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7 November 2008

Mrs Helen Dunnico
The Acting Headteacher
Yorkmead Junior and Infant School
York Road
Birmingham
West Midlands
B28 8BB

Dear Mrs Dunnico

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Yorkmead Junior and Infant School

Following my visit with Rodney Braithwaite and Sheila Boyle, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 5 and 6 November 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 January 2008. 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. 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 Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

David Rzeknik
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Yorkmead Junior and Infant School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 November 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and pupils' work in Reception, Years 2, 4 and 6. They also held discussions with the pupils whose work had been scrutinised. They met the acting headteacher, assistant headteachers, English and mathematics subject leaders, special educational needs coordinator and new inclusion leader. Inspectors also had discussions with the chair of governors, the School Improvement Partner and the two National Leaders in Education (NLE) who support the school. Inspectors undertook two joint lesson observations with senior staff and a NLE leader.

Context

The acting headteacher continues to lead and manage the school. Governors are starting to consider appointing a substantive headteacher sometime in 2009. The vice chair of governors was elected chair of governors in September 2008. The NLE headteacher, who was on leave of absence at the time of the first monitoring visit, has returned to support the school. In September a full-time teacher was appointed to release teachers for planning and preparation work. A Year 2 supply and Year 6 teacher left in July 2008. The Year 2 vacancy was filled by a permanent member of staff. The Year 6 class is now jointly taught by an assistant headteacher and a newly appointed inclusion leader. In October 2008 an existing teacher was appointed English subject leader on a temporary contract. The mathematics subject leader's temporary post was made permanent at the same time.

Achievement and standards

Standards at the end of Reception, Years 2 and 6 are starting to rise albeit from a low base. Data shows that significantly more pupils in these years will reach the expected level for their age in 2009 than in 2008. Results at the end of Years 2 and 6 are predicted to be above the minimum floor targets set by government. Realistic whole school targets have been set for 2009. The early signs are that most pupils are on track to achieve the individual targets set for them.

Pupils' progress in writing has accelerated in the first half of the autumn term, particularly in Years 2 and 3 and in some classes in Years 1 and 4. However, pupils' progress in writing in Year 6 is not yet good enough. There is no handwriting policy, although the school has just acquired a new handwriting scheme. It is needed because handwriting skills are insufficiently developed. Many older pupils are unable to write in a fluent joined style and too many younger pupils do not form their letters correctly. Pupils' progress in reading is starting to improve, especially in Years 2 and 6 and in some classes in Years 1, 3 and 4. In mathematics, pupils are starting

to make better gains in their learning, particularly in Years 2, 4 and 5 and in some classes in Years 1, 3 and 6. In the lessons seen, pupils generally made satisfactory or better progress in achieving the objectives set. Despite the improved rate of progress for many pupils, too many of them are still not reaching the standards of which they are capable. The leadership knows that pupils' progress is inconsistent within, and between, year groups.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- raise standards in English and mathematics in Key Stages 1 and 2 – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being remain good. Pupils are happy and enjoy school. They are polite, friendly and relate well to visitors, staff and each other. Their disposition to learning is good and they behave well. Attendance has improved and is satisfactory overall. Effective action has been taken to reduce the level of authorised absence by restricting holidays taken during term time. Through the school council pupils are having a say in how the school can improve. Pupils are keen to take responsibility and do a good job helping to run the library and supervising at lunchtime.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning continues to improve and inadequate teaching has been successfully eliminated. However, there is not enough good teaching. The small number of teachers who previously taught unsatisfactory lessons received effective guidance and support to remedy important teaching weaknesses. As a result, they are now teaching adequately and in the observed lessons pupils were achieving the objectives set. Expectations as to what pupils can achieve are now higher and work is more challenging. As a result, pupils' progress is starting to accelerate, particularly in writing.

Lesson planning continues to develop and is now satisfactory. Teachers are increasingly aware that they must plan work for differing abilities. However, they do not yet match work carefully enough to some group and individual needs, particularly for the less able. At times, teaching does not stretch the learning of the more able pupils sufficiently. Consequently, work is sometimes too hard or too easy for some pupils. The information gained from teacher assessment and the tracking of pupils' progress is not being fully utilised to ensure all pupils are consistently challenged. On occasions teachers slavishly follow their planning, and do not change if it is not fully meeting all pupils' needs.

