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5 December 2008

Mr R Brading
Headteacher
Hillbrook School
Hillbrook Road
Tooting
London
SW17 8SG

Dear Mr Brading

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Hillbrook School

Following my visit with Juliet Ward, Additional Inspector, to your school on 26 and 27 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

The appointment of one newly qualified teacher (NQT) has been agreed, subject to Belleville Primary School providing a mentor and the NQT participating in the local authority induction programme. Further NQTs should 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 Education for Wandsworth.

Yours sincerely

Alison Storey
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Hillbrook School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 November 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and pupils' written work, and met with the headteacher and deputy headteachers, other staff, pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority. Her Majesty's Inspector spoke to the associate headteacher by telephone.

Context

There have been significant staff changes since the last monitoring visit, in particular to the leadership and management structure. The revised roles and responsibilities of the two deputy headteachers have been confirmed, with neither having a class teaching role. One deputy headteacher now leads on achievement and standards and developing teaching and learning across the school. The second has a wider inclusion brief than her previous Special Educational Needs Coordinator role. New phase leader posts have been created to provide a layer of middle management; three new, experienced teachers were appointed to these permanent posts from September 2008, while the leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) changed with the retirement of the previous post-holder. Two further experienced teachers took up post as subject leaders for English and personal, social and health education from the beginning of this term.

The school is in the process of taking on responsibility for an integrated children's centre including a new autistic spectrum disorder unit which is due to open at the beginning of December. The on-site provision for 0 – 3 year olds will remain under separate management.

Achievement and standards

The release of national comparative data confirms that standards at the end of the Reception Year in 2008 were below average in personal and social development and particularly in communication, language and literacy. Nevertheless, given children's low starting points, they made good progress during their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Recently published data show that standards at the end of Key Stage 1 have steadily improved over the last three years, so that from being exceptionally low previously, they were below average in 2008. Nevertheless, while at least three-quarters of pupils now reach the level expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics, this is lower than found nationally; in particular, fewer than half the pupils reach a secure Level 2 and few reach the higher levels. The most significant improvement has been seen in writing but reading remains particularly low. The

school attributes this to the higher profile given to developing writing and plans to redress the balance with a renewed focus on guided reading this year.

Provisional data for the end of Key Stage 2, adjusted to take account of recently upheld appeals, show improvement in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level for their age in English, mathematics and science in 2008. Overall, standards were below average rather than exceptionally low. However, there are marked differences between the subjects. Standards in English were in line with those seen nationally. Improvements in mathematics took standards to below average, but the Level 4 figure is still too close to the national 'floor target' of 65%. However, in science a combination of a smaller rise in the number of pupils reaching Level 4 and a drop in the numbers reaching the higher Level 5 mean that standards remained exceptionally low.

The improvements in standards at the end of the key stages in 2008 are, in part at least, attributable to additional support funded by the local authority which accelerated progress over a relatively short period of time in Reception, Year 2 and Year 6. Analysis provided by the local authority shows that the proportion of pupils achieving age-related expectations across the school is not as high as that reported at the last monitoring inspection. Sometimes it is as low as one-quarter and it is rarely above half, showing there is still some way to go to improve standards across the school. Likewise, although the proportion of pupils making the expected progress of two levels across Key Stage 2 rose in 2008, it was stronger in English than in mathematics and the rates of progress across other year groups and across subjects are still too variable.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' positive attitudes are reflected in their behaviour in lessons and around the school, and in their relationships with each other, staff and visitors. They took pleasure in sharing their work books with inspectors, talking enthusiastically and knowledgably about what they have learned. For example, older pupils appreciate that they are now using more interesting vocabulary in their writing and are more confident in explaining the strategies they use to solve mathematics problems. This progress in improving their basic skills means that they are increasingly better prepared for future learning and life. In the lunch hall and playground pupils behave well, talking and playing together sensibly. The rate of attendance is improving, due in part to the introduction of a robust system to encourage better attendance and to follow up poor attendance. Punctuality, however, remains a cause for concern and the school has identified the steps needed to improve the time-keeping of some families.

Quality of provision

Steady progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. This has been brought about by training for all teachers and the regular monitoring of lessons and planning, followed up by coaching and

modelling of good practice for individual teachers led by the deputy headteacher responsible for teaching and learning. Consequently, inadequate teaching has been almost eliminated; indeed, during the monitoring inspections no lessons were less than satisfactory. Just as importantly, the proportion of good lessons is increasing. This has had a positive impact on how well pupils engage with their learning and the progress they make in lessons. In the best lessons, teachers use a good range of strategies to capture pupils' attention, assess their understanding and enable them to concentrate on their work. For example, in Year 6 the quality of interaction between adults and pupils meant that a close check was kept on how well pupils were learning, while they were being encouraged to evaluate their own success and progress. Teachers' planning details the range of different tasks to match pupils' needs and the support provided for lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is becoming more effective. This is due in part to the professional development provided for the teaching assistants and their increased involvement in planning. However, there remain some lessons where the support staff could be better used to support groups of pupils in their learning rather than helping individuals, and there is still a need for further professional development to fill gaps in teaching assistants' own knowledge, particularly in mathematics.

