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17 November 2010

Mr D Walton
Headteacher
Woodham Ley Primary School
Rushbottom Lane
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Benfleet
SS7 4DN

Dear Mr Walton

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Woodham Ley Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 and 16 November 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2010. The full list of the points for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. 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

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Essex.

Yours sincerely

Mike Thompson
Additional inspector

Annex

The single area for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2010.

- Raise attainment and increase rates of learning and progress in English, by:
 - making sure that teachers understand the pace, challenge and expectation required to ensure that all pupils make swift gains in their learning
 - using information gained from tracking pupils' progress and from marking to match work consistently to pupils' needs
 - ensuring pupils know their targets and how to improve their work
 - sharpening the skills of leaders and managers at all levels in identifying priorities for development
 - increasing the rigour with which leaders and managers monitor the school's performance in order to take action that will bring about sustainable improvements to the quality of provision

Special measures: monitoring of Woodham Ley Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 November 2010

Evidence

The monitoring inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and advisory deputy headteacher, senior teachers, pupils, members of the governing body including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority. He observed lessons in all seven classes and also observed 'early morning' activities designed to help pupils settle quickly to work as they arrive at the start of the day. He also looked at a range of information, including data showing the progress made by pupils and samples of pupils' work.

Context

There have been significant changes in the organisation of teaching personnel in four of the seven classes since the first monitoring inspection. Two of the teachers now teach in different year groups, and two experienced teachers have been recruited to replace teachers who have left.

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

Pupils' rates of progress are steadily improving. The foundations for improvement have been laid through pupils' improved attitudes towards their education, better marking of pupils' work, better use made of information from the tracking of pupils' progress, and improved leadership. However, although teaching has improved, and is now satisfactory, there is a need for greater rigour, pace and challenge in teaching in order to rectify the deficit in pupils' skills resulting from underachievement in previous years.

The provisional results of the 2010 national tests and assessments, conducted at the end of the summer term, show that standards remain a cause for concern. At the end of Year 2, standards fell and were below average in reading and mathematics and well below average in writing. These results were as expected because of the characteristics of the group of pupils assessed. However, at the end of Year 6, the impact of the school's strong focus on English was seen in an improvement in results in comparison with its performance in 2009. Despite this improvement, standards were below average. The improvement in English was offset by a sharp fall in standards in mathematics, from below average in 2009 to very low in 2010. While pupils in this year group made good progress in reading and writing because of the intensive support provided, their progress in mathematics was inadequate.

The satisfactory progress of pupils in Year 5 in English and mathematics, noted in the previous monitoring report, has continued as these pupils have moved into Year

6. Attainment in Year 6 is close to age-related expectations in these subjects. However, attainment in science is well below what is normally expected. This is because too little attention has been given to this subject in previous terms.

The school is working hard to improve pupils' basic skills. Insecure learning in the past continues to have an adverse impact on pupils' performance in English and mathematics. For example, in a mathematics lesson in Year 6, some pupils made hard work of a challenge to calculate the area of a rectangle because they either failed to make the link between this task and the need to use their knowledge of multiplication tables or had insecure knowledge of their tables. The school is working hard to improve the situation and accelerate progress further by improving the quality of teaching. It is also making good use of the improved system for checking on pupils' performance by targeting extra help where it is most needed. For example, in Year 6, almost half of the pupils use a computer-based mathematics program three times a week designed to sharpen their skills. Some of the girls are now being given individual tuition in mathematics, in order to address underachievement and 'booster groups' designed to give extra help in reading and mathematics meet once a week.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The school has made good progress in improving pupils' attitudes towards their education. This has occurred through a greatly improved partnership with parents and carers resulting from improved communications between the school and home and the high profile and accessibility of the headteacher.

The pupils say that they really enjoy coming to school, because they feel safe and valued, and because they find their lessons more interesting than before. They appreciate the improvements made within the premises. For example, classrooms are less cluttered, better organised, and more conducive to learning. Pupils also value the greater opportunities that they have to contribute to the day-to-day running of the school. Pupils in Year 6 feel that they are really helping to make a difference by taking on responsibilities as prefects or play leaders. The holders of the new positions of head boy and head girl are immensely proud of the trust placed in them and are good ambassadors for the school. Pupils' behaviour continues to improve, securely underpinned by the 'Woodham Way' code, which is displayed throughout the premises and sets out very clear expectations for pupils' conduct. The transformation in pupils' attitudes is beginning to have a positive impact on standards. The presentation of work in pupils' books is greatly improved and they are beginning to take a real pride in what they produce. Exercise books covered in drawings and graffiti are no longer found in any of the classes.

