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8 July 2009

A Skelton
Headteacher
Dearne Goldthorpe Primary School
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Dear Miss Skelton

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Dearne Goldthorpe Primary School

Following my visit with Fiona Gowers and Ross Parker, additional inspectors, to your school on 6 and 7 July 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 October 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 Children's Services for Barnsley.

Yours sincerely

John Rutherford
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Dearne Goldthorpe Primary School

Report from the Second monitoring inspection on 6 and 7 July 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents and pupils' books. They also met with the headteacher, senior leaders and other staff, the chair of governors, groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The staffing turbulence reported in the inspection and first monitoring visit has improved but it is not yet resolved. A significant proportion of the staff is still temporary and continuity of teaching and leadership is adversely affected by a high rate of staff absence.

Achievement and standards

Unvalidated data from the 2009 national tests and assessments show that standards in reading, writing and mathematics in Key Stage 1 have improved since the last inspection. Although the results remain below average, they are very close to the school's challenging targets. In Key Stage 2, standards in mathematics and science have improved but they declined in English; the 2009 results were below average and adrift of the school's targets. Standards have mostly improved because pupils are making better progress. The variation between key stages in meeting targets relates to differences in the quality of teaching. Teaching is now largely good in Key Stage 1, whereas in Key Stage 2 consistently good teaching is concentrated in part of Year 6 and this is not sufficient to enable pupils to make up the ground they have lost due to weak teaching in the past.

Children make satisfactory progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, which is an accurate reflection of the quality of provision for them. The school's assessments present an overgenerous view of children's achievements at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities throughout the school have improved their progress in reading and it is now good. This is because arrangements for meeting their needs have improved considerably since a new member of the senior leadership team took responsibility for this area of work. Progress is improving in writing and mathematics, but not yet to the same extent.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Raise standards and increase the rate of pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Attendance is currently similar to what it was at the time of the inspection. It improved significantly last term but it has dipped again, partly due to an outbreak of infectious illness. The school has successfully reduced the number of persistent absentees, though it is still too high. Many of these pupils underachieve and find it hard to cope with the interruptions to their learning. The school tracks attendance and punctuality rigorously every day and staff go out of their way to discuss problems with parents. As a result, the level of casual lateness has reduced significantly. The learning mentor works closely with the education welfare officer to ensure that parents understand their obligations, and some have been formally challenged to improve their children's attendance. However, too many parents do not ensure that their children come to school regularly and attendance remains too low.

Pupils now have more opportunities to work independently and collaboratively and they are clearly enjoying these. They also enjoy lessons more because behaviour has improved. This is the result of a consistently applied approach to rewards and sanctions, however, another outcome is an increase in exclusions. While exclusions have increased, the number of pupils excluded has reduced.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve attendance – inadequate.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the first monitoring visit. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated and the proportion of good or better teaching is beginning to increase. Pupils' improved behaviour and their more positive attitudes to work make a significant contribution to their learning. There is a greater consistency in teaching methods across the school, helped by the increased stability of long-term temporary staff. However, the frequent need to make short-term arrangements to cover teacher absences still causes problems.

The most effective lessons have a sharp focus on improving pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Activities are well planned to meet the needs of all groups of pupils, although higher attaining pupils in some classes are not always challenged enough. The pace of learning is mostly good. Well-planned practical and problem-solving activities maintain the interest of pupils and provide them with good opportunities to develop their skills in learning independently. Pupils are also given good opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills. In less effective lessons the pace of learning slows because planning focuses on tasks to be completed rather than what pupils will learn. Teachers often talk for too long, leaving insufficient time for pupils' independent activity. They do not always use questioning effectively to check that pupils fully understand their work. The quality



of marking has improved, although inconsistencies remain, especially in giving pupils the opportunity to respond to teachers' comments.