The strengths in teaching lie in the good relationship between adults and pupils, which helps create a positive learning ethos. Behaviour management is good. A good feature at the start of the lessons is the sharing of lesson objectives so pupils know

what they must achieve. It is also common to see lesson objectives and success criteria specified in pupils' books, with teachers and pupils rightly gauging success against them. Teachers have gone the extra mile to produce attractive displays that celebrate pupils' achievement and support learning. Lessons are better paced, although some pupils say at times teachers 'talk too long, and we get bored'. Some teachers are using practical activities to consolidate and extend learning, but practical investigative work is not widespread enough. There is sufficient practical equipment but it is not always used wisely. For example, dictionaries, thesauruses, word and letter banks are insufficiently used to support writing. Not enough attention is paid to how work is presented. Too much work is not properly laid out, particularly in mathematics, and presentation in a significant proportion of books is unsatisfactory. Teaching assistants ensure pupils can access activities. However, at times they are asked to guide pupils in tasks requiring specific subject knowledge and methodology for which they have not been trained. It means that concepts are not always taught effectively.

Assessment and marking procedures are much better but are not yet fully embedded. For example, work is more regularly marked but the quality of evaluation is variable. At its best, marking is informative and gives pupils clear advice about what must be improved. However, work scrutiny reveals that guidance is not always understood or acted upon and therefore errors are not quickly rectified. A wealth of assessment information exists, but it is not always effectively used to inform short and medium term lesson planning. Target setting at a whole school and individual level is more robust. Most pupils know the National Curriculum level they are working at, and some know their individual writing and mathematics targets. A significant proportion is unclear what they must do to achieve the higher levels of the National Curriculum. Procedures for assessing pupils with learning difficulties/and or disabilities are improving. Greater attention is being paid to the information collected from half-termly reviews to set more precise and challenging targets. Some pupils with learning difficulties are receiving targeted support and it is making a difference with pupils achieving their targets within the time set. However, the school recognises that the progress made by pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is too inconsistent.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- improve the quality and consistency of the teaching by raising the expectations of staff, by planning work that meets the needs of all abilities and by increasing the pace of lessons – satisfactory
- improve marking and assessment, so that all pupils receive clear guidance on what it is they need to do to improve and ensure that the needs of higher attainers, those with learning difficulties and those who speak English as an additional language are met – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The strategic leadership and management of the school have significantly improved. The acting headteacher is leading the school in the right direction. She has a steely determination to improve provision and raise standards. She has the confidence of staff and governors, who share her vision for improvement. Morale has steadily improved as provision and outcomes have got better. The first monitoring inspection gave the school some hard messages that the leadership 'took on board' without resistance. Effective work has been done in a relatively short period of time to improve teaching and the school's self-evaluation procedures.

The roles and responsibilities of the assistant headteachers are now clear and based on the key priorities for improvement. The assistant headteachers suitably evaluate provision and its impact on pupils' progress. They now have job descriptions and the clearer lines of responsibility have improved communication within the phases for which they have responsibility, and in other years too. The assistant headteachers welcome being class teachers again, and calling teachers to account for the standards achieved. They are happy with what they are being asked to do and feel they are making a difference. Inspectors agree. A good feature has been the establishment of a coherent monitoring and evaluation schedule to evaluate provision and its impact. Senior leaders have been trained by the NLE leaders on how to observe lessons and give feedback on strengths and weaknesses. A consistent approach to evaluate teaching is being established. At present, monitoring focuses strongly on teaching attributes, and does not yet focus enough on how well pupils are learning.

The redistribution of senior responsibilities has ensured the acting headteacher's workload is more manageable. She now has appropriate strategic oversight of the whole school, as well as ensuring it runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Staff no longer work in isolation. They now work in teams to get jobs done. This academic year some teachers have been deployed to teach new year groups. This is a good move as their skills and expertise are being put to best use. New teachers have been effectively vetted in line with government requirements. The acting headteacher has spent money wisely to improve resources and accommodation. The pupils like the new desks in their classrooms and the additional storage facilities mean resources are better organised and more easily accessible. Governors are starting to get better organised and their revised committee structure is helping to improve communication with staff and each other. The School Improvement Partner reports that governors have a robust system in place to evaluate the acting headteacher's performance.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve the strategic leadership of the school and bring greater rigour to the way that leaders, managers and governors monitor and evaluate the work of the school and plan for improvement – satisfactory.

External support

The NLE leaders have effectively supported senior staff and others to improve the overall quality of leadership and teaching across the school. Teachers have enjoyed visiting the NLE leaders' schools to observe good teaching, and say that they are incorporating some of the methods and approaches used into their own teaching. Advanced skills teachers have been instrumental in improving teachers' subject knowledge and planning to ensure work is more challenging. The initiatives adopted to improve pupils' writing skills have been successful with pupils' progress in the subject accelerating in some years. The local authority inspects the school each term and produces reports that clearly identify strengths and areas for development.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no further priorities for improvement.