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14 July 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 Alan Brewerton and Peter Lawley, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 7 and 8 July 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 May 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

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 third monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 July 2009

Evidence

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

Context

There have been no changes in context since the last monitoring visit.

Achievement and standards

In 2009, standards in national tests for English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6 all showed considerable improvement compared with 2008. At the expected level 4 and above, and at the higher level 5, unvalidated results for English, mathematics and science were above last year's national average. The percentages of pupils achieving level 4 and above in all subjects were the highest ever attained at Parkside and, in mathematics, the school had its higher ever percentage of pupils achieving a level 5. Nevertheless, the school did not meet its challenging targets in English and science. However, it did meet its target for pupils achieving level 4 in mathematics and was very close to its target for pupils achieving level 5 in mathematics. This equates to the current Year 6 pupils having made satisfactory progress during their time at Parkside. Teachers' assessment of their pupils was accurate.

Current school data indicates that progress in Years 5 and 6 is better than that in Years 3 and 4 and this is reflected in lesson observations and in the work of pupils; this is because of strengths in teaching in the upper school and the fact that pupils had more ground to make up than pupils in the lower school, primarily because of the inadequate progress in previous years. The use of assessment data to set targets for pupils, to match work more closely to pupils' needs and to track their progress has improved, particularly in English and mathematics. However, although tracking in science is satisfactory overall, this is not yet sufficiently refined to provide all of the information that teachers need. Most pupils, particularly in Years 5 and 6, know their targets and some know the National Curriculum level at which they are currently working, but they are less certain about what they need to do to improve to reach the next level.

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 – good

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Their behaviour is good and continues to improve. Pupils enjoy school and relationships between pupils and with staff are excellent. This provides a positive and secure climate for learning, especially where pupils are given opportunities to consolidate and extend their understanding through working and investigating together in pairs or in groups. They are now better informed about the range of cultures and beliefs to be found in modern British society and in the world. Cultural development is developed well in music, drama and through outstanding art projects, where pupils develop their own creative skills through close practical study of the work of famous artists. Pupils contribute to the local community for example through their performances, fund raising and, through effective collaboration with the local mayor to improve the environment.

Quality of provision

The overall quality of teaching and learning remain satisfactory, although teaching and learning have improved since the last visit. There is now a greater proportion of good and better lessons, but this is not yet consistent across the school. The 'active learning' approach is having a positive impact upon the quality of learning, particularly for boys. Discussions with pupils supports this judgement. They say that lessons are now 'much more enjoyable'. Quality assurance has improved. It is now more appropriately focused on what pupils are actually learning in lessons rather than solely scrutinising teaching practice. Lesson planning has continued to improve and most teachers use assessment data more effectively in the matching of work to pupils' needs and aspirations. The use of effective questioning, which encourages pupils to apply their prior knowledge to new situations, is more apparent, particularly in those lessons which are good or better. This technique was used effectively in a Year 6 mathematics lesson in which the teacher used questions well to encourage pupils to research the lowest costs of a family holiday in Australia. In the best lessons, the pace is good, and there is an excited 'buzz' of enthusiasm around the pupils, so learning is also good or better. Teaching and learning support assistants are mostly used well. In the English and mathematics lessons they work especially closely with teachers to good effect.

The quality of the curriculum remains satisfactory, but there are some good elements and it has improved since the last monitoring visit. There is now a greater emphasis upon creativity and links between subjects. For example, an 'India Day' helped pupils to understand more about Indian culture, geography, religious and artistic traditions, while improving their literacy and information and technology skills. The effect of making subjects and skills more relevant and meaningful has helped to engage pupils' imagination, particularly that of boys for whom it has resulted in increased work rate and interest. The curriculum is underpinned by a

wide range of extension activities and clubs. These include sporting, dramatic and musical activities, as well as a series of well-supported residential experiences and visits which are popular with the pupils and further contribute to their enjoyment.

