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Mrs Helen Dunnico
The Acting Headteacher
Yorkmead Junior and Infant School
York Road
Birmingham
West Midlands
B28 8BB

Dear Mrs Dunnico

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Yorkmead Junior and Infant School

Following my visit with Fran Ashworth and Alan Dobbins, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 24 and 25 March 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 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 Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

David Rzeznik
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Yorkmead Junior and Infant School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, and scrutinised documents and pupils' work in Reception and Years 1, 2, 3 and 5. They also held discussions with some more able pupils in Years 1 and 5. They met the acting headteacher, assistant headteachers and the English, mathematics and inclusion leaders. Inspectors also held discussions with the chair of governors and the two National Leaders in Education who support the school. Inspectors undertook two joint lesson observations. One with the mathematics leader and another with the assistant headteacher.

Context

The acting headteacher continues to lead and manage the school. Governors are in the process of appointing a substantive headteacher. At the end of December 2008 a Reception, Year 4 and Year 1 supply teacher left the school. Two permanent teachers were appointed for the Reception and Year 1 classes. A long term supply teacher is covering the Year 4 class until the end of the summer term 2009. In January 2009 the local authority inspected the school for the third time since it was placed in special measures.

Achievement and standards

Standards at the end of Reception, Years 2 and 6 continue to rise. Attainment is also rising steadily in other years too. Predicted results for Years 2 and 6 indicate that there will be a marked rise in the percentage of pupils reaching the expected level for their age. The proportion reaching the higher levels in English and mathematics in both years is also predicted to rise.

Pupils' progress is accelerating across the school. This is because teaching is more effective and work is better matched to pupils' differing capabilities. Since September 2008, pupils in Years 2, 4 and 6 have made good progress in reading and writing. Pupils' progress in mathematics is also accelerating, particularly in Years 3, 5 and 6. The mathematics intervention and booster work in the upper school is paying dividends. Since January 2009, pupils receiving additional support have made particularly good progress. Data shows that pupils with learning difficulties are making much better progress than in the past.

Despite the improved rate of progress for many pupils, the rate at which pupils learn is variable within and between year groups. For example, in one Year 3 class all of the pupils have made good progress in reading since September 2008. In contrast, only half of the pupils in the other Year 3 class have made good progress over the same period. It is a similar picture in writing in Year 1, with one class performing

much better than the other in this subject. In Year 3 over three quarters of the pupils have made good progress in mathematics since September 2008, whereas in Year 4 only a third has made good gains in their learning. Data also shows that there are a few individuals in most years that are stuck or are making slow progress in either reading, writing or mathematics. Leaders are aware of the problem and are putting in strategies to improve the situation. On the next monitoring visit inspectors will evaluate the impact the work is having on reducing the variability in pupils' performance.

The recent local authority inspection indicated that the 2009 targets set for pupils in Years 1, 3 and 4 were too low. New realistic targets have been set for these years. The 2009 targets for Years 2 and 6 are appropriately challenging.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- raise standards in English and mathematics in Key Stages 1 and 2 – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils are well behaved and have very positive attitudes to learning. They like school and can think of few things they would want to change. Attendance is below average. This is mainly because a large number of pupils have rightly been given authorised absence for religious observance and many pupils were absent during the bad weather in December 2008. A few families continue to take holidays in term time even when it has not been sanctioned by the school. Children's attendance in the Nursery and Reception classes is not good enough. Too many children do not attend regularly enough and this is having an adverse impact on their learning.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning continues to improve. There is much more good teaching than when the school was placed in special measures. The two new permanent teachers in Reception and Year 1 have settled in well and are quickly giving of their best. It is clear that teachers can produce satisfactory or better lessons when they know that they are to be inspected. However, data shows that pupils' progress is inconsistent because teaching quality varies between years and within subjects. Some teachers deliver consistently good lessons and consequently pupils make good gains in their learning. However, some teachers are able to teach some subjects well and others adequately. Leaders understand that further professional development and targeted support are required to improve individual teachers' subject knowledge in specific areas of learning to further raise standards.

The use of assessment information to plan work for differing abilities is much improved. The pace of lessons is now more brisk and time is generally being used wisely. Expectations as to what pupils can achieve are higher and work is more challenging. The activities given to the more and less able are now better suited to

their specific needs. Teachers and their assistants are using a wider range of strategies and resources to motivate and increase pupils' enjoyment of learning. Practical equipment is now being used more frequently, particularly to support mathematics and writing activities. In all lessons, there are very good relationships between teachers and pupils and amongst the pupils themselves. Pupils are motivated and are keen to do well. These attributes boost their performance.

Where teaching is good it is primarily because expectations are high and work is demanding for all ability groups. Lessons move along at a good pace and pupils are engrossed in what they are doing. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed, their work is well focused, and this ensures pupils achieve the lesson objectives. Where teaching is satisfactory it is mainly because the pitch of the work is not quite right for individuals or specific groups. On occasions teaching assistants are not managed well enough and their skills are not fully utilised. There are times when teachers talk too much and pupils are too passive. As a result, pupils have too few opportunities to think and learn for themselves.

