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26 March 2009

Mr Christopher Mansell, Headteacher  
Parkside Junior School  
Cokayne Avenue  
Ashbourne  
Derbyshire  
DE6 1EJ

Dear Mr Mansell

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Parkside Junior School

Following my visit with John Brennan and Susan Lewis (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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 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

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 of Children and Younger Adults at Derbyshire County Council.

Yours sincerely

Jane Melbourne  
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Parkside Junior School

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

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the new Headteacher, staff, pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

## Context

Since the last monitoring visit, a new substantive Headteacher has been appointed and there has been a change in leadership within the governing body.

## Achievement and standards

Standards in English, mathematics and science remain broadly average, but there is evidence of some of the focussed work and new initiatives in reading, writing and mathematics beginning to bear fruit. Progress for Year 5 and 6 pupils in these subjects has accelerated, which can be attributed to more consistently good quality teaching. More pupils in these year groups are now achieving closer to the levels that they should be, and particularly so in reading due to the renewed focus on this. The school's improved gathering of information on how pupils are doing means that staff are able to react much faster where year groups or classes are not doing as well as they should be. For example, last term's assessments revealed that Year 3 pupils were not progressing as expected in some aspects of mathematics. The school quickly identified the action necessary and has already managed to remedy the situation. However, whilst promising assessment and monitoring systems have been put in place to help the school raise standards and achievement in English and mathematics, they are not yet in place for science and for other subjects. There has been a clear focus on improving teachers' scientific skills and the quality of the learning opportunities provided in science lessons but these have yet to improve standards and progress in science overall. The more rigorous system of checking what pupils are achieving means that teachers now have a clearer grasp of what pupils know and what they now need to learn. Target setting has therefore improved, although the school acknowledges that there is still work to be done because not all teachers yet use the information available to sufficiently improve pupils' learning and progress in lessons.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Ensure the knowledge that teachers have about the levels at which pupils are working is used carefully to plan challenging tasks and promote at least good progress - satisfactory

## Personal development and well-being

Pupils behave well. They appear happy and content. Pupils say that they enjoy school and they recognise that things have got better this term with all the improvements being made. Attendance rates are above average. Changes to the curriculum, especially in Year 5, add to pupils' enjoyment of school. Topics, such as 'India', are helping to broaden pupils' views of life beyond Ashbourne. Improvements to lunchtimes are working well; these are very social and energetic occasions. The vast majority of pupils give of their best in lessons. However, there are times, especially when work is not matched to their needs effectively, when some pupils lose their concentration and they do not produce of their best. Pupils are gaining a clearer idea of how to improve their work. Although not yet widespread, they are beginning to take ownership of this through assessing their own efforts. Pupils' increasing ability to be reflective is very evident in the school's thought provoking assemblies.

## Quality of provision

The school has refined its approaches to supporting and developing teaching. Monitoring by senior staff successfully links staff needing support with school-based 'experts'. Individual teachers have benefited from this approach. However, the overall quality of teaching and learning remains satisfactory. Monitoring has tended to focus on whether staff are using agreed practices, rather than on whether these practices are making enough difference to pupils' learning in the lesson and to their overall progress. As a result, not all classroom changes are impacting consistently on how well pupils achieve. General strengths lie in the quality of relationships within the school and in the management of pupils. Classrooms are calm, purposeful places. In the best lessons, more commonly found in Years 5 and 6, teaching makes maximum use of this positive climate and pupils' positive attitudes. These lessons are marked by teachers' confident subject knowledge and the careful and imaginative use of resources, such as the interactive white boards. This results in well-paced teaching, which gives pupils ample challenge and opportunities to work independently. Additionally, flexible pupil grouping, along with an emphasis on group work, ensures that work is well matched to pupils' differing needs. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed and briefed. These factors seen in the best lessons ensure that pupils work hard. There are, however, lessons which are too teacher led and where teachers spend too long talking to the whole class. This shortens the time pupils have to complete tasks for themselves. When this is allied to muddled explanations, pupils are ill-prepared for follow-up work. All teachers are endeavouring to make use of the agreed strategies for teaching and learning, but not always to good effect. A tendency towards compliance with these, rather than purposeful use, leads to some superficial learning. For example, in one class, pupils encouraged to put their thumbs up or down to demonstrate their understanding gain little because the teacher does not then ask them to justify the reasons for the choices they make.

