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3 April 2009

Ms Nicola Davies
Headteacher
Sutton Road Primary School
Moor Lane
Mansfield
Nottinghamshire
NG18 5SF

Dear Ms Davies

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Sutton Road Primary School

Following my visit with Kathleen Yates and Michael Miller (Additional Inspectors) to your school on 18 and 19 March 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first 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 – inadequate

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 Nottinghamshire.

Yours sincerely

Jane Melbourne
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Sutton Road Primary School Report from the first monitoring inspection on 18 – 19 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, staff, pupils, governor representatives and a school improvement advisor from the local authority (LA).

Context

There has been a small number of alterations to the middle and senior management team. Two new governors have been appointed. Governors' roles are now specifically linked to the points for improvement from the last inspection and governors are currently always meeting as a full governing body. The school has now been linked with another Nottinghamshire primary school for support.

Achievement and standards

In 2008, the standards that pupils attained at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 demonstrated an improvement on 2007; an indication that the school has halted the downturn of the past few years. Across both key stages, pupils attain closest to the national average in mathematics. Nonetheless, standards overall remain below average, especially in writing, where pupils are making insufficient progress. Much support has been received to help the school remedy this weakness. Pupils state that they benefit from the booster classes which help develop their writing skills. 'The Big Write' programme has recently been introduced to encourage pupils to become competent writers. It is too soon for this to have yet had an impact on pupils' standards and achievement. The school is successful in helping pupils to attain standards in reading that are close to those found nationally by the time they leave the school. However, there are not enough links between reading and writing in lessons. Insufficient emphasis is given to the promotion of writing in other subjects. Too few pupils continue to reach the higher levels in all subjects. Targets are not precise enough to incorporate these. Inspection findings confirm the school's view that pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities currently make satisfactory progress. This is a result of the good support received in lessons and outside the classroom. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage do not achieve as well as they ought. There is no accurate assessment in place in the Nursery to inform the curriculum and the Reception children's learning is currently disrupted by changes to the organisation and management of their school day caused by classroom alterations.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2008:

- Accelerate the progress that children make so that they attain higher standards, especially in English – inadequate

Personal development and well-being

One of the main issues for the school relates to attendance, which is still below average overall and in some classes it is consistently well below average. Attendance is monitored weekly, and the school undertakes some good work with parents and carers to promote regular attendance, but improvement remains elusive. This is something that the School Council members feel strongly about. They realise it is contributing to the poor achievement and progress of some pupils. Therefore, they are themselves currently trying to raise awareness of this important issue. However, the majority of pupils are happy at school and they have positive attitudes to learning. Teaching strategies fail to engage pupils sufficiently in some lessons. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall but the spiritual and cultural development of pupils are less effective elements. Assemblies do not always meet the requirements for a daily act of collective worship. Pupils with roles and responsibilities take these seriously. Whilst pupils' academic achievement remains too low to support their future economic well-being, their personal development remains satisfactory overall.

Quality of provision

There have been some improvements to the quality of teaching since the last inspection. There are now fewer inadequate lessons. However, there is still too little consistently good or better teaching to boost pupils' learning and progress sufficiently and to ensure all groups of pupils are challenged. There is more detailed lesson planning and a more explicit focus for each lesson. Lessons also better match the work set to pupils' abilities, though this is not always done well. There remain inconsistencies in the ways assessment is used in order to check the extent of pupils' learning and therefore to plan lessons. Assessment remains a factor which limits pupils' progress. There is insufficient guidance, for example in the marking of their work, to guide pupils onto their next step in learning. Pupils remain largely unaware of their targets and what they need to do to improve. Whilst the monitoring of lessons tends to concentrate satisfactorily on teaching quality, it is not yet sufficiently focussed on the quality of learning. There is some good practice in the support of pupils who find learning difficult. The small steps of improvement by such pupils are often identified more clearly by specialist support teachers and teaching assistants than by mainstream class teachers. The school does not have a policy on learning and teaching to support its action plan and monitoring systems.

