

PROTECT-INSPECTION

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Mrs M Binns
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Binns

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Bankwood Community School

Following my visit with Lesley Clark, additional inspector, to your school on 8 and 9 July 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and the Director of Children's Services for Sheffield.

Yours sincerely

Susan Bowles
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Bankwood Community School.

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 July 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including 13 lessons, scrutinised documents and pupils' work, and met with the executive headteacher, the leading headteacher and other senior staff, three groups of pupils, and representatives from the local authority.

Context

The executive headteacher and deputy headteacher from the partner school continue to lead the school, but with the appointment to the school of one of the local authority's team of leading headteachers, the time they spend in the school has begun to reduce. The interim executive board (IEB) mainly comprising local authority officers also continues its close involvement with the school. Apart from some absences, staffing has been stable.

Achievement and standards

Standards have sustained the improvement shown at the last visit, although they remain below average. A significant proportion of pupils are working below the expected level for their age, particularly in writing. With support, the school's use of assessment and systems for tracking pupils' progress have improved, and as a result, the great majority of pupils are now making progress at the expected rate or better, although with some variation between subjects and classes.

A minority of children show the skills expected of them by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The proportion is higher than last year, but still far lower than the national picture. This represents satisfactory progress from the overall low starting point. Most children in Foundation Stage 2 communicate clearly, show an interest in writing and use their knowledge of sounds and letters to write words and simple sentences. Their interest in mathematical activities is less evident, and the lack of confidence some in Years 1 and 2 show in understanding money suggests a need to check the effectiveness of early provision for calculation.

Focused support has enabled the majority of pupils to reach the level expected in mathematics, reading and writing by the end of Year 2, although there has been no increase in the number who performed well in writing. Pupils' progress in Year 6 has been at least average. Teachers' assessment shows that more pupils than last year have reached or exceeded the expected level of attainment in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6. Pupils' written work shows care and thought, but is too reliant on adult guidance. Standards and progress are less consistent in Years 1, 3 and 5. The school's careful tracking indicates some significant dips in progress in the earlier part of the year, linked to discontinuity in teaching, but careful



monitoring and intervention has pulled these classes back on course in the latter part of the year. The quality of work in Year 5 has improved markedly since both classes changed teachers and started Year 6 early in June.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

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

Personal development and well-being

Attendance has improved, but, at 91.1%, is well below average and the school's target. Better systems for identifying and responding to pupils on the edge of poor attendance have had a positive effect. More focused work with external partners to change the habits of a few persistently poor attenders has begun but is yet to show significant impact. Meanwhile, the school is redoubling its efforts to gain parents' active support for punctuality and attendance. Contact with parents is supportive. Pupils like the recognition they get for good attendance. They enjoy coming to school and generally behave well. They appreciate the way teachers make lessons fun and make sure they can all get on with their work. They have a growing sense of their individual strengths. Older pupils like the opportunities they have to take responsibility and feel involved in the effort to make the social side of school life more enjoyable for everybody.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Improve pupils' attendance – satisfactory.

Quality of provision

The evidence from the monitoring of lessons by school leaders and the local authority indicates that the quality of teaching has strengthened as a consequence of considerable support and guidance. Teaching seen was consistently satisfactory and sometimes better, but not yet effective enough overall to eradicate the consequences of past underachievement. Since the last visit, confidence in using agreed strategies has consolidated. Clear success criteria help pupils structure and check their work. Marking is helpfully precise and sets targets which are usually checked. Lessons are suitably constructed and make good use of support staff. They typically include clear explanations and modelling by teachers and effective use of smartboards and wall displays. Relationships are good and have a positive effect on pupils' attitude to learning. The unified approach to the teaching of reading to younger pupils leads them effectively towards some high challenges and this is paying dividends in outcomes. Several special places for reading are in use across the school, and displays of writing are of sufficient quality to inspire other pupils' interest. There is, however, less clear evidence of the coherent development of mathematical thinking.

Teachers have acted positively on points raised at the last visit about matching activities to different needs and increasing boys' participation in activities. Assessment continues to become more precise and is better used in the classroom. The pattern of reviewing pupils' progress each half term is integral to practice now. Pupils who experience difficulties in learning are given a high profile in planning and evaluation and teachers involve them effectively in questioning. Boys participated well in observed lessons, though more of them have call to use the inclusion room. However, there is now a need to make sure that extension for more able pupils genuinely stretches them. Pupils have time to practise their skills but there is more to do to enable them to explore and evaluate their understanding through well-directed talk, so that they become less dependent on direction from adults in reaching for higher standards.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

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

Leadership and management

The school has improved its capacity to drive its own progress. The executive headteacher and deputy headteacher have played a significant part in developing this and the learning partnership has had a positive impact on the school. Although some targets for the year have not been met, the school is moving in the right direction.

Senior leaders are thorough and organised. Monitoring of the quality of provision is regularly done. The analysis of data – increasingly the work of the deputy headteacher - is well linked to action to improve aspects of teaching, whether individual or common. Staff are persistent and keen to share successful approaches. However, although inconsistencies in teaching quality persist, observers' recent feedback to staff has not given sufficient detail about how pupils' progress could be accelerated, and revisits to check progress on identified areas for improvement are not routine.

The addition of an experienced lead headteacher has brought further expertise and energy to the school, evident in recent work to strengthen the sense of common purpose within and beyond the school community and increase impact on attendance. Middle leadership for phases and subjects has not developed far. Work is now planned to realign leadership responsibilities with the school's priorities and to build sustainable leadership at all levels.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Secure sustainable and effective leadership – satisfactory.

External support

The school's new improvement adviser is aware of how far the school has met objectives set in the statement of action, and has confirmed the school's view of the strengthening skills of the youngest children. The evaluation of the school's improvement correctly identifies where progress has been positive and where more rigour is needed to ensure better outcomes. The school has met or come close to meeting several milestones, and this has been helped by the support and guidance from local authority personnel and the learning partnership, both of which continue. The school remains part of the Intensifying Support Programme. Since Easter, the work of consultants in English and mathematics has been less needed as the school's own capacity has developed. The learning partnership remains a flexible resource for developing the quality of provision in several areas, and this continues.

Priorities for further improvement

The key priorities for the school remain the same for the school. Next steps towards them should include:

- greater emphasis on independent learning and the development of teachers' range of strategies to challenge pupils
- further development of the roles of leaders at all levels, and wider distribution of responsibilities.

