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30 January 2009

Ms B Logan
The Headteacher
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off Rowan Avenue
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TF4 3PX

Dear Ms Logan

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Southall School

Following my visit with Alan Dobbins, Additional Inspector, to your school on 21 and 22 January 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 February 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

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 Telford and Wrekin.

Yours sincerely

Janet Thompson
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Southall School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 21 and 22 January 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, associate headteacher, staff, groups of pupils, parents, the chair of governors, and representatives from the local authority.

Context

Three members of the teaching staff were absent during the inspection, two of whom have been absent for some length of time. An associate headteacher took up the role of supporting the senior leadership team for three days a week shortly after the last monitoring visit. His role will continue until the end of the spring term. An experienced headteacher has been seconded to work at the school for two terms and took up post the week prior to this monitoring inspection. This gives the school substantially increased leadership capacity during this spring term.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is improving in lessons particularly where teachers have a good knowledge of pupils' prior learning, but there are still too many lessons where expectations for learning are too low. In lessons where differentiation is not precise the progress of higher attaining pupils and those with the most complex needs is not as good as that of others in the class.

The school now has data demonstrating the progress made by pupils. This information has only been available in a useful form very recently and not all pupils are included. Although the majority of those pupils included make expected or better progress, there is a significant minority who are not making expected progress. The school has been quick to use the information to identify some of the pupils who are underachieving but this has been very recent and outcomes of intervention are not evident. The analysis of progress is by category of need and the school has not had it available for long enough to investigate it fully or challenge expected levels with regard to previous rates of learning or attendance. Moderation is in the early stages across the school, therefore levels for pupils not attaining within national tests are not as reliable as they need to be.

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour in lessons has improved. In lessons where pupils find it difficult to maintain the code of conduct, staff usually deal it with quietly and calmly and the behaviour of one pupil rarely disrupts the learning of others. There is still too much inconsistency in the application of the code of conduct and 'Behaviour Way' by staff. The positive side of the system is less evident than the use of sanctions. Pupils are

very familiar with the code of conduct and understand the clear visual representation of the 'Behaviour Way' and this helps them to accept the consequences of their actions. In less structured times, for example break times, appropriate behaviour remains very dependent on high profile staffing levels. The Key Stage 4 lunch time also has a high staff presence but is becoming more age appropriate and during the inspection pupils' behaviour in this context was appropriate.

Systems for managing behaviour have been established and form a good basis for recognising and recording pupils' behaviours. As systems are relatively new they do not give enough detail for the school to use when evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives in enabling pupils to learn how to manage their own behaviour.

Attendance remains at similar levels to the last monitoring visit and overall is satisfactory. Nevertheless, there are too many pupils not attending regularly enough to gain full benefit.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve pupils' behaviour by insisting that all staff use effective behaviour management strategies consistently and provide pupils with a clear code of conduct for them to uphold – satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching has improved since the last visit and there are more good lessons. Where teachers have a good knowledge of pupils' previous learning they are more skilled at making sure all lesson tasks are relevant to pupils' needs. The availability of cross school and subject data is too new and so has not had the necessary impact on planning across all subjects. Where teachers have high expectations for learning, pupils rise to the challenge. In the best lessons pupils are given the opportunity to take control of their own learning and develop a deeper understanding. The use of teaching assistants is well planned and gives more opportunities for learning and active engagement of pupils within a lesson.

Where lessons are weaker or inadequate, planning is not precise enough to meet the individual needs of learners and progress is limited. In some lessons there is still not enough attention given to provide effective structures to aid communication and the understanding of pupils with the most complex needs.

Staff have attended training to help them improve provision so that pupils with autistic spectrum disorders can access the curriculum more fully. There is some evidence that this has led to improved practices but this is not consistent. The school has correctly identified the Key Stage 4 curriculum as requiring further development to meet the wide ranging needs of the pupils. Although the school offers a good college-link programme and an effective Duke of Edinburgh scheme, the curriculum remains too narrow. There are limited opportunities for achieving nationally recognised accreditation and pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to fulfil the extent of their potential. The current thinking to ensure the curriculum offers a

balance of opportunities for higher academic attainment and vocational opportunities including life skills is a good starting point for these developments.

Systems for making sure pupils know their current targets have only recently been introduced. Pupils are aware of their targets but are not sure of the value of their targets and are not fully involved in developing them. In some lessons pupils gain a good knowledge of their own progress through reviewing their learning and being given clear guidance on how they can improve. This highlights the need for these approaches to be applied more consistently. The way in which targets are recorded in the pupils' diaries is a good strategy for them to be easily accessible by parents.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure performance data are analysed regularly so that they can be used to inform self-evaluation, set challenging targets and improve teachers' planning – satisfactory
- improve the curriculum provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders so that they can all achieve to the best of their ability, particularly the more able – satisfactory
- improve pupils' knowledge of their own learning so they are clear about what they need to do to improve their work and are helped to make better progress – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Extra capacity to the leadership team has significantly increased the rate of progress made since the last visit. The monitoring of teaching and learning that started last term is rigorous and has provided good quality feedback to enable teachers to improve their practice. This has been closely linked to the training opportunities provided for the staff by the local authority and from within school and, as a result, the quality of lessons has improved.

Systems for monitoring developments at the school have improved and the action plan is more closely focused on outcomes for pupils. The information now available about quality of provision is increasing. The school is beginning to analyse outcomes for pupils but it is in the very early stages. The action plan is well organised to provide a clear direction of travel with clearly identifiable dates for completion and review. The newly available data have yet to inform the outcomes in the action plan and therefore outcomes are sometimes too vague and lack precision.

New job descriptions and systems for accountability provide a good foundation from which the school can develop. There is greater empowerment enabling leaders and managers to succeed in improving aspects of provision and the increased capacity has given an opportunity for this to begin but outcomes of this are still in the early stages.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure performance data are analysed regularly so that they can be used to inform self-evaluation, set challenging targets and improve teachers' planning – satisfactory (this area is also reported in the quality of provision aspect)
- improve the quality of leadership and management at all levels, ensuring that senior leaders have sufficient time to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning and to lead improvements in their areas of responsibility – satisfactory
- amend the action plan by adding success criteria that reflect the desired outcomes for pupils and clear milestones that assist rigorous self evaluation – good
- start regular monitoring of the outcomes for pupils as a result of the actions taken – good.

External support

Local authority support has been good. The associate headteacher has helped the school focus on priorities and establish good systems. The clear focus has made sure new initiatives are established supported by the necessary training for staff. The local authority has effectively brokered support from various consultants. This support has been well focused on priority areas for development and already there is evidence of improvement in teaching and learning. Similarly, the support for helping to improve behaviour at the school has been reduced as the school becomes more capable in managing this aspect.

The senior team have received the necessary training for monitoring lessons and other aspects of provision, although this is very recent and the team has not yet had time to do this unsupported.

The local authority are now taking swift and forward looking action to ensure the progress made by the school is sustainable and long lasting. Expectations of the pace of school improvement are more realistic and the local authority acknowledges the enhanced senior team for the spring term should enable even faster progress than has been evident to date.

Priorities for further improvement

- Establish more robust strategies for helping pupils to attend more regularly including ensuring curriculum developments help to engage pupils from a wide range of abilities.