.

There are increasing examples of marking that inform pupils about how they can improve their work. However, this improved practice is still not consistent in all classes or subjects. In a minority of classes, comments are too detailed or in language that is not helpful for the pupils. A more general weakness is a low expectation of how carefully pupils should present their work. There are examples of teachers praising mediocre presentation as 'good'.

There is more evidence of a creative and broad curriculum around the school, and in classrooms, than there was at the time of the last monitoring visit. Pupils' enjoyment and progress, particularly in science, benefit from the links the school has established with the local secondary school. For example, one Year 6 pupil said she

really enjoyed the recent Science Week because 'we made stuff - and we did it all ourselves!' The use of interactive whiteboards in classrooms has also helped to bring lessons to life and involved pupils more in their learning.

Since the last visit, the school has continued to improve how it tracks standards and achievement in English and mathematics. Teachers are more confident using their knowledge of their pupils' achievements to assess the progress pupils are making. Robust systems are in place to ensure the accuracy of these assessments and teachers now produce termly reports on: pupils with learning difficulties and /or disabilities; pupils that are more able; and, pupils failing to make the progress expected.

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

- improve the quality of teaching and learning by raising teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving, increasing the pace of learning and ensuring planning clearly identifies the learning expected – good
- develop assessment systems that provide teachers with accurate information about pupils' standards and progress to support the planning of learning – good.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management across the school continue to improve. In less than a term, the recently appointed headteacher has successfully raised morale and established a shared sense of purpose. Governors, staff and pupils are keen to talk about her impact. At the same time, she has shown great determination to improve provision, raise standards, and develop the role of leaders throughout the school. She has confronted weaknesses in both leadership and teaching and this has been crucial in improving both aspects since the previous inspection.

Good support from the local authority has helped develop the skills of the English and science subject leaders to monitor and evaluate their areas effectively. Since the last visit, both of these leaders, and the teacher responsible for special educational needs, have had regular opportunities to observe lessons and monitor the quality of work in books. Consequently, their understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision are much clearer. Although at present the impact of these activities on achievement is no better than satisfactory, the quality of subject action planning provides good grounds for optimism. It focuses sharply on how specific activities will lead to higher standards.

These are important gains. However, leadership and management in the school are still in a state of transition. The school plans to appoint a deputy headteacher before Easter. Even then, there will remain significant gaps in the leadership team. For example, there is not at present effective leadership of the Foundation Stage or information and communication technology. In addition, the school will need to replace the subject leaders in English and inclusion at the end of this academic year. With support from the local authority, the senior leaders, including governors, have well developed strategies for securing a successful restructuring of leadership and management in the school by September 2008.

The school's improvement plan is now an effective document to guide school improvement. The targets identified are measurable and enable the school and local authority to evaluate precisely the progress the school is making towards improving on the points raised in the previous inspection. The progress reports produced by the authority are helpful because they focus on the impact of the actions taken to secure improvement.

Governors are very positive about their different roles in supporting and sustaining school improvement. They are now sufficiently well informed, and actively encouraged by the new headteacher, to be able to hold senior leaders accountable for the school's effectiveness. The information they receive about the impact of actions taken focuses on progress against the improvement points identified in the previous report.

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

- strengthen leadership and management by involving leadership at all levels in rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures and making staff more accountable for their pupils' progress – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority and the former associate headteacher have provided good support for the school. The new headteacher has particularly valued guidance she has received dealing with a range of challenging staffing and budgetary issues. The effective work of consultants to improve the capacity of leadership at all levels has been crucial in securing satisfactory progress in this area. The reports produced on progress to date evaluate sharply current progress on each of the improvement points and provide helpful guidance to senior leaders on the next steps towards improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

The priorities remain those identified in the June 2007 inspection.