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30 November 2009

Ms A Gard
Stafford Junior School
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Dear Ms Gard

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Stafford Junior School

Following my visit with Peter Callow to your school on 18 November 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 January 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to the following qualifications:

- The school ensures appropriate and sustained mentoring and support.
- Provision for newly qualified teachers is kept under review by the school's local authority adviser.

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 Director of Children's Services for East Sussex, the Deputy Director as chair of the Management Intervention Board for the school, and the Regional Inspection Provider.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Stafford Junior School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 18 November 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, members of the school's senior leadership team, pupils and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The governing body's delegated powers remain rescinded by the local authority and a Management Intervention Board, chaired by the Deputy Director of Children's Services for East Sussex, is still in place. The resignation of the previous headteacher has been accepted and the senior advisory headteacher seconded to the school by the local authority continues as acting headteacher. A senior teacher, newly appointed to a substantive post in the school in September, is currently the acting deputy.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Although results for the year 2008/09 showed attainment to be well below national standards, more accurate assessment and the systematic monitoring of pupils' achievement are beginning to have a positive impact. The most striking evidence of improvement could be seen in the quality of pupils' written work and in their much greater enjoyment of reading. Pupils across the ability range spoke very enthusiastically of the scope they now had to choose topics and styles for themselves, which has led to more substantial, imaginative and fluent writing. Although pupils' literacy skills, such as spelling and punctuation, remain unreliable, their range of expression is closer to national standards. Inspectors saw examples of effective writing, especially of poetry, by older pupils.

Improvements were evident but less emphatic in mathematics. Results for 2009 showed progress at the end of Key Stage 2 to be inadequate, with more able pupils doing relatively less well than others. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities made better progress than their contemporaries. Steps have been taken to boost the performance of girls and to match teaching to pupils' capabilities more thoroughly, for example through setting by ability in Year 6. There is evidence that pupils' basic skills are strengthening but these are not consistently matched by an understanding of underlying mathematical principles and concepts.

The level of challenge generally presented to more able pupils is not yet high enough to ensure that they fulfil their potential. Pupils of all ages and abilities are keen to do well and appreciate the guidance given by their teachers but few show initiative in their learning. They enjoy opportunities to play an active part in lessons

and work very well in groups and pairs, offering each other productive mutual support.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2009:

- improve standards, particularly in English and mathematics, by raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

This aspect was not inspected but pupils' cheerful friendliness and positive attitudes to all aspects of school life were very evident.

The effectiveness of provision

Teachers are now more confidently recording and analysing information about pupils' current levels and rates of progress to identify underachievement and to inform their planning. Encouraging evidence was seen in mathematics of approaches and tasks being better attuned to pupils' abilities, through setting and booster groups for example. This was less evident in other subjects. The positive impact of recent training and modelling of good practice could be seen in all the lessons observed. Teachers, for example, ensured that pupils understood what was to be learned and they used open questions to prompt thinking. Pupils were encouraged to evaluate their own work and that of others in the class. While this is a valuable skill to develop, it calls for a level of understanding and a range of technical skills that few pupils were seen to possess. This meant that time devoted to peer review by pupils when working without adult support was not generally productive. Teachers did not pause often enough to establish how well pupils had grasped what was being taught, which meant that they were not always responsive to the immediate impact of their teaching on pupils' learning. Teachers' marking of written work combined encouragement with specific guidance on how to improve, to which pupils responded constructively.

The curriculum meets all National Curriculum requirements. The more inventive and enterprising approach now being taken to the presentation and exploration of familiar topics, ancient Greece for example, was demonstrated by the variety and verve of displays in classrooms and corridors. Pupils took great pride in pointing out work to which they had contributed and were happy to explain what it was all about.

Lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' written work indicated that, whereas there was careful coverage of appropriate subject content each year, this was not fully matched by progression in the development of skills.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve teachers' skills in assessing pupils' attainment so that they can use this information to plan work that is more closely matched to what pupils already know and can do – satisfactory

- implement a curriculum which meets National Curriculum requirements and builds learning systematically throughout the school – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Considerable progress has been made in building the capacity of team and subject leaders to take responsibility for particular aspects of the school's improvement. This has been purposefully and effectively promoted by the acting headteacher and the newly appointed acting deputy. Through a productive combination of leadership and consultation, a detailed, well-balanced and realistic *plan for the school's development has been drawn up taking into account views from governors, staff and parents*. It builds on progress made over recent months. The key priority, rightly, is to accelerate pupils' progress and raise standards. There have been enterprising responses to particular challenges. For example, subject leadership for science is being shared to exploit a combination of strengths. The governing body, benefiting from training and guidance from the local authority, is now better able to act as a 'critical friend' to the school's leadership.

A sustained programme of review and development is ensuring that the school's safeguarding provision is up to date and rigorous.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- strengthen the capacity of leaders and managers to prioritise and implement strategies for improvement and check their effectiveness in raising attainment – good
- ensure that statutory requirements for safeguarding pupils are met in full – good.

External support

The support provided for the school by the local authority continues to be well judged and effective. Sustained and productive consultation with the school has ensured that interventions are timely and sharply focused.

Priorities for further improvement

The five key issues identified in the January 2009 Ofsted report continue to be priorities for further improvement. Particular attention should be paid to raising standards further by ensuring that:

- best practice in teaching is widely disseminated and embedded, with all teachers adapting their approaches and skills more consistently to match pupils' capabilities and styles of learning
- expectations for more able pupils are sufficiently challenging, promoting creativity and independence.