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10 March 2010

Dr Tony James
Headteacher
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Dear Dr James

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Langley Primary School

Following my visit with Andrew Stafford, additional inspector, to your school on 8 and 9 March 2010, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

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 Director of Children's Services for Sandwell local authority.

Yours sincerely

Ian Jones
Additional Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Langley Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 March 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed teaching across the school, and met with groups of pupils and representatives from the governing body and the local authority. Separate meetings were held with the headteacher and the senior leadership team.

Context

Since the inspection in September 2009, the number on roll has increased and is now over 380.

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

Pupils' outcomes remain inadequate overall, with particular weaknesses at Key Stage 2. In the 2009 national tests for pupils aged 11, only around two thirds of pupils managed to achieve the expected level. Of particular concern was the decline in the proportions of pupils attaining the higher levels in English, mathematics and science, which were especially low. All groups of pupils, irrespective of their background, underachieve. Girls, although performing below expectations, do slightly better than the boys.

The school acknowledges that the progress pupils make from age seven to age eleven is inadequate. In mathematics and science, the progress pupils made between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 was amongst the lowest five per cent nationally. Even in English, where progress is slightly better, it was significantly below national levels.

Poor attainment and progress in core literacy skills are continuing barriers to better progress in all subjects. Inadequate writing skills, for example, are common throughout the school. Particular weaknesses in English include poor punctuation and grammar and weak spelling, although some of the more able pupils show signs of an improvement in this area. The spoken vocabulary used by pupils is improving as a result of a clearer focus on this in some lessons, although this is a mixed picture. In mathematics, an insecure basic grasp of number skills remains alongside a fragile ability to apply strategies to solve problems. Across the school pupils display limited ability to accurately and clearly record findings from science investigations.

Despite this, there are some early signs of improvement. A scrutiny of workbooks shows that pupils in Year 6 are now making better progress in mathematics and standards of writing are showing distinct signs of improvement. The proportion of pupils reaching higher levels is also increasing. This encouraging improvement is more evident in Year 6 than in other Key Stage 2 classes.



Progress towards the school's targets for 2010 represent a marked improvement in the proportion of pupils expected to reach the higher levels, although the proportion in line to reach the expected levels remains too low. The school readily acknowledges there is much still to be done to improve standards of attainment and pupils' progress and has engaged in appropriate support programmes to help tackle this.

Provision for acquiring literacy and numeracy skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved. The school's assessment records indicate that standards are rising with most children now expected to reach the early learning goals by the time they transfer to Year 1. Following a review of practice by the coordinator, significant changes in the Reception and Nursery classes have taken place. Notable among these is a restructuring of the school day and a renewed emphasis on independent learning. There is now a greater focus on the development of literacy and numeracy skills in learning activities throughout the school day. As a result, children are making improved progress, although there is further work needed, particularly in providing challenging writing activities to stimulate learning further.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The most significant improvement since the last inspection is seen in much better behaviour throughout the school. Behaviour has improved considerably as a result of a consistent application of behaviour management techniques and a clear system of rewards and sanctions. The school has taken effective steps to deal with rare examples of inappropriate behaviour and there have been no fixed-term exclusions during this academic year. As a result the school is a calm and harmonious environment. The majority of pupils are well behaved and polite. They enjoy their lessons and say that the school is a much calmer place than it used to be. They are very positive about the recent changes and say that they enjoy all the opportunities that the school offers. This change has sown the seeds for greater engagement in lessons in the future and bodes well for future capacity to improve.

Attendance is improving: while levels remain inadequate, attendance has risen this year by over 2% overall. The school is working hard to promote good attendance, although there is a sizeable group of pupils who have attendance levels below 80%.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- increase the rate of progress made by pupils in reading, writing, mathematics and science so that 80% make significant improvement each year – inadequate.
- in the Early Years Foundation Stage, increase the progress made by children by providing them with more structured opportunities to acquire literacy and numeracy skills – satisfactory.
- raise attendance to 94% and reduce the rate of exclusion – satisfactory.



The effectiveness of provision

Teaching overall has improved. Inspectors observed all classes and the large majority of lessons were satisfactory with a small proportion good. A consistent limitation is that teachers do not place enough emphasis on gauging what pupils are actually learning. The effectiveness of the use of questioning is restricted because too often teachers require only a short, often previously known, answer rather than prompting more ambitious thinking. Levels of challenge and expectations of what pupils are able to do are not consistently high; as a result a good quality of learning is not sustained. At times progress is hampered when work is not well matched to the various learning needs of pupils. The quality of feedback to pupils, both written and spoken, is variable. In good examples, it explains what pupils need to do and is systematically followed up by teachers. Teachers' routine planning varies in quality. Although planning identifies different expectations for a range of abilities it is sometimes insufficiently focused on learning.

Since September the school has reorganised the times of the school day to provide an improved focus on learning. The introduction of setting by ability is helping to match work better to the learning needs of pupils. However, the rate of progress is still limited, especially for less able pupils, because the quality of advice does not move their learning forward sufficiently. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities get regular support from adults but the impact of the guidance provided for them is erratic.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership in school has undergone significant change since September 2009, when a new headteacher and deputy headteacher were appointed. The headteacher is ambitious for the school and has a clear vision shared with colleagues. An invigorated senior leadership team has a clearer sense of purpose and is developing increased accountability for progress, which is beginning to be shared with colleagues in the classroom. The headteacher, with the close support of the deputy headteacher, has implemented a number of changes, including a refocus on pupils' progress. He has established a full programme of monitoring of teaching and learning. This is proving invaluable in establishing a clear picture of the school's weaknesses. This information is being used to improve strategic planning. Monitoring of teaching quality is accurate, although the limited opportunities for subject leaders to be involved in lesson observations weaken their ability to understand the various strengths and weaknesses in their area of responsibility. Action has been taken to address shortcomings such as behaviour management and attendance, although levels in the latter remain well below average. There has been too little time for changes introduced to have their full impact and, as a result, insufficient progress has been made in demonstrating satisfactory capacity to improve.



By revisiting their policy on disability and access governors are now meeting their responsibilities in this respect. However, they are not meeting their responsibility to ensure that community cohesion is promoted because they have not yet developed an action plan based upon an audit of current practice. Many governors are new and developing their roles. The impact of their work is thus unproven and some governors are not sufficiently involved in driving improvements. As a result their skills of critical evaluation are underdeveloped.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- strengthen the capacity for improvement – inadequate.

External support

The local authority has provided good support. There has been a range of inputs appropriate to the particular needs of the school or of individuals, for example planning meetings with the School Improvement Partner. A programme of training for staff has been devised in conjunction with the School Improvement Partner. Additional finance has been made available for the school to acquire much needed resources, including equipment to support information and communication technology and reading books. The support supplied, as specified within the local authority statement of action, has been welcomed by the school and has helped it to make the first steps of progress.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that assessment for learning practice informs lesson planning and that appropriate levels of challenge are well matched to the needs of pupils of all ability levels.