

27 February 2008

Mr Lee Stevens (Acting Headteacher)
West Earlham Junior School
Scarnell Road
Norwich
Norfolk
NR5 8HT

Dear Mr Stevens

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WEST EARLHAM JUNIOR SCHOOL

Following my visit with Ruth Frith, Additional Inspector, to your school on 26 and 27 February 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 March 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

Newly qualified teachers may not 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 Norfolk.

Yours sincerely

Godfrey V Bancroft
Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF WEST EARLHAM JUNIOR SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 26 – 27 February 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, teachers, groups of pupils, parents and carers, the chair of the governing body and representatives of the Local Authority (LA).

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, in October 2007, the acting headteacher, a member of the County Headteacher Service, has been appointed to the permanent headship of another school. He will be leaving to take up this post at the end of the Spring Term 2008. The LA has a strategy in place for the likely appointment of another acting headteacher. During this period one teacher has also left and was replaced by temporary member of staff. Arrangements are in place for a permanent replacement to be made. Two additional members have also been added to the governing body.

Achievement and standards

The 2007 test results for pupils in Year 6 painted a more positive picture than those for 2006. Whilst standards in science fell slightly, those for English and mathematics were better. While standards remained well below average, progress was close to that expected. Standards in English were the highest for some years. When account is taken of pupils' circumstances, such as the very high percentage who have learning difficulties, progress was broadly satisfactory. Boys showed the best progress, some of whom had not done very well in their Year 2 tests. The school was close to achieving its targets, even so, they had hoped for higher standards and even better progress and were a little disappointed with the outcomes. The current Year 6 pupils, when tested in Year 2, were below average in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the school's data, based on an increasingly robust and accurate range of tests and teacher assessments, shows that most pupils are on course to attain the standards expected of them in the current academic year. However, these are likely to remain well below average in English and science, but with mathematics improving to below average. Even so, pupils have made satisfactory progress from their starting points. This view is supported by the progress seen in their work and lessons during the inspection. However, whilst standards in English and mathematics are once again likely to show some improvement, standards in science have fallen. As a result of detailed and accurate analysis, the targets for 2009 and 2010 have been revised to represent challenging but achievable targets for the school.

Judgement

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

- Raise standards in English mathematics and science – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Discussion with staff and pupils and observations throughout the school day confirm that pupils' behaviour has improved. The school is much calmer and pupils are more settled and ready to learn. Most move around the school quietly and behave sensibly at playtime and lunchtime. Fewer incidents of unacceptable behaviour occur during lunchtimes as pupils are encouraged to make friends and play responsibly with each other. Incidents, when they do occur, are less severe than in the past as pupils are encouraged to adapt their own behaviour and make conscious choices about what they do. Pupils generally respond well to the system of rewards which encourage good attitudes, work and behaviour. During lessons, most react well to the teachers' expectations but a few need reminders to ensure that they behave and remain on task. Whilst in the best lessons pupils' attitudes are good, in others a significant minority lose concentration, become restless or exclude themselves from the main teaching activity. Younger pupils, in particular, are still overly reliant on teachers and teaching assistants to keep them well focussed. In some classes there still are still a significant number of pupils who do not involve themselves sufficiently in the learning.

Pupils increasingly comment that they are doing well and enjoy coming to school. They are keen to talk about their work and show pride in what they do. This is reflected in the continued upward trend of attendance. Because expectations are clear, pupils are now fully aware of the importance of regular attendance and arriving at school on time. The pupils' response to the effective reward systems for regular attendance and punctuality is ensuring that the school is currently exceeding its attendance target for 2008.

Judgement

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

- Develop a wider range of more rigorous strategies to encourage better attendance – good

Quality of provision

The school's focus on identifying aspects that make a good lesson and support from LA advisors is improving the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers' expectations are higher, both in relation to pupils' work and their behaviour. As a result, inadequate teaching has been almost eliminated. In the best lessons, expectations are high and the pace of learning swift. Pupils are increasingly able to work independently as the work is set at the correct level to provide sufficient challenge without being too difficult. However, most lessons remain satisfactory and there is still insufficient good teaching to increase the rate of pupils' progress and raise standards further. In most lessons, planning clearly identifies what teachers expect pupils to learn and this is shared with them. Consequently, most pupils are clear about what they need to do. Older pupils, in particular, understand their targets and what is needed to reach the next level in their learning. In others, staff do not plan sufficiently to meet the needs of all pupils, particularly the more able. On these occasions learning is not as good as it should be.

