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17 October 2008

Mrs J Dale
The Interim Headteacher
Fosse Primary School
Balfour Street
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Dear Mrs Dale

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Fosse Primary School

Following my visit with Mary Davis and John Eadie, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 14 and 15 October 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in April 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

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 Director of Children's Services for Leicester City.

Yours sincerely

Mark Mumby
Her Majesty's Inspector

PROTECT INSPECTION

Special measures: monitoring of Fosse Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 14 and 15 October 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the interim headteacher, the associate headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the coordinators for English, mathematics and science, the chair of governors and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the school became subject to special measures in April 2008, the headteacher has left the school. An interim headteacher is in post for the autumn term 2008 and the school is currently in the process of recruiting a permanent headteacher. The interim headteacher is supported by an associate headteacher. Two full time teachers and one part time teacher have been appointed on temporary contracts. The LA's plan to appoint an interim executive board (IEB) has been delayed. From 10 July 2008 until 13 October 2008, the work of the governing body was suspended.

Achievement and standards

Analysis of pupils' work and observations in lessons reveal that standards remain exceptionally low in English, mathematics and science. The progress pupils are making is too slow and the gaps between what pupils are attaining and what they are capable of are not closing quickly enough. Inspectors' analysis of the school's assessment data shows that far too many pupils are working at levels well below those expected for their age and that many make very limited progress. The exception is in Year 6, where a majority of pupils made good progress over the last year. Nevertheless, this was not sufficient to address past underachievement and pupils were still working at levels well below those they are capable of. Standards attained by these pupils in Year 6 in national assessments in 2008 rose slightly from the exceptionally low performance in 2007. However, the 2008 cohort performed significantly better when they were assessed in Year 2. Consequently, their progress through Key Stage 2 was slower than the 2007 cohort.

The progress of the less able pupils is inadequate because these pupils are frequently provided with tasks that are not matched well to their specific needs. This progress sometimes improves when they are supported by teaching assistants. However, this support is variable. The more able pupils are rarely challenged sufficiently, so do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Personal development and well-being

Younger pupils frequently find it difficult to sit and listen or concentrate on their work. They lose interest when teaching is less engaging, although their lack of attention does not usually disrupt the learning of other pupils. By the time they are in Year 6, pupils develop improved working habits and they generally concentrate well in lessons. This is a direct consequence of the better quality of teaching in Year 6.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has not improved significantly since the inspection in April 2008. Far too much teaching is not good enough to challenge pupils and enable them to make the progress of which they are capable. As a result, standards are not rising. Pupils in Year 6 and some pupils in Year 5 make better progress because the teaching for these older pupils is frequently good. This is because lessons for these pupils are well paced and include challenging activities that engage the pupils' interests.

Teachers are not using assessment well enough to plan lessons which meet the needs of individual pupils. Activities are frequently too difficult for the least able pupils or provide too little challenge to enable the more able pupils to make sufficient progress. Pupils often lose interest in their work because the tasks they are given lack excitement and are not sufficiently related to their own experiences. Planning is frequently imprecise, resulting in learning objectives that are unclear. Activities are often not matched well to these objectives and, consequently, pupils do not understand what they are learning. Teachers do not make sufficient use of opportunities to extend learning during lessons. For example, too little time is spent sharing pupils' work and discussing their ideas.

Teachers' expectations about how much should be achieved by individual pupils in a lesson are often too low. As a result, pupils frequently become passive in their learning and the pace of lessons is too slow. More able pupils make too little progress because they often complete tasks quickly but are not given suitable further work to extend their learning. On occasions, teachers use questioning well to challenge pupils' thinking. This enables these pupils to make better progress. However, this does not happen enough and too many questions asked by teachers and other adults fail to extend learning sufficiently.

The work of teaching assistants is inconsistent. On occasions, assistants support pupils' learning well. However, they are not always deployed effectively to ensure that all learners are equally well supported. As a result, the most able are often left to work independently without the guidance they need to extend their learning. Frequently, teaching assistants provide too much help for the pupils. Consequently, too many pupils are not developing independent learning skills.

Marking does not consistently inform pupils how they can improve their work. Some marking is inaccurate and teachers do not always check that advice they have given or questions they have asked have been followed up. As a result, pupils do not learn

from their mistakes. Systems for setting targets for pupils in reading and writing have been put in place. However, these are not used consistently throughout the school and too many pupils do not understand how these targets can help them.

