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7 May 2009

Mrs M Jones
The Headteacher
Highley Community Primary School
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Dear Mrs Jones

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Highley Community Primary School

Following my visit with Martin James to your school on 28 and 29 April 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 December 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgement is set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – 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 Corporate Director - Children and Young People's Services for Shropshire.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Highley Community Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 April 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher and other staff, the National Leader for Education headteacher who is supporting the school, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The new headteacher took up post at the start of the spring term 2009 and the school has recently updated its management structure and responsibilities. The headteacher, chair of governors and local authority adviser attended a school improvement seminar in January 2009.

Achievement and standards

Children generally enter the Reception class with skills and knowledge below those expected for their age.

Standards in English, mathematics and science, remain below average. However, the recently introduced system to track levels attained by pupils means that staff are now more aware of the progress being made. Early indications show that pupils are making better progress than at the time of the inspection and this is confirmed by observations of lessons and pupils' work.

Teachers have better information of the level at which pupils are working and this is starting to be used more effectively to ensure greater challenge in lessons. However, there are still some lessons where the challenge is not sufficient and the pace of learning is slow. Pupils have individual targets for subjects but they are not always aware of their targets and, in some classes, targets have not been updated.

The school has changed the system to ensure pupils with learning difficulties are more effectively supported. These pupils have not made as much progress as higher attaining pupils over the last few years. This includes ensuring all such pupils receive effective instruction by class teachers as well as support from teaching assistants. This is being used to support lower attaining pupils more effectively.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2008:

- in order to improve rates of progress and raise standards, particularly in English, mathematics and science, ensure teaching uses information from assessments to challenge all pupils at the right level and provides those needing additional help with high quality support – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Many elements of pupils' personal development and well-being continue to be good, for example the extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and safe practices. Behaviour remains good, with pupils being keen to work hard. They are polite and friendly and respond well when they are given opportunities to work independently.

Attendance has improved since the time of the inspection, and is now just above the national average. Minimal time was lost with the school closed during the heavy snow. Whilst pupils generally enjoy their learning, their attention and concentration sometimes wavers when the pace of lessons is slow.

Quality of provision

Teaching observed during the visit was judged to be satisfactory with some lessons good. However, some of the satisfactory lessons were only just satisfactory because they lack sufficient challenge, not just for the more able but across all ability levels. Teachers talk for too long at the start of lessons, and the initial pace is slow. Hence pupils do not get engaged with their learning quickly enough.

Planning has improved so that now teachers routinely plan for the different ability groups in their classes. Opportunities to help pupils develop their own ideas by working independently are regularly identified. However in some classes, pupils find working in this way difficult because they have previously had limited opportunities to develop independent learning skills and, as such, have not been suitably prepared for the task.

Teachers set and share learning objectives for each lesson along with success criteria. However, these are often based upon tasks rather than clearly understood learning outcomes or are focused on the acquisition of subject knowledge rather than, or as well as, skills. Good relationships are a strong feature of most of the lessons seen and teaching assistants provide appropriate support for pupils, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Teachers provide much written praise and encouragement when marking pupils' books. They less frequently inform pupils on how well they are doing or give written advice on how to improve their work. In a few books, teachers enter into a learning dialogue with pupils which enables pupils to be further challenged or to consolidate work.

The school has appropriate procedures for ensuring the safety of pupils.

For children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, staff continue to provide a safe and secure environment, where the welfare of the children is a priority. Children continue to enjoy their learning and their attitudes are consistently good. All areas of the curriculum are suitably covered, with adult-led activities and opportunities for the

children to choose for themselves routinely provided. The addition of a new external door in the Reception classroom now facilitates the use of the adjoining playground. Whilst there is still no dedicated secure outdoor area, plans were delayed until appropriate advice was received to maximise the effectiveness when completed. Plans are now in place for this to be provided, and appropriate new resources have been ordered.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2008:

- improve the curriculum so that it offers all pupils, particularly the more able, further opportunities to work independently – satisfactory
- improve the quality of teaching and learning, ensuring that all teachers set challenging targets and give pupils clear guidance as to how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work – satisfactory
- provide children in the Reception class with a secure outdoor area to support their learning – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has made a significant impact upon the strategic direction of the school. She has ensured staff are aware of her high expectations and she has given appropriate support to ensure the overall quality of teaching has improved. She has also ensured that revised systems and structures are in place. However, because many staff are new to leadership roles they have not yet been able to monitor work to bring about improvements. Plans are in place, including appropriate training and mentoring of subject leaders.

Governance is improving with governors having a better understanding of what needs to be improved and how they can ensure that developments are on track by monitoring effectively the work of the school. Governors are receiving appropriate support from the local authority to ensure they are better able to carry out their duties.

The school has formulated a development plan but this needs to be more closely allied with the key issues for improvement as well as identifying how to take the school forward in areas which were not identified during the last inspection.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2008:

- make sure that leaders at all levels monitor the school's work rigorously and take effective action to drive school improvement – inadequate.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is good. It provides a sound framework for further improvement, including suitable support from advisers and subject consultants. The School Improvement Partner who is a full time employee of the

local authority works directly with the headteacher to develop the capacity of the senior leadership team. The local authority's commentary explains how the school's progress will be monitored and evaluated. The local authority, School Improvement Partner, advisers, consultants and mentor headteacher monitor the school to ensure improvement actions are undertaken effectively and to evaluate the impact of interventions.

The work of the National Leader for Education headteacher who is supporting the school, has been very effective in supporting the school to identify weaknesses in teaching and providing appropriate support by mentoring individual staff through observations of good practice at his own school.