The quality of care, guidance and support is satisfactory. The school has good systems in place to ensure the safety of pupils both on and offsite, and to vet staff in accordance with current statutory requirements. Effective systems of monitoring and pupils' enjoyment of school ensures attendance is slightly above the national average. The school deals rapidly with the occasional incident of bullying and provides suitable care for vulnerable pupils. The individual nature of pupils' targets is a significant improvement upon the more general whole class targets which were previously used and has contributed to raising standards. Pupils who find learning difficult benefit from close tracking of their progress and needs, and the action taken ensures that they make good progress in many classes. Whilst marking is usually thorough, detailed marking providing information for pupils about how to improve their work was rarely observed and insufficient time is given to pupils to make their corrections. Therefore marking in some books across the school is insufficiently effective in supporting pupils' progress. There are teaching strategies in place to improve spelling, which is a whole school issue, and the school continues to work at this. The presentation of work in some classes and in some subjects is inconsistent and remains a matter of concern as noted on a previous visit. The school has improved its relationships with parents and carers through its newly introduced system of 'Learning Logs'. These explain what pupils are expected to learn in class and to do for homework. They enable parents and carers to support their children better. They also provide a vehicle for pupils to reflect on their own learning by discussing it at home and at school. The school also takes the views of parents seriously and acts on their suggestions, following a regular system of parental surveys. Parents continue to be kept informed about the changes the school is implementing and they are becoming increasingly consulted and involved. Much work has been done to improve the quality of the documentation for, and communication with, parents of pupils who experience difficulties with their learning.

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 – good
- Strengthen the relationships between home and school, by making sure that the school communicates regularly with parents about their children's education – good

Leadership and management

The head teacher, appointed in January, continues to make a significant difference to many aspects of the school's improvement and this is moving on at a rapid pace.

The committed team of staff and governors are working hard to improve the school; roles and responsibilities have been delegated sensibly, are understood and all have a keen sense of purpose. Since the last monitoring visit, the senior leadership team has strengthened further and governors have begun to hold the school to account more effectively. Further training has been undertaken to equip everyone for their roles and to ensure the school meets statutory requirements and is provided with an appropriate level of challenge. Professional development involving support staff has been accepted positively and is beginning to have an impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The school is becoming more analytical and improving its self evaluation, so it knows its strengths and correctly identifies areas for development. It has appropriately and entirely addressed the priorities for further improvement given at the last monitoring visit. These are beginning to have an impact on pupils' progress and on raising standards overall. However, the school is still working hard at ironing out the areas where pupils' progress slows or regresses and it is taking steps to address this. Current priorities for action are sensible and short and long term decision making are sound. The senior leadership team is focussing on ensuring that the methods used and the quality are consistent across the school. The school works with internal and external stakeholders to provide a mutually supportive environment and continues to work on and monitor staff's individual needs. The staff's drive and determination to improve the school and to do their best for the pupils has not waned. They understand the next steps needed to strengthen the leadership and management of some subject areas. They continue to be receptive to the suggestions made by the local authority (LA) and are now seeking out the support they need independently. There is much good practice to be shared across the school and the school makes best uses of its resources. Through all of this, the school has demonstrated it is building a good 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 – good

External support

The quality of the external support provided by the local authority (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 has remained the same and that for next year it will have a class structure in excess of the expectations for the number of pupils on roll. The LA has supported the new head teacher well, but sensitively enough to allow him to lead the school. LA representatives continue to work with staff and governors to improve specific aspects of leadership and the quality of teaching where it is deemed necessary. The school now identifies key areas for improvement itself, only seeking 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. The modelling of effective monitoring practice has enabled school staff to undertake this independently, although the LA continues to moderate the judgements on the quality of teaching and learning, pupils' work and the staff's marking of pupils' work to check for accuracy. This has significantly contributed to the school's rapid progress since the last monitoring visit under the newly structured leadership team, making the school increasingly self-sufficient. The LA recognises that there is a reducing list of issues to address and continues to work with the school to ensure consistency of provision for all pupils and in all subjects.