The science curriculum remains inadequate. The school does not have a satisfactory overall curriculum plan. Consequently, pupils are not receiving their full curriculum entitlement and there is a lack of continuity and progression in their learning. Shortcomings in teachers' subject knowledge result in poor planning and inadequate marking. For example, pupils are often given incorrect advice. Pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to develop investigative skills. There are too few opportunities for them to plan their own investigations or develop their own recording and analytical skills. The current lack of a systematic approach to developing pupils' scientific vocabulary is impeding the progress they make.

Progress since the inspection in April 2008 on the areas for improvement:

- improve standards and achievements in English, mathematics and science by ensuring that teaching and the curriculum consistently provide the right level of challenge for all pupils – inadequate
- ensure that all aspects of the science curriculum are covered in sufficient depth, especially in Years 1 and 2 – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The recently appointed interim headteacher is working effectively with the school improvement advisor from the LA and the associate headteacher to develop a learning culture in the school. They have successfully engaged the staff in developing an appropriate policy for performance management, including the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. This provides an essential foundation for the future development of the school. However, this work did not begin until the current term and, consequently, progress on addressing the areas for improvement identified in April 2008 has been too slow. Nevertheless, both the headteacher and the LA have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. They fully appreciate the very significant issues that need to be addressed in order to raise standards and improve achievement throughout Key Stages 1 and 2. The school uses assessment data effectively to identify pupils who are attaining below the expectations for their age. However, the progress made by individual pupils is not being monitored effectively.

The school has prepared a raising achievement plan (RAP). This plan provides a clear strategy for improvement including appropriate activities with a good system of monitoring and evaluation built in. The headteacher, LA and senior staff have already begun to analyse the work of the school through frequent scrutinies of pupils' work and informal visits to lessons. However, the written feedback prepared for staff following these activities is too general and does not provide sufficiently precise targets for individual members of staff. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is not improving quickly enough. Furthermore, the absence of formal

lesson observations with developmental feedback for teachers since the inspection in April 2008 has impeded progress.

The recently appointed subject leaders for English and mathematics have a clear understanding of their roles. They are enthusiastic about their work and have received good support from the LA consultants. They have prepared action plans to develop their subjects. These action plans are generally fit for purpose, although the absence of sufficient measurable success criteria, based on the outcomes for pupils, is likely to make it difficult to measure the impact of initiatives. It is too early to see evidence of the impact of this work in English and mathematics. Subject leadership in science is insecure. The subject leader has received some training from the LA. However, shortcomings in subject knowledge and the lack of a clear understanding of her role mean that progress in developing teaching and learning in science has been very limited.

The school does not have an effective governing body. Although the governing body was reconvened two days prior to this monitoring visit, only three governors attended. Apologies were received from only one of the other five governors. Furthermore, the membership of the governing body remains severely depleted as there are still six vacancies. With the exception of two governors attending training on safe recruitment, no governor training has taken place since the last inspection and the formation of an IEB has been delayed.

Progress since the inspection in April 2008 on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that self-evaluation is based on a rigorous and accurate analysis of the work of the school, including assessment data so that the school's leaders identify and address weaknesses at the early stages – inadequate
- deal effectively with current weaknesses by implementing the plan to raise attainment swiftly and determinedly – inadequate
- work with the local authority to recruit and train governors to monitor the work of the school and provide sufficient challenge – inadequate.

External support

The LA has prepared a satisfactory statement of action to support the school. It has provided substantial support to the school's leadership. This includes the appointment of an interim headteacher and part time associate headteacher. These school leaders have worked closely with the LA to overcome many of the barriers that have been preventing the school from moving forward. As a result, the culture of the school has changed considerably and there is now a clear determination to improve. However, because this has taken a considerable amount of time to achieve, progress on addressing the issues raised in the inspection report of April 2008 has been too slow. Furthermore, the failure of the LA to ensure continuity of governance left the school in a situation where the leadership rightly feels that they were not fully supported and were, consequently, left in a vulnerable position.

The support that the LA has provided for the recently appointed subject leaders has been of good quality. As a result, the coordinators of English and mathematics have made a good start in establishing their roles. However, again, the impact of their actions is not yet evident because much of this work has only begun relatively recently.