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21 April 2009

Mr Rick Brading
Headteacher
Hillbrook School
Hillbrook Road
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London
SW17 8SG

Dear Mr Brading

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Hillbrook School

Following my visit with Grace Marriott, Additional Inspector, to your school on 31 March and 1 April 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 January 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Wandsworth.

Yours sincerely

Alison Storey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Hillbrook School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 31 March and 1 April 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work; scrutinised documents and pupils' written work; and met with the headteacher and deputy headteachers, other staff, pupils, the associate headteacher and representatives from the local authority.

Context

There have been a few staff changes since the last monitoring visit. The appointment of a newly qualified teacher to cover maternity leave in Year 2 from the end of November was agreed just prior to the last visit. A music specialist, who provides cover for teachers for planning, preparation and assessment, was appointed on a temporary full-time basis from January to replace the previous post-holder, who returned abroad. The school has been able to fund a number of additional temporary teaching assistant appointments, which has increased its capacity to provide additional support for groups of pupils. The level of support from Belleville Primary has reduced to the extent that the associate headteacher acts in an advisory role and, since January, other members of his staff are no longer providing support. There are currently three vacancies for governors.

Overall, the number of pupils on roll has risen slightly since the last monitoring visit, although this masks the fact that the number of pupils joining and leaving the school during the course of the year has been higher than expected. The unit for nursery-aged children with autistic spectrum disorder opened at the beginning of December. There are currently four children on roll, and this is due to increase to 10 by September 2009.

Achievement and standards

Recently published unvalidated data confirm the improvements in standards seen at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2008, which were reported at the last monitoring visit. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected level for their age in English, mathematics and science rose, and overall standards were below average rather than exceptionally low. However, there remain marked differences between the subjects and for different groups of pupils. Although standards in English were in line with those seen nationally, mathematics and science were below average, with the gap between school and national results greatest in science. Overall, progress from the end of Key Stage 1 was satisfactory, largely because it was accelerated in Year 6. However, the legacy of underachievement meant that the picture still mirrored that seen at the last inspection, with some groups of pupils, in particular lower attainers, pupils at school action and those speaking English as a first language, not achieving as well as they should.

The school's own tracking data indicate that, since September 2008, almost two thirds of pupils in Years 1 to 6 have made better than expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics, although previous underachievement means that the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level for their age is still below average. Furthermore, the picture is the same for those groups of pupils who were previously underachieving. Although the figures do show variations from class to class, which are often linked to the quality of teaching and learning, it is clear that the school knows which pupils are not making as much progress and is, consequently, putting in place additional support to help them. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, more detailed tracking is indicating that the introduction of a structured programme for teaching phonics is paying dividends in improving children's skills in communication, language and literacy, so that they no longer lag behind their development in other areas of learning.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils work well together and behave well in lessons and around the school. They relate well to adults in school, are polite and friendly to visitors, and are happy to talk about their work and how well they are doing. The relaunched school council takes its responsibilities very seriously and is making a good contribution to the life of the school. For example, it has been working on healthy eating and has written to parents about packed lunches. It is evident from displays on bullying, behaviour and the environment that pupils take these matters seriously. The rate of attendance is improving slowly, having dipped below the level seen at the last inspection. The amount of casual absence is decreasing as some parents begin to understand the effect of absence on their children's progress, and the school is strongly discouraging parents from taking children on holiday in term time. There has been some very recent success in improving punctuality. Staff have worked hard with parents and pupils to ensure that they understand why it is important to be on time for school, using incentives, such as the Cinema Club, very effectively to motivate pupils.

Quality of provision

Planned and systematic professional development for teachers and teaching assistants, supported by regular observation and constructive feedback, is ensuring that teaching and learning continue to improve. The vast majority of lessons are satisfactory and many are now good, and there is clear evidence that the coaching led by the deputy headteacher responsible for teaching and learning is having a positive impact in targeted classes. Together with the current high levels of additional support across the school, this is having a positive impact on the rate of progress pupils are making. Pupils at all levels respond well to lessons where the work has a good level of challenge and where they know how well they are doing. In the better lessons, pupils understand what is expected of them and the work is well structured so that they are given good support and guidance to tackle the next steps, but this is not yet consistent enough across the school. In a few lessons, teachers' expectations of pupils are not high enough and this slows the pace of learning. The quality of marking is showing signs of improvement. Work is regularly



marked and the information is used to set targets for literacy and numeracy. Pupils understand their targets and what they need to do to achieve them and appreciate it when they get feedback about how they can improve their work.

The new electronic tracking system for monitoring pupils' progress is up and running and is proving useful in giving teachers and senior managers a clear picture of the progress made by all pupils across the school and the standards they are reaching. This information is improving teachers' understanding of the wide range of needs within their classes, and more challenging targets are raising their expectations as to what pupils should achieve by the end of the year. However, the link between the level at which pupils are assessed and the level at which their work is pitched is not always clear. The assessments have been particularly useful in identifying pupils with particular needs and ensuring that they receive good support in class or through additional group interventions. These groups are well organised and focused on meeting specific needs, usually in literacy and numeracy. The school's own monitoring is indicating that lower attainers and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are now making a similar rate of progress to other pupils.

