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05 November 2008

Miss Tracey McCarthy
Swaffham CE VC Junior School
Brandon Road
Swaffham
Norfolk
PE37 7EA

Dear Miss McCarthy

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Swaffham CE VC Junior School

Following my visit with Judith Dawson, Additional Inspector, to your school on 20 – 21 October 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth 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 be appointed subject to the following qualifications:

- an effective senior teacher acts as mentor and schedules weekly meetings
- a comprehensive induction programme is provided
- the monitoring lead inspector moderates the support and induction of the appointment during visits.

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 CE VC Junior School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 20 – 21 October 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The new, permanent, headteacher has been in post since the start of this term. A number of changes have also been made to the school's organisation. Falling rolls have necessitated a reduction to six classes and, consequently, the departure of a number of teachers. The lower school now has a Year 3 and a Year 4 class, and a mixed Year3/4 class. The organisation in the upper school mirrors this, with a Year 5 and Year 6 class and a mixed Year 5/6 class. The subject leader for mathematics has taken up her post and during the absence of the English coordinator, the headteacher has taken over this subject responsibility. Other changes include reorganising the additional classrooms now available to enhance facilities in the school, such as information and communication technology (ICT) and art and design technology.

Achievement and standards

Improvements to the quality of teaching and learning are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' achievement and their rate of progress. The test results for Year 6 at the end of the summer were well below average, as predicted. This group of pupils had a long legacy of underachievement. However, better progress for those pupils in other year groups is beginning to narrow the gap between what they are achieving and the national expectations for their age. This is particularly so in reading and writing. Pupils are continuing to develop their comprehension skills in reading, and have a greater understanding of writing for different purposes. Mathematics, however, remains an area of concern and progress seen in all classes over the last year has been well below that normally expected. However, changes in approaches to teaching and learning this term are presenting pupils with more investigative work, which is raising pupils' interest and enabling them to achieve more. This is also seen in the stronger focus on improving pupils' rapid recall of tables and number bonds. Teachers expect more of pupils and pupils are responding enthusiastically. These improvements show in the more confident and accurate use of basic number facts in pupils' written calculations.

Personal development and well-being

Further refinements in the school's approaches to managing behaviour have continued the good improvement seen at the time of the last visit. The number of recorded incidents has fallen significantly again. Although there are still some pupils who find it hard to conform to the higher expectations, these are now very much in the minority. Earlier contact and closer cooperation with parents is involving them as active partners in reducing behaviour incidents even more. A further review of the role of the 'pastoral bay' has resulted in making it into a much more effective 'nurture' unit rather than merely a place to send pupils who were disruptive in class. It now has a clear purpose in supporting and guiding rather than just isolating pupils. In class, pupils respond well to the teacher and any incidents of inappropriate behaviour are now largely ignored by other pupils. Through the work of the SEAL programme, pupils now see themselves as part of the solution to other's problems. Attendance is improving as pupils begin to see the impact of the changes and get greater enjoyment from school. Most recent figures show attendance to be now in line with the national average.

Along with other responsibilities pupils take on, the work of the school council contributes well to the smooth running of the school. However, the school has not yet broadened its horizons beyond links with a narrow range of specific community groups. Consequently, pupils do not have a wide enough understanding of other cultures found in Britain today or across the wider world.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning continues to improve steadily. Eight out of 10 lessons seen were of good quality, a higher proportion than the school's own record of observations earlier in the term. This shows in improvements to pupils' attitudes and the quality of the work that they are beginning to produce. Teachers are capitalising on pupils' good behaviour by developing much more interesting and active approaches to lessons. Lesson planning is more focused, and teachers share the learning outcomes for the lessons with the pupils more effectively making them much more responsive to the challenges. The use of 'marking ladders' seen in some lessons is a very positive step towards showing pupils what they need to do to succeed and how they will be able to tell when they have achieved their goal. However, some of the criteria by which teachers and pupils can judge how successful they have been are still not sharp enough. Good marking celebrates pupils' successes while also making it clear where they need to go next. This is the result of further training and is supporting the revised approaches well. While there is still much to do to raise standards to a satisfactory level, the improved progress is beginning to reduce the deficit in pupils' achievement.

The use of 'response partners' during many lessons gives pupils greater confidence to answer, having had the opportunity to rehearse their ideas with their neighbour. This approach also benefits from teachers' improved questioning skills. They are now much more effective in drawing out extended answers from the pupils. In the best lessons, teachers also modelled the good quality responses they now expect more often from pupils.

Changes to the curriculum have resulted in some very effective work across subjects, for example, linking the Victorian history theme being studied in Year 6 to a particular genre of writing. Additionally, the teacher utilised pupils' good skills in ICT to enhance this, through creating their own Power Point presentations using the lap top computers. This cross-curricular approach is becoming a much more regular feature of teachers' planning. Having always been used to a single subject approach to learning in many instances, it is taking some pupils a little longer to appreciate the opportunities it presents. However, teachers are now much more aware of the possibilities it offers to develop skills learnt in one subject and apply them more widely across the curriculum to improve understanding.

Teachers are now using the good quality assessment data to target their lesson planning much more effectively to the needs of the pupils in the class. The excellent work of the assessment coordinator has been a driving force in this development. The school's leaders now have a detailed knowledge of the performance of all pupils in school and how different groups of pupils perform. This is enabling much better target setting and a more effective evaluation of the impact of the intervention programmes used.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- 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 newly appointed headteacher has made an exceptionally positive start. With a permanent appointment, parents, pupils and staff have greater confidence in the school's future development. All staff have shown a strong commitment to even more rapid progress. In a short time, the changes to systems and well targeted training are showing good impact on aspects such as teaching and learning and pupils' personal development. Changes to subject and other management responsibilities will need time to embed but the action plans produced by the subject leaders following the last monitoring visit, are detailed, thorough and give a clearer sense of direction to their work.

Monitoring is regular and well focused on improving teaching and learning. There are now clear links between the targets being set for pupils and the expectations on all staff. Teachers and teaching assistants are rising to these increased challenges and have a clear focus on improvement. Modifications to the school's development planning make this much more accessible and relevant to all in school.

The governing body continues to be very well led by an active and very knowledgeable chair of governors. Further training has given the more recent appointments a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities. A detailed and honest self-evaluation at the end of last term shows how much progress they have made in the last year. They are aware of the school's need to engage more with parents and the wider community beyond the school gate. A start has been made in this through the development of an 'extended schools' agenda.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

External support

The LA continues to offer good support to the school through monitoring, advice and training. It has been very effective in ensuring a smooth transition through the change of headteacher. However, the LA is also aware that the school needs to be self-supporting and cannot rely on external support for ever. Consequently, more recently, the level of support and challenge has been reducing and is now much more in response to the school's identified needs and demands rather than the LA view of what the school needs. This is a very positive approach and sends a strong message to the school about the staff's developing capabilities.

Priorities for further improvement

- Forge closer links with a wider range of community groups aimed at improving pupils' understanding of local, national and international cultures.