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15 June 2009

Mr Nicholas Sutton
Headteacher
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Aspatia
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Cumbria
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Dear Mr Sutton

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Oughterside Foundation School

Following my visit to your school on the 11 and 12 June 2009, 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 July 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 governors and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Brian Dower

Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Oughterside Foundation School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 11-12 June 2009

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and teaching staff, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

There have been no significant changes in the school's circumstances since the last monitoring visit.

Achievement and standards

There has been a noticeable improvement in pupils' progress since the last monitoring visit. The good teaching seen then has reversed the past shortcomings in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills in mathematics. However, progress in English has not been so rapid and has yet to reverse past underachievement completely.

There are eight boys in Class One, three of whom are Reception age children. Their attainment on entry to the school was below that expected for children of that age, particularly in their language and communication skills. The range and quality of the work these boys are doing now, together with the school's assessment of how well they are developing, show that the rate of their progress has improved since the last monitoring visit and is now good. They have attained the early learning goals. The progress of the three Year 2 boys in Class One has also improved and is now good in reading, writing and mathematics, from a below average starting point. They are well placed to attain average standards in the national assessments.

Class Three has ten Year 6 and five Year 5 pupils. The Year 6 pupils started Key Stage 2 with average levels of attainment. The quality of the work seen in mathematics and the school's assessment records show that they are working at above expected levels and are on course to attain above average national test results in the subject. This confirms the good progress they were making in mathematics at the time of the February monitoring visit. The situation is not so clear in English because staffing difficulties beyond the school's control have led to a lack of continuity in teaching.

Personal development and well-being

There were no key issues for improvement identified at the July 2008 inspection and at the February 2009 visit. This second monitoring visit found no additional priorities for improvement.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has continued to improve since the last monitoring visit. This is seen, for example, in the way teachers are promoting coherence in pupils' learning by making the links between subjects clear. In a Class Three mathematics lesson, the money and inventory systems used in Tudor England were contrasted with modern accounting procedures. Pupils moved easily from one to the other, relishing the challenge of getting to grips with unfamiliar calculations and quickly spotting mistakes in the examples from Tudor times. They also learnt about the items deemed essential in households at that time. Boys and girls in Class Two, comprising nine Year 3 pupils and four in Year 4, made the link between estimation and measurement exercises in mathematics and their practical application in science where they had to calculate and record capacity in an experiment.

There are more opportunities for speaking and listening, resulting in pupils expressing themselves confidently and listening carefully to what others have to say. The few pupils in February who called out answers to questions no longer do so. They have learnt to be patient and await their turn to contribute in lessons. The standard of presentation in pupils' books remains good and written work is now ordered logically, an improvement since the last visit. Work on developing the outdoor play area is on-going. The good and effective use of information and communication technology for teaching and learning was more apparent during this visit. For example, teachers are making use of the interactive whiteboard to motivate and engage pupils actively in the learning process. Pupils are using computers as a learning aid. In a Class One lesson linking mathematics and science, the highest attaining pupils in the class were using the technology to create bar charts to classify groups of animals according to given criteria. They then presented their findings to their peers.

Staffing difficulties, leading to a lack of continuity in teaching for Class Three, has affected the rate of the older pupils' progress in English. Although the school's assessments evaluate progress as satisfactory, it is not possible to corroborate this from pupils' written work because it is scattered and not assembled coherently in one place. Also, there is inconsistency in the way the different teachers mark. Marking is always conscientiously done but there is little continuity between the methods adopted by the three teachers involved. In some of the books seen, no feedback was given on the levels at which pupils were working and little guidance on how to improve. Pupils say they find the different approaches confusing. The school is aware of the need to address this issue and the staffing plans for September focus on ensuring continuity of teaching and consistency in marking.

The teaching seen during the monitoring visit was good overall. The lack of continuity in teaching in Class Three has held back to satisfactory the rate of progress in overcoming the legacy of past underachievement in English.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Accelerate pupils' progress by improving the quality and continuity of teaching and learning – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The health and safety and child protection improvements noted at the last monitoring visit remain firmly established. The systems to monitor and evaluate pupils' progress continue to be used well to inform lesson planning and to evaluate how well the school is doing. The monitoring of the quality of education provided is good overall. The school is alert to the impact on the quality of provision and on pupils' progress in English of the use of three teachers with the older pupils.

Governors undertook a second, recent survey of parents' views and compared the returns to those of the survey conducted at the start of the autumn term. This showed greater satisfaction with the quality of education and care being afforded their children. The returns in both surveys represented about half the families with children in the school. There has been a fall in pupil numbers since the last monitoring visit. Governors and staff are being pro-active in the community in advertising the school's achievements, in particular the good academic progress being made in school now and the anticipated promising levels of attainment in the national assessments and tests.

Governors are aware of and fulfil all their statutory responsibilities. They have acquired an in-depth understanding of assessment procedures and performance indicators and ask the right questions about the rate of pupils' progress in lessons and their likely levels of achievement over time. They are aware, for example, that the good progress seen now in mathematics might lead to above average standards in the Year 6 national tests. They also recognise the staffing difficulties in Class Three and have worked closely with the headteacher to put in place plans to ensure greater continuity of teaching in the autumn term. Leaders and managers are now skilled in monitoring and evaluating the progress of every pupil and therefore how effectively the school is performing. They have worked to minimise the impact of recent staffing difficulties on Class Three and have been successful in securing progress in mathematics. However, they recognise that more needs to be done to accelerate the rate of progress in English to overcome past underachievement completely.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Take urgent steps to ensure that health and safety and child protection policies are fully up to date – good
- Ensure that governors are aware of and fulfil all their statutory responsibilities and are suitably skilled to hold the school to account – good
- Extend the skills of leaders and managers so that they can accurately monitor and evaluate the school's performance and the quality of education provided – good

- Establish a good working relationship with parents– satisfactory

External support

The significant improvements since the July 2008 inspection in health and safety and child protection procedures and in the governance of the school have allowed the local authority to rein back its support in these areas. It has continued to work effectively with teachers and teaching assistants on classroom provision, resulting in the improvements in teaching and learning apparent since the February visit. The school again recognises how helpful this has been. The external support provided by the local authority has been and continues to be good and the manner of its delivery excellent.

Priorities for further improvement

- There are no additional priorities for further improvement.