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13 November 2008

Ms E Ramsay
The Headteacher
Arthur Dye Primary School
Springbank Road
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Cheltenham
Gloucestershire
GL51 0PH

Dear Ms Ramsey

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Arthur Dye Primary School

Following my visit with Peter Kemble and Anne Newall, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 11 and 12 November 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 June 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

New 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 Gloucestershire.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Arthur Dye Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 November 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, two assistant headteachers, a group of pupils, the vice chair of the governors and two representatives from the local authority. A range of school documents was scrutinised. Pupils were observed at break times, during assembly, and generally around the school.

Context

There have been no changes to the senior leadership team since the last inspection. Two new teachers have joined Key Stage 2. Very recently, three additional governors were seconded from a local school to support the governing body.

Achievement and standards

Overall, standards seen in lessons and in the pupils' books are below average. This is reflected in the provisional 2008 Year 6 national results and confirms that too many pupils are underachieving. Across the school, pupils' progress is variable and inconsistent. In Reception and in Years 1 to 4, a significant proportion of pupils are making slow progress in relation to reaching the levels expected for their age group. Higher ability pupils are insufficiently challenged and, consequently, their progress is limited. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 make satisfactory progress but they have lost too much learning time in the past for them to reach the expected levels by the time they leave for secondary school. The lack of progress made in Reception and in Years 1 and 2 is of particular concern.

The school has started to rectify the underachievement of boys by introducing programmes of work which have been designed to meet their interests. Topics such as World War Two, 'Superheroes' and 'Infinity and Beyond' have started to motivate the boys. This is starting to be reflected at the top end of Key Stage 2 where boys are making better progress in their writing.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science in Key Stage 2, especially for boys – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Most pupils behave well in lessons and around school, but some become restless and disengaged from learning when teaching is dull or lessons proceed at too slow a pace. They are friendly and polite and many enjoy coming to school to meet their friends. However, attendance rates are very poor and, despite some positive

initiatives introduced by administrative staff, this is not being rectified quickly enough by senior leaders and governance.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent. Too much is inadequate in Reception and in Years 1 and 2 and too little is good. The main weakness in teaching lies in the low expectations evident in many classes and the lack of understanding of what constitutes good learning. A new assessment tool, which helps to identify individual levels of attainment, has been used by some teachers to set targets and help pupils move on to the next stage of their learning. In a minority of classes, teachers mark books effectively, providing praise for pupils' efforts and highlighting areas requiring improvement. However, the assessment systems and marking techniques are new and have not been implemented consistently across the school.

In the most successful lessons, planning is carefully matched to pupils' levels and needs. Interesting activities and programmes of work provide opportunities for pupils to extend their skills and knowledge. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour skilfully and relationships between pupils and staff are good. Teaching assistants are suitably deployed to work alongside and support those pupils who find learning challenging. In the less effective lessons, pupils do not always make the progress of which they are capable because teachers' expectations are not high enough and tasks are not readily adapted if pupils do not respond as expected. Learning is not managed effectively because teachers spend too much time talking. This means that there is not enough time for the pupils to explore issues for themselves, consolidate their understanding, and reflect on what they have learnt. Although learning objectives are displayed on boards and walls they are not used effectively to assess what the pupils have learnt.

Relationships between children and staff are warm and caring in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The leader is working closely with a local authority consultant to build on the quality of provision across the early years and develop the children's independent skills. However, despite this high level of support, inadequacies in the quality of provision remain. The EYFS learning area is dull and lacks stimulation. Insufficient use is made of the outdoor area as an integral part of learning. Activities do not challenge the children and, consequently, they do not achieve as well as they could.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that teachers match work accurately to the needs of all pupils in lessons, and have high expectations of what pupils can achieve – inadequate
- use assessment, marking and target setting more effectively to track pupils' progress, and provide pupils with better indications of the next steps in their learning – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The role of the senior leadership team remains weak because it is underdeveloped and therefore inadequate. The impact of the work of senior staff is limited because they do not have the skills required to bring about sustained and lasting improvements. Monitoring and evaluation remain inadequate because actions are not having enough impact on eliminating persistent weaknesses in teaching nor raising achievement levels at a sufficiently speedy rate. Lesson observations are not specific enough and do not rigorously evaluate the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Feedbacks to teachers are not used to help the teachers identify important development points and are not followed up by subsequent observations.

Governors have not shown the capacity to challenge the school effectively and their systems are not sufficiently robust to hold the headteacher and her leadership team to account. Planning is in place for governors to attend training courses in the future. However, there is still some way to go before the governing body plays its full part in strategic planning and acts as a critical friend in challenging the school to do its best.

The school is in a precarious position. It is working hard to strengthen relationships with parents. However, despite a range of well focused mentoring and support for the headteacher from the local authority, the school's leadership is struggling to make a sufficiently positive impact in increasing the rate of progress for all pupils, improving standards, and eliminating the weaknesses in teaching and learning. The local authority recognises that the school is facing a significant challenge to improve the quality of education and has committed extensive additional resources to aid the school's recovery.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that the senior leaders rigorously evaluate the school's strengths and weaknesses and effectively implement measures to improve pupils' achievement – inadequate.

External support

The local authority statement of action meets the requirements and extensive support is being provided to the school. Local authority officers and consultants work with the leadership team and this includes mentoring support for the headteacher. The local authority meets regularly with the key personnel to evaluate the school's progress. It confirms that the school is not making enough progress. The recent monitoring of teaching and learning by the external consultants accurately identified key areas requiring improvement in the EYFS and in Years 1 and 2 and they have devised support for these key stages. The challenge for the local authority is now to hold the school rigorously to account for the implementation of its own improvement plan.

Priorities for further improvement

- As a matter of urgency, introduce a coherent and rigorous system for improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Ensure that the newly introduced assessment system is used consistently throughout the school.