The quality of the curriculum remains satisfactory. However, there have been some successful improvements and trialling of approaches that warrant more widespread implementation. The teaching of French has been introduced which has further enriched the curriculum and a French-themed open morning successfully brought together the school community, including parents. Pupils and some parents say that the new creative curriculum in Year 5 is enjoyable and motivating. The embedding of knowledge, for example within thoughtful topics such as 'Blast Off', gives a sense of purpose to subjects, such as science. It also helps pupils to develop and apply basic skills, such as mathematics, to work that weaves between subjects. The potential is created for the development of some general skills, such as the ability to solve problems or to work collaboratively. However, these are not as clearly defined or as purposefully taught within activities. Guided reading sessions, improved by staff training in this area, provide a clear structure for the teaching of reading and are successfully accelerating pupils' progress. However, the implementation of extended writing sessions is not yet fully effective. These lessons help pupils to acquire some basic writing skills, but they do not use these skills effectively to produce writing which is carefully crafted. This is, in part, because in the extended sessions, pupils do not always make enough connections within the curriculum.

It is very evident that staff have pupils' needs at heart. This staff attitude to care is not always matched by the quality of formal systems underpinning it; the Headteacher and the governing body are aware that some training needs exist and that some policies are in need of review. Links with feeder infant schools have been strengthened. Infant school staff have delivered important training to junior school staff on the use of sounds of letters. Joint training for staff of the schools, so far on the development of learning platforms, has begun to ensure that there are consistent approaches across the schools. The school continues to deepen its partnerships with parents. Parents are kept informed about the changes the school is implementing. The school habitually consults with parents before implementing important policies. The recent addition of 'Learning Logs' and 'Report Cards' has drawn parents closer to aiding their child's progress. However, there is need to tailor 'Report Cards' to the needs of pupils who find learning difficult and whose progress is measured in different ways.

There is good evidence of partnership working with families and with other agencies in relation to those pupils who have a Statement of Special Educational Need. Annual review targets and individual education plans (IEPS) for these pupils generally target their most important needs. The school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator has already identified that, for other pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, targets are not sharp enough, because they are not informed sufficiently by parental and pupils' views to guide teaching and learning in everyday lessons.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to quicken progress and to raise standards in English, maths and science – satisfactory
- Strengthen the relationships between home and school, by making sure that the school communicates regularly with parents about their children's education – satisfactory

## Leadership and management

The new headteacher has made a significant difference to many aspects of the school's improvement in the short period of time since his appointment. He has secured relationships with pupils, parents, staff and governors quickly and established a sense of team spirit with renewed vision and ethos. Delegation has been efficient and the school is making good use of the knowledge and skills of each member of staff. Likewise, governors have also assigned more effectively their roles and responsibilities within the governing body. There are named leaders and groups of governors leading on each point for improvement, which is already beginning to make a difference. The school works diligently through its action plan ensuring timescales are adhered to. It has begun to measure the impact of the actions taken, but for some changes it is far too early to be able to accurately judge this, particularly in respect of pupils' progress and on raising standards. The leadership team is becoming more skilled in identifying school issues and finding effective solutions for tackling them. There are far less general whole school issues remaining, and the school is now working on a more tailored approach to staff's individual needs. Staff show a drive and determination to improve the school and to do their best for the pupils. They recognise some of the inequalities that exist between subjects and across year groups, and are not complacent about this. They have been very receptive to the suggestions made by the local authority (LA), by the new headteacher and their colleagues, and have immediately put in place many of the suggestions shared at training and development sessions. There is increasing good practice to share within school, particularly within literacy and numeracy. Self-evaluation, which has been recently updated, is accurate and perceptive. It recognises where the focus of energy needs to be targeted. Through all of this, the school continues to increase its capacity to improve and work towards self-sufficiency.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Make sure that leaders at all levels establish and rigorously apply effective systems for monitoring the school's work and evaluating improvements, in order to strengthen the performance of the school – satisfactory

## External support

The quality of the external support provided by the LA, School Improvement Partner and senior advisor in particular, continues to be of high quality. The LA is still making a major financial contribution to improving the school by ensuring that, for this academic year, the number of classes remains the same. The LA ensured that

there was a smooth transition between the temporary acting headteacher last term and the permanent headteacher this term. LA representatives continue to work with staff and governors to improve leadership and the quality of teaching. It has supported the new headteacher in making any necessary actions to bring about changes swiftly. The school is now in a stronger position to identify these in the key areas for improvement itself, and to seek out from the LA the appropriate assistance it needs. The LA meets very regularly with the school leadership team to review the statement of action and to evaluate the impact of any actions taken. It has modelled effective monitoring practice to enable school staff to undertake this independently. It has moderated pupils' work and the staff's marking of pupils' work to check for accuracy. This all continues to contribute to the school's satisfactory progress and long term self-sufficiency. The LA recognises that there is more to be done to ensure consistency of provision across the school and to refine some of the good practice already taking place.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Make better use of the assessment information the school now collects to tailor the teaching more appropriately to the pupils' differing needs.
- Ensure that sufficient learning takes place in all lessons so that pupils achieve consistently well.
- Refine the partnership with parents, enabling them to become more involved in the plans and targets for their children's learning and to help them to support this effectively at home.
- Ensure that all staff are appropriately trained and that all policies are up-to-date with regard to safeguarding pupils.

