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21 October 2009

Mrs H Davies
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Davies

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Lickhill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19–20 October 2009, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in December 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.
Progress since previous monitoring inspection – inadequate.

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 the interim executive board and the Director of Children's Services for Worcestershire.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Lickhill Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 19–21 October 2009

Evidence

HMI observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and senior staff, groups of pupils, a parent, the chair of the interim executive board and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

There has been considerable reorganisation of staffing since the summer term. An acting headteacher was appointed in June 2009 and has since been made permanent. Two teachers have been seconded for a year to strengthen the senior leadership team and improve the teaching in Key Stage 2. The governing body has been replaced by an interim executive board.

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

Children come into the Early Years Foundation Stage with skill levels below expectations for their age. Standards in numeracy have remained low and are inadequate. Standards in communication, language and literacy have improved and are now significantly higher than LA averages. The school's data show that girls' personal, social and emotional development is better than national expectations, but that of boys is well below. There is currently no secure information regarding the nursery profile and the school is working to address this. Initial observations show children making good progress in problem solving and number work.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2009 was in line with national expectations for reading, but below for writing and mathematics. The school has analysed the end of Key Stage 2 results well and as a result has put in place a range of strategies to raise attainment and improve progress. Proportionally more girls attained Level 5 than boys, whose results were significantly weaker in writing. Consequently no boy attained a Level 5 in writing and no boy attained Level 5s in both English and mathematics. Overall this led to a very low percentage of pupils attaining Level 5 in both subjects.

There is evidence that the reorganisation of staffing is already beginning to have an impact. Lesson planning has begun to improve, but does not always identify sufficient strategies to challenge all pupils appropriately. The assessment of pupils' learning is improving because teachers have benefited from support provided by the LA. Pupils say that they enjoy school, that they are more interested in many lessons and that this helps them to learn.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- eliminate underachievement, raise standards and increase rates of progress, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics in Key Stage 2 and for the most able pupils throughout the school - inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour is improving overall because there is now a more consistent approach to tackling instances of poor behaviour. This is because the school has reviewed its management of behaviour and clear sanctions are in place, coupled with a reward system. Formerly disruptive pupils are now supported to be in school, and this is reducing exclusions. A significant proportion of parents continue to express concern about pupils' behaviour but the inspector judged that behaviour in lessons and around school is generally satisfactory. Pupils said they felt safe at break and lunch times because the school has increased the levels of supervision around the site. There are now appropriate policies in place to log accidents, bullying and racism. Attendance is satisfactory and the school has put new systems in place to ensure attendance is further improved through working more closely with the education welfare officer.

The effectiveness of provision

Although teaching remains inadequate overall the decline has been halted. The school is now clear about the issues which it needs to address and has appropriate plans to drive improvement. Developments are at too early a stage for their impact to be evaluated. Pupils' interest and enjoyment in lessons were evident in most classrooms. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, where the learning is good, lessons are child-centred and children have plenty of opportunities to initiate their own learning. Children were looking at fruits and vegetables and had organised a farm shop. One boy was making a ruler so that he could measure the length of his vegetables whilst others were busy making shopping lists or tasting a range of different fruit and vegetables. This good practice in actively involving pupils in their learning is not yet shared across the all key stages. Staff have good relationships with pupils and a good level of care promotes their well-being. Sometimes pupils lost concentration when teachers talked for too long, asked questions which failed to help pupils explain their understanding, or when activities had insufficient pace. Too often boys dominated class discussion while girls sat quietly not participating. Talk partners are beginning to involve all pupils in voicing their views, but this approach is at times allowed to go on for too long. Where learning was more effective pupils were challenged to complete work more quickly and good links were made to previous learning. In these lessons pupils were well stimulated and motivated to learn. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are better provided for as support has begun to be tailored to their individual needs. This is enabling them to participate better in class and socially in the playground. However, teaching does not sufficiently meet the learning needs of all pupils.

Teachers have begun to use targets to help pupils take the next steps in their learning, but practice is still in an early stage of development and inconsistent. Thus, whilst most of the older pupils knew their targets, younger pupils did not. Marking does not systematically provide good quality information to pupils on how they should improve their work.

Progress since the last visit on areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning, raising expectations and making sure pupils' work is challenging and matched consistently to their different starting points and capabilities - inadequate.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The new headteacher has acted with speed and determination to improve the school and address the weaknesses. She is ably supported by the deputy headteacher and the two new members of the senior team. They have a clear plan for improvement. This provides a clear direction and focus for the school and is aligned with the LA action plan. A great deal of time has been taken up in putting basic systems and policies in place to ensure the smooth running of the school. The restructuring of curricular areas with attached members of the senior leadership team has made staff more accountable, whilst providing better levels of support. This has improved medium-term planning. Monitoring by senior leaders is now more systematic, but does not give a sharp enough focus to improving teaching and learning in the classroom. Currently, teachers' planning is not monitored frequently enough. The senior team does not yet give sufficient guidance on the specific actions of teaching which are needed to improve pupils' engagement and understanding of their learning. The leadership team recognise that more has yet to be done to promote greater consistency in the application of policies across the school. Communication with parents is appropriately recognised as an improvement priority. A parental questionnaire has been devised and sent out to ensure that developments are responsive to parents' views.

Shortcomings in safeguarding have been speedily addressed. The school site now provides a safe environment for pupils. It now complies with all statutory requirements.

The interim executive board is holding the school to account. Strong links have been made with staff in the school and each member of the board is responsible for monitoring an area of the curriculum. There is a good relationship with the school and an atmosphere of openness and trust.

School tracking systems are now in place and are used to identify pupils' progress accurately. This information is being used to plan interventions to support groups of pupils and address the shortfall in their progress. However, class teachers do not

always make use of assessment information to check the progress of individuals and groups and match work to their needs.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of collective leadership and management, which includes senior staff and governors, ensuring a more rigorous approach to monitoring and more effective tracking of pupils' progress; using assessment information rigorously to identify and eliminate the causes of underachievement - satisfactory
- ensure a more equitable distribution of roles and responsibilities among senior staff, and evaluate the impact of their work more effectively, in relation to raising achievement – satisfactory.

External support

The LA continues to maintain a high level of support to the school which is having an impact at several levels. Support to senior leaders has helped develop their skills of monitoring and evaluation; classroom assessment has improved.

Priorities for further improvement

- Sharpen the monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure that teachers plan effectively for every lesson, so that work is better matched to individual pupils' needs and engages their interest.
- Ensure that whole-school strategies are consistently applied by all staff.