The school has made a good start in improving progress in the use of assessment, which was judged to be inadequate in the first monitoring visit. Senior leaders have recently improved methods for providing pupils with targets and guidance on how to accelerate their progress. This is already beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in writing. The impact, however, is limited because the methods are not yet used consistently in every class. The greatest impact can be seen in classes where the school's policy for teaching extended writing is implemented regularly in conjunction with the newly introduced writing target books, and pupils are involved in discussing what they need to do to meet their targets.

Since the first monitoring visit, teachers in Key Stages 1 and 2 have developed a clearer picture of the level at which pupils are working and they use this information more effectively when planning their lessons. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, teachers often base their assessments on an insufficient range of evidence of children's achievements. They use assessment information effectively when planning adult-directed activities, which helps the children to make satisfactory progress. This is not the case for child-initiated activities therefore these often lack purpose.

The school has made a strong response to the judgement in the first monitoring visit that progress in improving the curriculum was inadequate. A good partnership with a neighbouring school has contributed significantly to this work. Senior leaders have improved planning so that there is more emphasis on stimulating topics, a wider range of approaches to learning and more interesting contexts for extending literacy and numeracy skills. More work is linked to pupils' everyday experience. The impact is seen in pupils' increased motivation and their enjoyment of writing. Pupils' achievement in mathematics and science is improving because there is more practical enquiry and problem solving in lessons. The organisation of classrooms has been changed to provide a better climate for learning. The organisation of furniture, resources and displays now promotes independent learning, group collaboration, creativity and learning through role play.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching to a good or better level and ensure rigour, pace and challenge in all lessons – satisfactory.
- Use assessment information systematically to build on what pupils already know – satisfactory.
- Provide an exciting, relevant curriculum which always motivates pupils to learn – good.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is providing a strong drive for improving standards and she has the support of the majority of the staff. A key driver for improvement is a detailed action plan that is sharply focused on the priorities identified by the last inspection. Senior leaders systematically evaluate the impact of the plan on pupils' progress and accurately identify priorities for improvement.

Senior leaders who are new to their roles are quickly developing their leadership skills and making a good contribution to increasing the school's capacity for raising standards. They have, for example, improved the school's use of assessment and the curriculum which are areas of work where progress was judged to be inadequate in the first monitoring visit. They have also ensured that all teachers make effective provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They are beginning to hold teachers to account for the progress made by all groups of pupils in their classes and to provide guidance where required. These improvements are starting to make a positive difference to pupils' progress and standards. Not all senior leaders are developing their skills at the same good pace.

The role of middle leaders is at an early stage of development. They are beginning to identify areas for improvement in their subjects and to provide guidance to their colleagues, for example in planning practical investigations and opportunities to extend mathematical skills in science.

Governance has improved considerably since the first monitoring visit. A new chair of governors has quickly formed a good working relationship with the headteacher and staff. He is closely involved in monitoring the school's improvement and he provides a good balance of support and challenge. He is putting in place arrangements to train other governors on how on how to fulfil their responsibilities for supporting the school and holding it to account.

The school ensures that all adults who work with pupils are suitable to do so. Child protection procedures are in place, though not all staff have received appropriate training. Arrangements for preventing unauthorised entrance to or exit from the school are not as systematic as they should be.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Strengthen senior management and ensure that all leaders carry out rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning to tackle underachievement – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority provides effective support. Local authority advisers and officers regularly monitor the impact of their support in collaboration with senior leaders and governors of the school, and they refine their plans to meet changing priorities.

Having observed the growing confidence of the new senior leaders, they are now supporting the leadership team in taking a more proactive role in evaluation and improvement in order to build the school's capacity. Consultants make a good contribution to improving the quality of teaching and learning and to the development of subject leaders' skills. The local authority, in partnership with the school, is beginning to make progress with some of the long-standing staffing difficulties.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that all arrangements for safeguarding pupils are fully in place.
- Improve pupils' progress by increasing consistency in the use of recently introduced assessment and target-setting methods.