The curriculum has an appropriate balance. All subjects are included in the planning for each class and links between subjects are improving, particularly in finding ways of using computers to assist pupils' learning, although currently the greatest focus is on improving pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills in order to raise standards. The quality of provision in the EYFS remains a relative strength. Good use is made of both indoor and outside classrooms to provide a range of activities across all the areas of learning, with daily evaluations of sessions and assessment of children's learning used to plan next steps. Staff are adapting their teaching of phonics in a bid to improve children's skills in communication, language and literacy by the end of the Reception Year.

The sharing of summative assessment data has given teachers a better understanding of the wide range of needs within their classes and more challenging targets are raising expectations as to what pupils should achieve by the end of the year. A new electronic tracking system has been introduced this term but it is still in its infancy and as yet does not give a clear and accurate overview of the progress made by all pupils across the school, particularly those in intervention groups. This is key to measuring the impact of the improvements seen in teaching and learning overall and in the provision for lower attainers, and to keeping teachers focused on the progress each pupil needs to make.

Across the school, more consistent marking is providing pupils with better information about how they are doing and what they can do to improve. Pupils can describe how they have improved and what they need to do next. Targets for improvement are evident, and pupils use them more regularly to check how well they are doing.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- accelerate all pupils' progress by improving the use of assessment data in lessons so that pupils are given challenging tasks well suited to their needs and know better how to improve their work – satisfactory
- improve the teaching for pupils with lower attainment, including those identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The likelihood that the school can bring about improvement itself rather than relying on external support has been increased by the revised senior and middle management structure and the appointment of new, experienced teachers to key roles. However, it is still early days. The deputy headteacher's role in leading the drive to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning and to raise standards and achievement has had a higher profile, while the other deputy headteacher's role in leading the improvement of provision for lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been lower-key. Her work has been supportive rather than rigorously monitoring or modelling expectations; the full inclusion remit of this role still needs further development. The new middle managers have been allowed to establish themselves first and foremost as teachers within the school and have just begun to take on aspects of their management role. It is crucial that the pace of the development of leadership and management steps up and that the headteacher and governors demonstrate their ability not only to support key staff in their roles but closely to monitor practice and its impact and to challenge where appropriate. Importantly, the influx of new staff and improvements in communication and in systems has brought about a step change in staff attitudes this term. Staff have a much clearer understanding of what is expected of them and of pupils and the majority have a positive and determined approach towards bringing about improvement.

Having led the development and modelling of a more systematic approach to self-evaluation in the last academic year, the associate headteacher has taken more of a back seat this term to allow the school's senior leaders to establish the systems and take ownership of the process themselves. At one level this has been successful. A range of strategies to gather information has been used; a regular programme of lesson observations has been set up, linked to a cycle of year group monitoring meetings; 2008 data have been analysed to evaluate standards and achievement across the school and a new electronic tracking system, which will support the school in monitoring pupils' progress, was introduced at the beginning of this term. In particular, there has been a prompt response to the need identified at the last monitoring inspection to audit provision and outcomes in mathematics in order to plan specifically to raise standards across the school. However, there is still a way to go in developing the effectiveness and efficiency of these systems. For example, data analysis tends to focus more on stating facts than on probing further why things are as they are and does not go beyond reiterating the broad improvement priorities identified by inspection to specify targeted action for particular groups. Careful consideration still needs to be given to the cycle of collecting and analysing

information so that it is collected at the right time, for a purpose and used accordingly. The school also needs to ensure that it has systems in place to keep a check on consistency beyond the classroom and to make sure staff adhere to expected practice in other areas.

There is greater clarity about the process of school improvement planning. The format currently used is more coherent. There are a limited number of key priorities, a logical sequence of actions which are informing work on the ground and evidence that the plan is regularly evaluated; although there is still a lack of consistency in distinguishing between checking implementation and evaluating impact, and in quantifying success criteria. Nevertheless, the current plan is a useful working document and planning is already taking place to involve all staff in the review of the current plan and the development of the next one in the spring term.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- add more rigour to its self-evaluation procedures – satisfactory
- ensure the school improvement plan identifies clearly and coherently the main strategic priorities, and how they will be achieved, so that it ensures consistent improvement across the school – satisfactory
- ensure that there is a clear strategy for improving achievement in mathematics, based on a thorough analysis of provision and outcomes – satisfactory

External support

The partnership with Belleville Primary School continues to be effective, although the focus is rightly shifting from Belleville staff leading and modelling good practice in leadership and management and classroom practice, to supporting senior staff at Hillbrook to take on these roles.

The local authority has responded positively to the judgement made at the last monitoring visit that it had at times communicated an over-optimistic view of progress which had not been helpful to the school. It has taken stock, revised its timelines and identified intermediate success criteria to try to ensure that there is secure and sustainable improvement in the school over the next year. This will include the phased withdrawal of support from the headteacher and staff at Bellville Primary School.