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3 December 2009

Mrs M Binns, Executive Headteacher and
Ms J Hobley, Acting Headteacher
Bankwood Community Primary School
Bankwood Close
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S14 1LW

Dear Mrs Binns

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Bankwood Community Primary School.

Following my visit to your school on 1 and 2 December 2009, with Sarah Drake and Geoff Lawrence, additional inspectors, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 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 be appointed subject to discussion and agreement with the lead inspector.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of the interim executive board and the Director of Children's Services for Sheffield.

Yours sincerely

Susan Bowles
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Bankwood Community Primary School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 December 2009.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, a group of pupils, and representatives from the local authority and the interim executive board.

Context

Miss Jane Hobley, previously executive deputy headteacher, has become the school's acting headteacher for the current year. The executive leadership and support provided by the partner school continues. Staffing has remained fairly stable, with two teachers joining the school in September, one being the Early Years Foundation Stage teacher. A new governing body has recently met for the first time to begin shadowing the work of the interim executive board.

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

Achievement has continued its steady improvement, although standards of attainment remain low. This is reflected in recent national test results for Year 6 and teachers' assessments across the age range. Last year, results in English and mathematics in Year 6 were higher than in previous years. Results met the government's minimum expectation, but were well below the national average. These Year 6 pupils made progress at the expected rate in Key Stage 2, marking a significant step forward. The number attaining the higher Level 5 increased. No groups underachieved, and in English, pupils' progress was better than average. However, their progress, especially in writing and mathematics, was not strong enough to make up for their slow start in the past. The progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities did not improve as much as that of the other pupils.

Lessons seen showed that recent improvements in learning and progress are being sustained. The progress pupils make in English has become more consistent as teachers have embedded effective approaches to support learning. Pupils reported that they had enjoyed writing for a variety of purposes. Handwriting has generally improved. There is still variation between classes, however, in the quantity and quality of pupils' writing in different subjects. In mathematics, there are some signs of better progress, for example, in the improving work done by pupils in Years 3 and 4. However, the progress of pupils in mathematics in Years 5 and 6 is not currently strong enough to make up for past underachievement.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in English and mathematics – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Attendance levels remain very low. Some initial improvement was not sustained to the end of the school year. Too many pupils attend school for less than 90% of the time, despite determined efforts by staff to make clear the importance of regular attendance. Work with external partners had some positive effects on persistent absentees at first, but without sufficiently effective follow-up, there has been some backsliding. Set against this disappointing progress, firm and supportive approaches have sustained improvements in punctuality well. Staff keep track of pupils who fail to attend school. Current requirements for safeguarding pupils are vigilantly followed in other respects too, for example, staff check visitors scrupulously. Pupils' behaviour about the school is well managed and orderly. In lessons, pupils are showing better engagement as teachers involve them more quickly in suitably pitched and purposeful activities and make clearer their expectations for good learning.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- improve pupils' attendance – inadequate

The effectiveness of provision

The improvements in the teaching of literacy noted at the last visit have become more consistently established, and there has been some progress on improving pupils' independence. Effective approaches to teaching writing are being used across the age range, and teachers are helping pupils develop a little more confidence to take on higher challenges by themselves. On the other hand, the guided reading sessions seen did not have enough impact on pupils whose reading skills are weak. Observation of mathematics teaching indicated some progress towards consistency in learning calculation. However, teachers varied in their confidence in teaching mathematics. Sometimes pupils found the activities they were set too easy or too hard. When the challenges were pitched well, and teachers and their assistants picked up difficulties and involved pupils in mathematical talk to overcome them, much better progress was seen.

A survey of pupils' books across a range of subjects confirms the school's view that teachers now routinely share success criteria with pupils and help them understand their achievements. Comments are less clear about what their next step in learning should be, and pupils are less sure about this. Sometimes teachers ask pupils pertinent questions about their work, but it is rare to find examples of pupils having responded to feedback.

The new teacher in the Reception class has established sensible routines. Adults lead some interesting, well-targeted work with small groups of children, though better

open-ended questions and more effective modelling are needed to accelerate their progress. During observations, children were happily involved in varied indoor and outdoor activities which attracted them to use numbers, make marks, and begin to talk to each other. However, it is less clear how adults' observations are used to track progress in all areas of learning or to guide effective planning.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that teaching consistently promotes high standards and meets the learning needs of all pupils – satisfactory
- place greater emphasis on independent learning and the development of teachers' range of strategies to challenge pupils – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Although the appointment of the acting headteacher to her current role is recent, the core senior team is established in the school and works well together. Its members speak with growing authority about their responsibilities for driving improvement. The capacity of the wider leadership team has begun to strengthen. The positive impact of the assistant headteacher on literacy teaching across the school is more widely evident, and the appointment of a leader for mathematics, although too recent to have had much effect, is a step forward in sharing responsibility. Challenging, but realistic targets lead the school's plans, which have a manageable number of priorities. Systems for moderating assessment and reviewing pupils' progress are established, and more reliably indicate consistent progress across the age range this year. At this point, the school's evidence indicates that at least half the pupils in most year groups are on track to achieve the standards expected of their age in both English and mathematics by the end of the year. The interim executive board continues to monitor and support the school well, and the newly formed shadow governing body has just held its first meeting.

While all of this indicates that leadership is stable and moving forward, sustainability beyond the end of the school year is uncertain, so that progress in this area is only satisfactory. The track record of improvement is real, but modest. The school continues to rely to a significant extent on the local authority and the partner school. The need for support is particularly apparent in the leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school's own capacity to tackle weaker features in teaching is not yet sufficient to carry it forward independently.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- secure sustainable and effective leadership – satisfactory
- further develop the roles of leaders at all levels, with wider distribution of responsibilities – satisfactory

External support

The school has made full use of extensive support from the local authority. Through the work of the School Improvement Partner, the interim executive board, a range of consultants and the partnership, the school has been challenged and provided with practical help, for example, to improve mathematics teaching and cover a temporary gap in the attendance team. The local authority recognises the need to establish sustainable leadership and for effective multi-agency action to boost attendance.

Priorities for further improvement

The priorities for improvement remain as at the previous visit.