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13 March 2009

Mrs Mary Binns
Headteacher
Bankwood Community Primary School
Bankwood Close
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S14 1LW

Dear Mrs Binns

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Bankwood School

Following my visit with Judith Tolley and Naila Zaffir, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 11 and 12 March, 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 March 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 the interim executive board and the Director of Education for Sheffield.

Yours sincerely

Susan Bowles
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Bankwood School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher and the senior leadership team, groups of pupils, a representative from the local authority (LA) and a member of the interim executive board (IEB).

Context

There has been some discontinuity in teaching for some pupils in the past six months, due to absences and difficulties in recruitment, but the school now has a full complement of largely permanent staff, including a new learning mentor. The four-strong senior leadership team is well established. Two members have executive roles which they combine with leading the partner school, while two are fully based in the school. The IEB has recently added an experienced governor to represent the community.

Achievement and standards

Standards overall remain below average in English and mathematics, but progress has improved since the last visit. Children who started in the Early Years Foundation Stage 2 class in September are making good progress from a low base in communication, language and literacy; for example, they are now working on phase four of Letters and Sounds and are learning to write a sentence. Their satisfactory progress in mathematical and personal, social and emotional development is also securely demonstrated.

Progress has improved in Key Stage 1, based on the school's regular and systematic tracking. Recent assessments suggest that the school's targets will be exceeded in reading and writing and will come close to the target for mathematics. The progress of pupils who start at a low level is accelerated by interventions designed to close gaps in their learning. The steady improvement in standards of work in Key Stage 2 is being maintained. Progress made by Year 6 pupils in English has accelerated, as they make up for past deficits and increase their independence in reading, speaking and writing. This includes pupils learning English as a second language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, pupils show less confidence in mathematics. Weak skills in, for example, using a ruler to measure in Key Stage 1, or using partition to solve problems in Key Stage 2, slow down progress. Generally, there is some variation in the rate of progress seen in lessons. This is linked to differences in teachers' use of assessment to match teaching and activities to pupils' different needs.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in English and mathematics – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

The measures the school has taken to improve its below average attendance are now well established and beginning to have a positive impact on the attendance and punctuality of pupils. Through its links with the local community, the school is giving coherent messages about its high expectations of pupils and families. Authorised absence has decreased as a result of the school's firmer stance. Too many parents still take holidays in term times and allow the odd day off that is not strictly necessary. As a result, unauthorised absence has increased slightly. Overall, attendance is, at 92.6%, better than last year, although below the school's target of 93.5%.

Systematic monitoring and analysis of attendance on a weekly basis has enabled the school to identify groups of persistent non-attenders or latecomers. The school is successfully changing pupils' attitudes to absence and punctuality: they clearly understand the link between missing school and losing out on learning. Because the school highlights upcoming events and lessons, the pupils have a stronger desire not to miss out. Pupils and their parents, if arriving a few minutes after the start of the school day, show a sense of urgency which the school can encourage further. Pupils generally feel positive about coming to school and enjoy most lessons, but some said they are put off by unkind behaviour in playtimes. Though pupils play together imaginatively, some boisterousness is evident and there is scope for the school to make play time more enjoyably sociable for all.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve pupils' attendance – satisfactory

Quality of provision

With continuing regular support and monitoring by the partnership school and the LA, provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has sustained the improvement seen at the last visit. Effective use is made of good resources, and learning outdoors effectively mirrors indoor activities. Good teaching, engaging activities and a stimulating environment encourage the children to use their growing understanding of letters and sounds, so they enjoy writing and independently take up the plentiful opportunities to use their emerging skills. Improving arrangements for assessment and transition from the children's centre have enabled the school to cater for the group of children who started in January with lower personal and social skills than is typical.

The investment in teachers' knowledge, skill and understanding has begun to pay dividends in the quality of provision across the age range. Teaching seen was satisfactory overall, with some that was good but a small proportion that was weak. The basic features of effective teaching that the school's leaders expect were

observed in all classrooms, marking an improvement in consistency. These include clearly shared learning objectives and success criteria which help pupils understand how to do well, and helpful marking. Lessons are suitably constructed and make good use of support staff. They typically include clear explanations and modelling by teachers, effective use of resources such as smartboards and wall displays, and opportunities for pupils to practise their skills independently as well as to explore and evaluate their understanding through well-directed talk. This, combined with good relationships and effective management of behaviour, has had a positive effect on pupils' attitudes to learning. Observation indicated that boys' engagement has improved, though it is not equal to girls' in every lesson. In the weaker lessons, the different activities pupils were set were not well enough attuned to their different needs, so that some groups did not work well independently or make the intended progress. Assessment is more consistently accurate and precise, but there is scope for teachers to make better use of information when designing the detail of activities, and when evaluating the impact of lessons on different groups.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that teaching consistently promotes high standards and meets the learning needs of all pupils – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Significant changes to leadership which were recent at the previous visit have now had time to show an effect on the quality of provision. Well supported by advisory teachers and learning partnership staff, senior leaders can demonstrate the positive impact of actions taken to tackle the areas for improvement. Staff show better understanding of higher expectations and how to secure them; they have worked hard to reach some early milestones for their pupils' progress and the quality of provision. Regular and rigorous monitoring, with suitable training, has contributed to clear improvement in marking and the use of targets for pupils' progress. The school's assistant headteacher, new in post at the time of the last visit, has had a positive impact on the consistency and effectiveness of teaching in Key Stage 1 and in leading literacy teaching across the school. Recording of pupils' all-round progress, including punctuality and attendance, is established and helping the school to coordinate and monitor interventions. As a result, pupils' readiness to learn in lessons has improved. This reflects the developing effectiveness of the school's leaders in collecting and using data, although everyday use of records by teachers is less effective in personalising learning. Staffing difficulties have delayed the development of middle leader roles, but more staff are taking on responsibility for transforming the school, for example, working together in teams to create a good learning environment and to plan sequences of lessons.

The leadership team and the IEB share a well informed and realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders correctly see that the school now has a better foundation on which to build quality, and recognise what needs to be done next to consolidate and advance.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Secure sustainable and effective leadership – satisfactory.

External support

Support from the LA is contributing well to the satisfactory improvement seen since the last inspection. The learning partnership with Norfolk Primary School is securing the effective leadership of the school and providing leadership and regular practical support for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Support from advisory teachers is contributing to improvements in teachers' planning, assessment and approaches to the teaching of literacy. The school improvement adviser helps the school to monitor improvements against targets in the Raising Attainment Plan. Through weekly meetings between the executive headteacher and the interim executive board, the LA keeps a close eye on progress and has provided practical help to overcome obstacles.

Priorities for further improvement

The priorities for further improvement continue to be the issues identified by the last inspection. To help ensure teaching consistently meets the needs of all pupils, teachers should:

- use assessment to plan activities which are well matched to pupils' needs and capabilities.