Whilst the curriculum overall is satisfactory, and meets statutory requirements, it is not yet being monitored effectively enough to ensure a consistent approach by all teachers. Subject leaders do not yet have a sufficient overview of their areas, and the progress pupils make across all the key stages. Understandably, the school has been focusing on improving its curriculum and teaching for the core subjects of literacy and numeracy. Staff miss opportunities to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects. The school has satisfactory systems overall for the care and pastoral support of its pupils.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2008:

- Ensure that there is effective teaching and learning across the school, which consistently engages, motivates and challenges all groups of learners – inadequate

Leadership and management

The current leadership team is focussed on raising standards across the school. Despite drive and determination to improve the school, and the existence of a raising attainment plan, some of the senior and middle managers are too complacent about timescales and the necessity for rapid change. Their monitoring and evaluation of their subject areas has been too loose. Consequently not everyone has a good enough knowledge of the progress of pupils in their subject areas. Booster classes to improve the learning of pupils in Year 6 are beneficial, but there is not enough emphasis given to those pupils who are capable of achieving more than the expected levels. With such disparity across subject areas and so many changes, initiatives and time committed to evaluating the school and its progress, time for disseminating and embedding good practice is significantly reduced. Some aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage have been poorly planned and there is currently nobody effectively responsible for leading and managing this area. There is a lack of co-ordination in assessment, particularly across the Early Years Foundation Stage with the rest of the school. Time management for some middle and senior managers is an issue. Whilst they demonstrate commitment and hard work, this has not been sufficiently fruitful as they have not concentrated on promoting consistency, or on the things that are most important and that will bring about change. Many of the strategies already started have not been fully implemented by all staff, nor have they had sufficient time to embed yet. The school improvement plan is mainly evaluated by the head teacher and the whole team has not really taken sufficient ownership of it. The governing body has not been sufficiently aware of its statutory responsibilities in some areas, particularly in respect of the Early Years Foundation Stage and other areas of monitoring. With weak pockets across the whole school, and little impact on improvement to date, leadership and management has yet to demonstrate it has the capacity to improve.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2008:

- Establish a senior leadership team and middle management structure that clearly demonstrates a robust capacity to improve teaching, learning and standards quickly – inadequate

External support

The school has received some good quality support from the LA overall this academic year, including taking part in the intensified support programme (ISP) and

close working with a school improvement advisor and specialist consultants. Overall the LA statement of action is appropriate and has been amended as requested by Ofsted to incorporate clearer timings of actions and success criteria. It shows how it will support each of the identified areas requiring improvement. It allows sufficient time for changed practice to embed and has promised to help the school to review this regularly. However, the school acknowledges that continual assessment at such regular intervals is sometimes counterproductive. The school is already behind some of the ambitious targets and timescales which the LA set in agreement with school staff. Whilst training has been well received by school staff and governors, the LA realises that further professional development and support is still needed to ensure consistency of provision across the school. Recent monitoring visits by the LA identified that the quality of teaching and learning had improved but not sufficiently to have raised standards significantly. The LA is also aware that leadership and management at all levels continue to be major priorities for improvement. The LA's evaluation of the school's improvement is accurate and the LA realises that the support given to the school to date has had insufficient impact. The school site, organisational issues and some staff who do not demonstrate sufficient capacity to contribute fully to the team have hindered overall progress.

Priorities for further improvement - As at the last section 5 inspection, with 2 additional priorities which both stem from the priority of leadership and management and which are crucial to the school's development and the development of pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage:

- Strengthen governance to ensure governors are effectively supporting the school to address the three points for improvement, and to check that the school is embracing the statutory requirements for the school and the Early Years Foundation Stage
- Strengthen leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage, ensuring that: closer links are forged between nursery and reception; the organisation of the day for reception children is conducive to learning; staff accurately assess children's attainment on entry and their progress, enabling staff to plan for their needs more effectively; staff plan for and meet the welfare and learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage more effectively, particularly making consistent use of the outdoor learning environment for all children.