Nursery lesson planning is not robust enough. Planning for adult-led activities is adequate but the planning for child-initiated learning is not sharp enough. The activities that are not adult-led sometimes lack challenge and there are insufficient good quality resources to support child-initiated activities. Teaching assistants are not always effectively deployed and their work is not always well focused. They do not put their bilingual skills to good use. Not enough use is made of children's home language to reinforce and consolidate learning.

The nursery is located in a two storey house that has been adapted for educational use. The indoor accommodation is cramped and it is difficult for staff or children to move easily between the two floors. The accommodation is hindering children's learning and the layout of rooms makes it difficult for the nursery teacher to oversee the quality of teaching and its impact. Outdoor facilities are not good enough. The outdoor space is bleak and uninviting. There are too few outdoor resources to promote children's creative and physical development.

The quality of marking is improving but remains inconsistent. For example, the quality of marking is satisfactory in Year 1 but is inadequate in one of the Year 2 classes. It is unsatisfactory because Year 2 work is simply ticked and not properly corrected. Messy presentation is too readily accepted and feedback on what pupils do well and what must be improved is rare. Not all teachers model good handwriting or spelling when commenting in books. The new handwriting scheme is starting to improve pupils' handwriting and the presentation of work is better in most, but not all, books.

A good feature is the placing of literacy and numeracy targets in the front of pupils' books so pupils know what skills they are aiming to achieve. However, the targets are not written in a language that the younger and less able pupils readily understand.

The older pupils know the National Curriculum level that they are working at and what they must do to achieve the next National Curriculum level. This is an improvement since the last monitoring visit.

Teachers generally moderate pupils' attainment accurately and this ensures that there is a secure baseline from which to track pupils' future progress. However, leaders recognise that the judgements made about the standards achieved at the end of Year 5 in July 2008 were not robust enough. Therefore, the tracking of the oldest pupils' progress is not yet secure. Procedures to track the attainment and progress of pupils with special educational needs, and for those with English as an additional language, have improved. A much clearer distinction is now made between the specific needs and the support and guidance required for both groups.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality and consistency of teaching by raising the expectations of staff, by planning work that meets the needs of all abilities and by increasing the pace of lessons – satisfactory
- improve marking and assessment, so that all pupils receive clear guidance on what it is they need to do to improve and ensure that the needs of higher attainers, those with learning difficulties and those who speak English as an additional language are met – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher and senior staff are doing a good job and the school is continuing to move in the right direction. They are ably supported by the chair of governors. Subject leaders are now more involved in evaluating the school's work and this is improving the school's capacity to improve further. The National Leaders in Education continue to support the school but they are taking more of a 'back seat' letting senior staff take the lead on initiatives.

The English and mathematics leaders have a good grasp of the main strengths and weaknesses in their subjects. This is because they have soundly monitored and evaluated the quality of provision. There has been a concerted effort by both subject leaders to remedy weaknesses in provision, for example introducing better approaches to teach reading, writing and calculation with good results. The grouping of pupils by ability in mathematics is helping to ensure work is more closely matched to pupils' needs and the introduction of guided reading is improving pupils' reading and comprehension skills.

Professional development to improve teachers' generic teaching skills has been effective. This has led to a wider range of strategies being employed to teach reading, writing, mathematics and science. Lesson planning has been successfully refined to ensure work is much better matched to pupils' capabilities. Work done with individual teachers to improve their teaching skills has been productive. It is clear from the lessons seen that teachers' subject knowledge has improved and they are now using appropriate methods and resources to accelerate pupils' progress.

However, there are individual teachers who require further support in specific subject areas to iron out inconsistencies in practice and further reduce the variability in terms of pupil outcomes.

Financial management is sound and money has continued to be spent wisely to improve the accommodation and the quality of teaching resources. This said, the school is likely to run slightly over budget at the end of this financial year. Leaders have been in liaison with the local authority finance department regarding what costs the local authority will fund as a result of the school being in special measures. However, there is no formal written agreement specifying exactly what the local authority will fund and what the school must pay for. The lack of clarity is creating unnecessary uncertainty and the financial position must be resolved by the time of the next monitoring visit.

Governors are receiving training to ensure they fulfil their statutory duties. At governor meetings they are keeping abreast of how well the school is doing and what must be improved. Apart from the chair of governors, few visit the school to find things out for themselves or to evaluate the school's work first hand. This means they are overly reliant on the acting headteacher and others providing the information about the school's main strengths and weaknesses.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve the strategic leadership of the school and bring greater rigour to the way that leaders, managers and governors monitor and evaluate the work of the school and plan for improvement – good.

External support

The National Leaders in Education have continued to provide effective support to senior staff and others to improve the overall quality of leadership and teaching across the school. The advanced skills teachers' input has been worthwhile, particularly with new staff and those whose teaching required substantial improvement. The most recent local authority inspection of the school evaluated the progress made on each area of improvement fairly and accurately.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no further priorities for improvement.