The curriculum covers all the required subjects and areas of learning. The greatest focus is still on improving pupils' basic skills, but there is evidence from displays of good work in history, geography, art and, increasingly, information and communication technology. The displays show particularly good links between art and other subjects which support pupils' learning well. Literacy work has a high profile, but the opportunity is missed to use mathematics as a focus for displays to support the work being done in class. Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage ensures a balance of activities across all areas of learning. Children are able to learn from activities outside, as well as in the classroom. They have many opportunities to choose interesting activities for themselves, which helps to develop their independence, as well as taking part in more structured activities where adults develop learning through a good use of questioning.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- accelerate all pupils' progress by improving the use of assessment data in lessons so that pupils are given challenging tasks well suited to their needs and know better how to improve their work – satisfactory
- improve the teaching for pupils with lower attainment, including those identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities – good

Leadership and management

A picture of shared leadership and management is emerging. There has been a positive response to the need to step up the pace of the development of leadership and management, which was identified at the last monitoring visit. The headteacher was prompt in drawing up action plans to drive the development of senior leaders, making it clear what was expected of them and how they would be held accountable. This has been particularly successful in developing the role of the deputy headteacher who leads on provision for lower-attaining pupils and those with

learning difficulties and/or disabilities. She has risen to the challenge and is now monitoring the quality of provision for these pupils, analysing their progress over time and ensuring that review meetings clearly identify how their needs will be met. She has also taken on responsibility for monitoring attendance and punctuality, working with phase leaders to try to find new solutions to what is an ongoing and long-standing problem for the school, and is taking overall responsibility for the implementation of the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme and behaviour management across the school.

Similarly, in recent months the expectations of phase leaders have increased. Increasingly, they are directly supporting their teams in aspects of their work such as planning and, with the support of the deputy headteachers, they have begun to take responsibility for leading the meetings to review pupil progress. Their involvement with the senior team in reviewing the school's progress in relation to its key priorities and contributing to forward planning is giving them a much better grasp of whole-school issues, and how what they do in their phase contributes to overall improvement. In turn, the profile of subject leaders has been raised. All post-holders have been supported in reviewing their subject and the two responsible for English and mathematics are starting to develop their roles further. Supported mainly by the deputy headteacher responsible for teaching and learning and standards and achievement, they are beginning to monitor and develop both practice and policy and to provide advice to colleagues.

Monitoring is much more a feature of the school's work. Central to the process are the regular meetings held between senior staff and teachers in each year group to discuss pupil progress, based on data from the electronic tracking system. Monitoring also takes other forms, notably classroom observation, scrutiny of planning and work sampling, which provide useful information about the quality of teaching and learning and help to identify where improvement is needed. However, there is still room for greater rigour. The school itself recognises that the tracking system can only be as good as the quality of data on which it is based. Although senior staff are increasingly confident about the accuracy of teachers' assessments, plans are already in place to moderate judgements next term to quality-assure judgements about standards and progress. They also acknowledge that there are a few apparent discrepancies between the rates of progress over time and the quality of teaching and learning seen in individual lessons which need further exploration. The focus now needs to be on making sure monitoring is more incisive; for example, careful checking in lesson observations and work sampling that assessment data are used to pitch work at exactly the right level for all groups of pupils, and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning by looking beyond what is observed during lessons to measure it against the progress pupils are making over time. There is also a need for senior staff to keep a careful check on the quality of the work of middle leaders as they assume more responsibility for monitoring and development. As planned, the school should be looking to establish the cycle whereby it brings together and evaluates the information, benchmarked against criteria in the evaluation schedule for inspection, and uses it to inform improvement planning.



The school improvement plan has recently been reviewed; importantly, the review took into account the views of all staff, and then both senior and middle leaders were involved in drawing up the new plan. While it serves its purpose as a working document in that there are a limited number of key priorities and a logical sequence of activities which keep the school focused on the work it has to do, it remains a fairly lengthy document, and there is still some way to go to distinguish between checking implementation and evaluating impact, and in quantifying success criteria. It is also still led very much by external evaluation; the school needs to develop the confidence to add other priorities as appropriate. For example, 2008 data highlighted concerns about achievement in science, yet the work to address this lacks a sense of urgency and the action plan remains one of many development plans, but not a key priority. Nevertheless, there is undoubtedly a much closer focus, across all aspects of the school's work, on raising standards and a recognition of the need to be proactive and to anticipate change. For example, the headteacher has already made some staffing appointments for September to try to secure good-quality teaching and reduce the need for intervention in the future. Governors are playing a more active role in monitoring and holding the school to account to demonstrate the impact of its work. There is greater challenge at governing body meetings and committees are meeting directly with key staff to find out more about their work and the difference it is making.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- add more rigour to its self-evaluation procedures – satisfactory
- ensure the school improvement plan identifies clearly and coherently the main strategic priorities, and how they will be achieved, so that it ensures consistent improvement across the school – satisfactory
- ensure that there is a clear strategy for improving achievement in mathematics, based on a thorough analysis of provision and outcomes – satisfactory

External support

The partnership with Belleville Primary School has been successful in that the position has now been reached whereby staff do not rely on their partners for direction and support, but are managing much of their own development in-house. Although links will remain between the two schools, the associate headteacher's role is now essentially to act in an advisory capacity, at the request of Hillbrook's headteacher.

The local authority has a much more realistic view of the school's position and progress. It continues to provide additional teaching support targeted at raising standards in the shorter term, alongside an appropriate balance of both support and challenge to senior and middle leaders. The next step is to ensure senior leaders maintain the pace of improvement by increasing the incisiveness of their monitoring, by quality-assuring the work of middle leaders, and by benchmarking their self-evaluation against criteria in the evaluation schedule for inspection.