The effectiveness of provision

The school's senior managers and the local authority are acutely aware that the weaknesses identified in teaching at the time of the previous inspection were not

confined to English, which was the focus of the last report, but were widespread. The improvement of teaching continues, rightly, to be the highest priority.

All of the teaching observed during the course of this monitoring inspection was satisfactory. This is an improvement since the first monitoring inspection and reflects the impact of changes made and the intense focus on developing teachers' skills. Satisfactory teaching is not yet resulting in the accelerated learning needed to ensure that pupils catch up in developing their knowledge and skills. However, teachers' marking of pupils' work is more effective in helping pupils to improve and teachers are more adept at pitching work at different levels in order to provide more appropriate challenges for their pupils. The good progress made in providing clear targets for pupils to work towards, noted in the previous monitoring report, has been consolidated. All of the pupils interviewed knew precisely what their targets are and understood how their progress in achieving their targets is assessed. Good features of teaching are emerging. Typically, these are the relationships between teachers and their pupils, the management and organisation of lessons, and teachers' skills in questioning their pupils in order to improve learning. Despite these improvements, teaching is not yet resulting in rapid enough learning. Teachers are aware of the need for pace, challenge and high expectations as key elements in accelerating pupils' learning. However, many lessons lack crisp pace, and expectations of what pupils ought to achieve are not made explicit enough. This is because teachers sometimes lack a clear enough understanding of precisely what they intend pupils to learn or do not focus enough on ensuring that pupils apply previously learned knowledge and skills when tackling the work set for them.

The 'early morning' activities continue to help develop a climate for learning by ensuring that pupils have useful tasks to work at from the moment that they arrive. These tasks are highly focused on helping pupils to improve their knowledge and skills. For example, in the class for pupils in Years 3 and 4, pupils were first expected to respond to the teachers' marking in their mathematics books and then to complete writing tasks with a focus on their individual targets for improvement. A further noteworthy feature is the development of 'working walls' in all classes. These provide pupils with useful reminders of, for example, how to tabulate calculations correctly or hints to help improve their writing.

The need to ensure a significant reduction in pupils' rates of absence, particularly in relation to pupils with below or well below average attainment, was identified as a priority for improvement at the last monitoring inspection. About a quarter of the persistent absentees at that time were disaffected pupils in Year 6, who have since left the school. In respect of the remaining pupils, the school's actions have been rigorous and highly effective. A member of the school administrative staff monitors attendance rates closely and provides regular information to the headteacher and governors. The school has ensured that the need for regular attendance and good punctuality is fully understood by pupils and their parents, and any lapses are quickly acted upon. As a result of the school's actions, rates of attendance have

improved from inadequate levels in the previous school year to above average levels at the time of the monitoring inspection.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher and consultant deputy headteacher continue to provide clear direction through their rigorous monitoring of all aspects of the school's performance. They have a realistic view of the quality of teaching and learning, as well as a detailed plan of what needs to be done to improve pupils' achievement. Most of their efforts remain focused on improving teaching and learning, and the initiatives introduced continue to have a beneficial effect. However, they acknowledge that there is still much to be done. Work to develop the leadership and management skills of senior staff responsible for English and mathematics is underway. With the support of the local authority, these teachers are developing a view of what needs to be done to improve attainment and progress in these subjects. However, they have yet to gain experience in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and, consequently, their perspectives are not fully informed. Governance is improving, and governors are now better informed and more involved in monitoring the work of the school. With the support provided by the local authority, governors are beginning to develop the skills required in order to provide the levels of challenge expected of them. Currently, they lack the range of skills required to interpret data thoroughly and are too accepting of the data provided. Governors show clear determination to improve and have arranged further training.

Judgement

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- *raise attainment and increase rates of learning and progress in English – satisfactory.*

External support

The local authority continues to provide satisfactory support for the school. This is largely achieved through the work of the advisory deputy headteacher, the support provided by consultants and on-going monitoring through regular visits from the school improvement adviser. The school reports positively on the continued impact of the local authority's support to help improve the quality of teaching and learning.