The rate of pupils' progress is reduced by the lack of urgency among a number of pupils. This is reflected in the time it takes some pupils to settle to their tasks. Many also find it difficult to work on their own and rely heavily on their teachers and teaching assistants. In several of the lessons seen, teachers had to work hard to maintain pupils' learning at a steady rate.

All members of the school community understand and support the revised behaviour policy so there is a greater consistency of approach to managing pupils' behaviour. A small number of pupils find it difficult to respond to the high expectations of staff but additional strategies are used effectively to give them a 'cooling off' period and discuss how they could improve their behaviour. Systems to promote good behaviour are used effectively so that pupils begin to see that it is in their own interest to behave well and understand the effect their behaviour has on others. Pupil's learning is enhanced by improved behaviour and attitudes because less time is spent dealing with incidents.

Significant changes to the curriculum, for example, the introduction of a 30 minute session each day when pupils are taught the sounds that letters make (phonics) and daily guided reading, is beginning to make up for gaps in pupils' learning. Insufficient time has passed to fully evaluate the effect of this new strategy but early signs are promising.

Judgement

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

- Improve teachers' skills in managing pupils' behaviour so that more effective learning can take place – good

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher, senior staff and the governors have worked together to produce a very helpful development plan. This incorporates the initial Ofsted Action Plan, responding to the findings of the inspection in March 2007. The plans sets out clearly what needs to be improved, the actions needed to bring the improvements about, and how their success will be measured. However, the target set to improve the proportion of good teaching is, at this stage, somewhat over-ambitious and is likely take a little longer to achieve. Arrangements to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning are thorough, regular and sometimes involve pupils from the student council. The school, in partnership with the LA, has also evaluated its own performance accurately. Outcomes of the self-evaluation are used increasingly well to identify areas for further improvement.

The school's leadership is making better use of all the available data from monitoring and assessments to improve the provision and set challenging targets for pupils. Following training, managers at all levels, including subject leaders, are better placed to make good use of the information gathered from assessments. Staff are becoming increasingly familiar with these processes but some of the systems are recent introductions and have not had long enough to impact fully on standards and progress.

Senior staff, subject leaders and teachers are allocating more time to the analysis of pupils' work. As a result, those pupils at risk of not making the expected progress are identified at a much earlier stage than in the past. As a result of the help available through appropriate support programmes, pupils' progress in English and mathematics is gradually improving. The marking of pupils' work is getting better, but is still not consistent across the school. For example, marking does not always contain reference to what pupils were expected to learn or to the next steps for their learning. Nevertheless, displays of targets on classroom walls and in pupils' books, mean they are much more aware of these than in the past.

Governors now meet all of their statutory obligations. The governing body undertook a guided self-review in November 2007. This led them to the view that they were inadequate in some aspects of their work, for example, in their role of monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision. Since then, governors have attended training sessions, some led by their own members, which have left them far better placed to act as critical friends to the school. However, much remains to be done. Plans are in place, but are at an early stage and have not all been put into action. The timescales for these plans to come to fruition do not show sufficient urgency and the pattern of planned visits by governors does not have a sufficiently clear structure or focus.

Judgement

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

- Ensure the school's leadership make better use of all the available data for monitoring and assessments to improve the provision and set challenging targets for pupils – satisfactory

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

- Following training, establish procedures through which the governing body can check on and evaluate the quality of provision – satisfactory

External support

The support provided by the Local Authority (LA) has proved to be adequate in its contribution to the school's satisfactory progress, since it went into special measures and since the last monitoring inspection. Substantial advice has been provided for developments in English and mathematics, resulting in increased rates of progress in both subjects. Whilst the support for mathematics is to be maintained, as a result of improvements to teaching and learning, the support for English is being reduced. In recognising that improvements in science are lagging behind those in English and mathematics additional support is to be provided for this subject. The support for the introduction of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme (SEAL) is also being continued. This support is part of the reason why pupils' behaviour is showing significant improvements. The LA has also been instrumental in the appointment of two additional governors. This has been helpful in supporting and improving the work of the governing body.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the rate of pupils' progress in science.
- Work towards ensuring consistently good or better teaching in all parts of the school.