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8 July 2008

Mrs J Lapsa
The Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lapsa

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF VERNON TERRACE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit to your school on 24 and 25 June 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 October 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 be appointed subject to the following qualifications:

- the school ensures appropriate and sustained mentoring and support
- the local authority monitors the effectiveness of this support.

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 and Young People's Services for Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

John Eadie
Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF VERNON TERRACE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 24 and 25 June 2008

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work in all classes, scrutinised assessment data, pupils' work and other documents, and met with the headteacher, other key staff, a group of pupils, the chair of governors, and representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, there have been three staff changes, one of whom is to take on the post of deputy headteacher in September. A further member of staff is leaving at the end of this term and all classes should then have stability of staffing. The proportion of pupils joining the school at times other than the normal stage and speaking little English is increasing, particularly from Eastern European countries.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' progress is continuing to improve. The large majority have made good progress this year in all classes except Year 5, where there has been the greatest disruption to staffing. In Year 6, the poor progress these pupils made lower down the school has been reversed. Data shows that these pupils have made good progress this year and satisfactory progress overall since their test results in Year 2. Their progress is particularly pleasing in mathematics and science.

This improved progress has not had a major impact on standards across the school, which are still too low. Pupils' achievement is inadequate as too many are not reaching the standards of which they are capable. However, past underachievement is being addressed and a greater proportion of pupils is now achieving satisfactorily. At the last inspection, few pupils were achieving satisfactorily and around half are now. Although the Nursery and Reception were not a particular focus for this inspection, evidence shows that children in the Nursery make good progress from a very low starting point. Data for Reception is not precise enough to form a judgement.

Particularly good systems have been put in place to assess the levels of English that are being acquired by pupils who arrive speaking little English. This is enabling the school to build on these skills more quickly, although there has been little support in this from the local authority.

Good strategies continue to make an impact on the progress of those pupils who are in danger of falling behind. The effectiveness of these strategies is being monitored well and strategies are consequently being adapted effectively to suit the needs of the pupils. Good work has been done to raise the achievement of more able pupils.

There are now more consistently high expectations of what pupils of all abilities, and particularly the more able, can achieve in lessons.

Personal development and well-being

This aspect of the school's work was not a focus for this inspection, with the exception of attendance. Despite the continuing difficulty of families taking their children back to their homelands during term time, rates of attendance have improved once more, although they are still below the national average.

Pupils say that behaviour is continuing to improve. During this inspection, it was observed to be generally good, both in class and in the playground. Pupils care for each other well and are polite and welcoming to visitors. Relationships at all levels are good and, in almost all lessons, good levels of enthusiasm and involvement were seen.

Quality of provision

The key reason for pupils' improving progress is the improvement that there has been in the quality of teaching. No inadequate teaching was seen and monitoring, both by school leaders and local authority representatives, confirms that all teaching is now at least satisfactory. The school is comfortably ahead of the target set by the local authority for increasing the proportion of good teaching. Around two-thirds of lessons are now good and pupils make good progress in these lessons. Teaching is much more consistent through the school and, although several teachers are new to their classes, good engagement and involvement of pupils were seen in all lessons observed. A particular weakness noted at the last inspection was that pupils were often sitting and listening for too long. This was not observed in any class during this inspection. Pupils say that lessons are more interesting and that they are expected to do more difficult work. Teaching in the Nursery and in the special unit for pupils with a hearing impairment continues to be good.

One of the reasons for the improved teaching is that teachers are using assessment systems more effectively to ensure tasks set for pupils are better matched to their abilities. In most lessons, this is now happening well. The new marking policy is having an impact in helping pupils see how they can improve their work. When they mark work, teachers are now generally making helpful comments on what pupils need to do next to move forward. However, there are still some inconsistencies in its use. Teachers do not always refer to pupils' individual targets and pupils are not always expected to react to comments made in their books. For example, pupils are not often given time to read these comments and make changes or improvements that teachers suggest.

Targets are now set routinely for next steps in learning. Most pupils are aware of the level at which they are working and what they need to do to reach the next level. Good practice was seen in some books and lessons where pupils are beginning to assess the effectiveness of their own learning. However, these targets are not being used consistently by all teachers. In most classes, targets are broken down into what pupils need to do to achieve each sub-level, but this is not the case in all classes. Similarly, in some classes the targets are in the front of pupils' books or displayed on

tables, where they can be easily seen or referred to. In other cases, the targets are stuck into books when a previous target has been achieved. This means that the targets are not as easily taken into account by pupils when they are working or by teachers when they are marking.

The curriculum was not a focus for this inspection, although developments continue. For example, shortly before the inspection, pupils enjoyed a science week, which raised the profile of this subject.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2008:

- ensure consistency of teaching so that pupils make faster progress – good
- ensure that the new marking policy and target setting procedures are used consistently so that pupils know the next steps in, and take more responsibility for, their own learning – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The drive to raise standards has continued apace. The headteacher has a very clear vision of what needs to be done and this is shared well by all staff. A particular improvement has been the involvement of governors and other key staff in monitoring and evaluating the school's provision. Governance has improved significantly, partly due to some new members of the governing body, who offer good experience and expertise. Governors now ask searching questions of leaders and are much more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Governors have also started to make visits to school to gather information first hand. However, these visits are not as focused as they might be as governors are not fully aware of what they should be looking for.

The school development plan is thorough, whilst remaining focused on the key issues for improvement. The school has done well to ensure that resources, and particularly the efforts of leaders, have not been spread too thinly in trying to address everything at once. For example, developments in science have taken rather a back seat whilst the school has, quite rightly, been focusing its efforts on raising standards in the key skills in literacy and numeracy. However, improvements in these are now under way and the focus has begun to shift to science.

Leaders for literacy, numeracy and science are beginning to take the driving seat in leading developments in their subjects. A clear plan has been put in place for monitoring by a wider range of staff, but this is in its early days. There is a feeling of corporate teamwork and responsibility about all staff and governors. Far more staff are now involved in evaluating the school's effectiveness and the upward movement is clearly continuing. There is much still to be done, but the school knows what it is and how to make that next step forward.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2008:

- extend the monitoring of the effectiveness of the school to include more involvement of key staff and governors – satisfactory.

External support

The support provided by the local authority has been variable. The input from consultants for literacy, numeracy and science has been effective, especially in their work alongside leaders for these subjects, empowering them for their roles. The regular local authority reviews are also valued highly by the school. The school regards these reviews, carried out by local authority staff who are not involved in regular work with the school, as being independent and therefore a very useful affirmation that they are on the right track. The work of the education welfare officer is much appreciated as she has worked closely with the school and has been instrumental in helping to improve attendance.

The school has a growing number of pupils who do not speak English at home and a widening range of home languages. The support from the local authority to aid provision for these pupils has been inadequate. For instance, in its statement of action, the local authority planned a good amount of support for each term. Very little of this has happened. The school, in the circumstances, has done a good job in making satisfactory provision for these pupils. Training for governors has been limited and, specifically, training planned for March to help them appreciate their roles and responsibilities and their monitoring and evaluation role has not happened.

Priorities for further improvement

- Build on the initiatives to improve pupils' achievement and raise standards.