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Ms Kim Beat
Headteacher
Braintcroft Primary School
Warren Road
London
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Dear Ms Beat

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Braintcroft Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 and 20 January 2009 with Sue Vale, Additional Inspector, 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 November 2007. 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

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

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 Brent.

Yours sincerely

Bradley Simmons
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Braintcroft Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 19 and 20 January 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work over two days; scrutinised documents; and met with the headteacher, various staff, governors including the chair, and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors talked with a number of pupils from different classes and met with the school council and members of the parents' forum.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, five new teachers have been appointed on long-term supply contracts to class teacher posts. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) leader has left the school, and a supply teacher has been appointed to teach her class until the end of the academic year. In addition, the school has seconded an experienced EYFS leader from another school for one day and two mornings each week to support leadership across the three Reception classes.

Achievement and standards

In the Nursery, children are now making good progress as a result of the much improved provision in this area. During lessons observed on this visit, Reception Year children were making satisfactory progress. However, the standards they attained at the end of the autumn term 2008 were exceptionally low. In part, this reflects the very poor provision experienced by these children when they were in the Nursery. This was compounded by a difficult start for children in one class during their first term in the Reception Year.

Across Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils' progress in any given class, while better than a year ago overall, is too dependent on the continuity of teaching they receive. Across Year 6, for example, pupils' progress is good because they experience consistently high-quality teaching. Similar quality and continuity of teaching are found in individual classes elsewhere in the school and, in these classes, pupils are making better progress than was the case at the time of the previous monitoring inspection. Notwithstanding this, in some classes, pupils of higher ability are not sufficiently stretched. Most seriously, however, at least three classes continue to experience a level of discontinuity in teaching which, after one year in special measures, is unacceptable. The school's own increasingly robust data demonstrate that pupils in these classes are not making the progress of which they are capable in reading, writing and mathematics.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards, initially in English and mathematics, by accelerating pupils' progress – inadequate

Personal development and well-being

The behaviour of pupils around the school and in lessons is good. Pupils are keen and very motivated to learn. They participate fully in class discussions and are willing and eager to offer their opinions. Members of the school council were keen to explain how much they feel the school has improved over the past year. They feel safe at school and enjoy the new systems and structures which have been put in place to encourage attendance, punctuality and good work. Despite the positive work done by the school to encourage pupils to attend school regularly, there are still a number of families who continue to take children out of school for holidays during term time. These pupils are missing out on essential time in their education.

Quality of provision

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning continues to improve. In some classes, particularly in upper Key Stage 2, it is consistently good. Senior leaders and the School Improvement Partner continue to maintain a very clear view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching across the school. A common planning format is now used in virtually all classrooms. Teachers across year groups plan together. The result of this is that, generally, planning is coherent, judiciously considered and informed to a greater degree by teachers' assessments of what pupils need to learn next. This planning provides a good framework for better teaching. In most lessons, teachers discuss learning intentions and planned 'steps to success' with pupils, and return to these at pertinent points throughout the lesson.

Teachers are implementing the school's chosen scheme for teaching early reading, including systematic phonics, increasingly effectively in many classrooms. However, assessment of individual pupils' phonic knowledge for reading and writing is not yet precise enough to ensure that early intervention is well targeted, or to determine whether individual pupils' challenges in this area arise as a result of underachievement or learning difficulties. A new handwriting scheme has been introduced across the school and most teachers now teach handwriting regularly. Many pupils are not, however, transferring the skills they demonstrate in their handwriting exercise books to their work in other areas of the curriculum.

Increasingly, teachers are making secure assessments of pupils' needs and abilities, and their targets in writing and mathematics are pitched at an appropriate level. Those pupils with whom inspectors spoke understand their targets and appreciate the guidance some teachers give them on how to achieve them.

Observations during this inspection, together with the school's monitoring evidence, demonstrate that teaching in some classes remains weak. Lessons in these classes are typically characterised by a lack of urgency, with the result that pupils are not productive enough. Teachers' questioning skills are poor so that, even though planning contains a good range of questions, these are not targeted at individuals or different ability groups by the teacher. Pupils have few opportunities to verbalise

their thinking, or to challenge or support that of their classmates. As a result, pupils lose interest, their attention drifts and their enthusiasm wanes. Sometimes, when pupils do make oral contributions to the whole class at the teacher's request, these contributions do not appear to be valued; other pupils continue to talk among themselves, unchecked by the teacher. At a basic level, some teachers simply fail to follow procedures that have been agreed at whole-school level, for example modelling cursive handwriting correctly. When teaching is challenging, pupils rise to this and relish their work; the school council told an inspector how much they enjoyed 'hard work'. For a minority of classes, however, teachers' expectations remain too low.

