

7 February 2008

Mr S Morley
Acting Headteacher
Swaffham Junior School
Brandon Road
Swaffham
Norfolk PE37 7EA

Dear Mr Morley

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SWAFFHAM JUNIOR SCHOOL

Following my visit with Ann Taylor, Additional Inspector, to your school on 5 – 6 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



John Francis
Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF SWAFFHAM JUNIOR SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 5 – 6 February 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher and other staff with leadership roles, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

The school continues to be led by a specialist County headteacher. However, the governing body has now appointed a substantive headteacher, who takes up the post in April 2008. There is also a new chair of governors. During the inspection, pupils from Year 5 were away from school on a residential visit.

Achievement and standards

In the lessons seen during this visit, pupils made generally satisfactory and sometimes good progress. Considerable effort has been put into setting up procedures for assessing and tracking the longer-term progress of individuals, classes and year groups. The system means that teachers have a better knowledge of pupils' attainment and most are using this successfully to support their lesson planning. While standards remain below average, pupils' books show that most are currently making at least satisfactory progress. For many pupils in Year 6, progress in English is often good. However, throughout the school there remain weaknesses in pupils' writing skills, particularly in the presentation of their work and in their punctuation and spelling skills. There is no consistent approach to presentation across the school and heavy scoring out and freehand drawing of lines, even in mathematical activities, often spoil pupils' work.

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour is satisfactory overall and mostly good in classrooms. There remains a small core of pupils in Years 5 and 6, who find it more difficult to meet the higher standards now expected. However, there is no disruption to other pupils' learning because of the systems now in place to deal with this. Pupils report that there is some boisterous behaviour at times in the playground, but staff deal with incidents calmly and quickly. Staff are now better prepared and more willing to deal with incidents themselves rather than passing these on to the leadership. While there was a small increase in exclusions in the middle of last term, because of the school's approach, these have come down again. Pupils' attitudes in lessons are satisfactory, and where teaching is good and engages their interest, they respond well. Where lessons not as well prepared and the pace is too slow, pupils waste more time by chattering to others. The introduction of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) to the curriculum is having a positive effect on pupils' attitudes. This approach has been embraced by staff and is reinforced through displays and assemblies. Pupils have a growing understanding of their part in all of this. They acknowledge that behaviour is now much better and there are clear guidelines for

them to follow. Pupils demonstrate a sound understanding of the need to eat healthily, take exercise and to look after themselves and others. Attendance remains good.

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

- Ensure that behaviour is consistently and effectively managed so that no lessons are disrupted – *good*

Quality of provision

There continues to be satisfactory improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since the last monitoring visit. The headteacher has accurately identified those areas where effective teaching takes place. However, there remains scope for sharper evaluations of lessons to bring about further refinement and more effective teaching and learning.

There has been satisfactory progress in developing staff confidence and expertise in specific subject areas and procedures. Staff training and individual support programmes have resolved concerns about subject knowledge, for example, in information and communication technology (ICT). This is particularly evident in the increased confidence in teachers' use of interactive whiteboards to support learning and the more frequent use of computers by the pupils.

There is a more purposeful atmosphere in most classes, with teachers more conscious of the need to ensure that lessons have a brisk pace to maintain the interest of pupils. However, poor timing in some parts of the lesson results in some slippage. This means teachers do not always ensure adequate time to evaluate what the pupils have learned by the end of each lesson. Lesson planning continues to develop and as teachers become more confident in using the revised format, the level of detail within the planning is improving. There is still some variability in the way teachers prepare for pupils' differing needs. While this is improving, too much still relates to the quantity of work pupils are expected to produce rather than the quality and challenge of the tasks they are given. Work on improving lesson objectives is having a positive impact on learning. In the more effective lessons, teachers frequently remind the pupils of the key objectives to ensure that they are not sidetracked. However, further work is needed to ensure these are measurable outcomes of the learning rather than just the activities pupils are to complete. This is needed in order to sharpen up the effectiveness of the review session at the end of the lessons and enable teachers and pupils to gain a clearer understanding of the progress made. Changes to the marking system following the last visit are beginning to show a positive impact on pupils' learning. Pupils are now clearer about what they do well and why, and where they need to improve. However, this becomes ineffective where teachers fail to follow up on the comments they have made in pupils' books.

There are not enough opportunities for pupils to develop their speaking skills and improve the quality of their contribution through, for example, the use of 'talk partners'. Where there are good examples of teachers' questioning, the quality of

pupils' responses improves. However, there is still a need for teachers to demand more of pupils at these times. Teaching does not yet model examples of good sentences and responses well enough to help the development of pupils' literacy skills.

A priority for the school following the last monitoring inspection was to review and revise class timetables to ensure better coverage of all subjects and improve links between literacy and the rest of the subjects. Good work has been done to create a better subject balance and coverage in class timetables. This has had a particular impact on the time given to subjects other than English, mathematics and science subjects and, consequently, enriched the curriculum for the pupils. All subjects now have an appropriate allocation of time, and changes to the lesson timings for the afternoon are beginning to have an impact on improving pupils' concentration and attention.

The school is now collecting and analysing detailed information about pupils' starting points. This provides an effective baseline by which to measure individual progress. However, at present, the leadership team is unable to show how well pupils across the school are achieving so far this year. Teacher assessments made at the end of the autumn term were not considered sufficiently accurate to enable a secure enough picture of pupils' progress. The lack of up-to-date information means the school cannot fully address the issue of underachievement as urgently as needed.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to accelerate progress and raise standards in English, mathematics and science. – satisfactory
- Raise the expectations that teachers have of the standards that pupils can attain. – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The school has made good progress in addressing the additional priorities from the last visit. The senior leadership team is now more established. Under the good leadership of the acting headteacher, it continues to drive forward initiatives and consolidate the gains already made. Their open and supportive approach has resulted in greater staff involvement and a growing confidence. There is a greater willingness by staff to develop their professional skills. Subject leaders are beginning to establish their roles. Monitoring is taking place but there is not yet a systematic approach to gathering all the evidence needed. There is no overall timetable of when these activities will take place that would allow for a close check on progress and enable early intervention or correction to the programme where needed.

An aspect for further improvement from the last visit was to revise the medium-term plan by drawing together key priorities and creating a timescale for implementation. This has been done well and there are now clearer expectations and measurable targets in place. This makes it much easier for school leaders and governors to evaluate the rate of progress and measure the impact of initiatives.

The new chair of governors is knowledgeable and active. Although many governors are relatively new to their roles they are keen to engage with the school and are undertaking specific training on the role of governors in monitoring the work of the school.

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

- Develop and apply effective systems for planning, monitoring and evaluating improvements in the school. – *satisfactory*

External support

The LA continues to provide good support through the 'Intensifying Support Programme'. The School Development Adviser provides a good level of support and challenge. Through this guidance, the school is now starting to take more responsibility for improvements in teaching and learning. There is a better grasp of strengths and weaknesses in provision and school leaders are successfully taking steps to improve teaching still further. However, the school still relies heavily on external support to sustain improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure more frequent and targeted monitoring by subject leaders and follow up the outcomes of these evaluations.
- Introduce a regular timetable for assessment, using these opportunities to moderate teachers' judgements and improve their knowledge and understanding of National Curriculum levels.
- Monitor the implementation of the revised marking scheme to ensure greater consistency in the quality of the advice given to pupils.