To compound these factors, some pupils are experiencing unacceptable discontinuity in provision because of their permanent teachers being away from school for long periods.

Overall provision in the EYFS is satisfactory. The support from the seconded Reception year leader is in its infancy but has resulted in a review of the way that Reception classes are run. A new planning system is being introduced to ensure that work is more accurately matched to individual children's needs and requirements, so that they are more suitably challenged in their learning. At the time of the last monitoring visit, there were insufficient observations to determine what children know, understand and can do. This is being addressed, and there are now more frequent observations, formal and informal, by teachers but not, generally, by other practitioners. The systematic teaching of phonics has been introduced and children are taught phonemes on a daily basis. This is already having a positive impact on the progress children make in their learning. Key staff working in Reception classes now feel that their views are being sought and acted upon. This is an improvement since the last monitoring visit. Encouragingly, teaching is now satisfactory overall across the EYFS.

Provision in the Nursery is good. A bright, stimulating learning environment is enhancing children's learning. Well-considered play activities, underpinned by meaningful and sensitive adult support, help children to settle quickly into their new environment and to make good progress in learning. The outdoor learning environment for both the Nursery and Reception classes does not yet reflect the positive renovation of the indoor surroundings.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve teachers' use of assessment information in planning to meet the learning needs of pupils, including those in the early stages of learning English – satisfactory
- improve the quality of the provision in the EYFS to ensure that planned activities are based on regular and systematic observations of children's learning – satisfactory

Leadership and management

Senior leaders have made some significant strides in improving provision since the last inspection, particularly in the EYFS, which is now providing a satisfactory standard of education for children.

Procedures for monitoring teaching and learning have developed further. Some senior leaders are now making informal 'drop-in' visits to classrooms with the intention of ensuring that standards of teaching and learning remain of a similar quality to those observed during formal monitoring. Informal monitoring is a sensible initiative, but records show that observations do not concentrate sufficiently on pupils' response to the teaching they receive. A new marking policy has been introduced and the senior leadership team have monitored its implementation effectively. Their effective evaluation has led to better marking from more, but not all, teachers. Senior leaders have not carried out a formal scrutiny of writing to check that pupils receive daily opportunities to practise their writing skills.

The appointment of a second deputy headteacher has brought many benefits, but appears to be leading to some duplication of roles between the two deputy headteachers. Senior leaders realise that their challenge is now to secure consistency of practice in all classrooms. Administration of data, rather than its analysis, is taking up too much valuable senior leadership time, and limiting the support and challenge to secure consistency and improved practice that the first deputy headteacher could be offering on a daily basis in classrooms across the school.

Teachers' sharper judgements of pupils' performance against National Curriculum levels are leading to increasingly robust data, although anomalies remain in one or two classes, where judgements about pupils' progress remain inaccurate.

The work of the governing body has been strengthened by the addition of new governors. Attendance at governing body meetings has improved and new governors are being sensibly deployed to mentor others with the aim of ensuring that the governing body's ability to hold the school accountable for its work becomes stronger.

The school has rightly implemented a review of provision for pupils with learning difficulties, led by the second deputy headteacher. This is timely, in order to rationalise and more effectively target the plethora of intervention strategies.

A meeting with a group of parents from the parents' forum clearly showed that the majority feel that there is much better communication between the school and families. Parents feel that their views and opinions are listened to and acted upon and that the school has improved.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- devise a rigorous approach to monitoring all aspects of the school's work and develop thorough systems, including the analysis of performance data, for evaluating the impact of provision on pupils' learning – satisfactory
- strengthen links with parents – satisfactory

External support

The impact of the local authority's school improvement function on the school is good. The link adviser provides a good level of support and challenge, and his work and that of local authority consultants continue to make an effective impact overall. The link adviser has worked effectively to appoint new, experienced governors to support and challenge the school.

One year after the school was placed in special measures; however, local authority support is inadequate overall. This is because systems for dealing with competency issues and sickness are not sufficiently developed to enable decisive action to be taken where teachers fall between both procedures. As a result, a significant minority of pupils at Braintcroft are taught by a series of supply teachers and are not getting the continuity of education they deserve.

Priorities for further improvement

- Reduce the discontinuity of provision experienced by pupils who are being taught by a series of supply teachers.
- Balance the roles of the deputy headteachers more equitably in order to focus efforts on securing consistency of provision and thus eliminate the remaining core of unsatisfactory teaching.