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13 January 2011

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Mr Barry Cregeen
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cregeen

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Farnworth CofE Controlled Primary School

Following my visit with Peter McKay, additional inspector, to your school on 11 and 12 January 2011, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2009. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is 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 – good

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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Halton.

Yours sincerely

Gill Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2009

- Ensure that pupils in Key Stage 2 make much better progress and attain higher standards, especially in mathematics and writing by:
 - involving them much more in their own learning and assessment
 - using the information gained from tracking their progress far more effectively to provide pupils with work which is responsive to their needs and provides a suitable level of challenge.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stage 2 by:
 - providing pupils with consistently challenging work
 - increasing the pace of lessons and setting much higher expectations for the amount and quality of work to be completed in lessons.

- Improve the quality of the curriculum by:
 - producing a whole-school curricular plan that identifies how pupils will progressively acquire and apply key skills across different subjects
 - ensuring that planning fully matches pupils' needs
 - making it much more relevant and exciting for pupils.

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - making leaders and managers at all levels more accountable and responsible for the progress made by pupils and the standards they achieve
 - including all staff more in school development planning, the analysis of assessment data and in checking on the effectiveness of provision
 - ensuring that statutory requirements with regard to safeguarding and community cohesion are fully met
 - enabling governors to acquire the necessary information and skills that will allow them to support and challenge the school's performance effectively.

Special measures: monitoring of Farnworth CofE Controlled Primary School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 January 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed 14 lessons and 14 teachers. They looked at the work in pupils' exercise books and made a curriculum learning walk to all classrooms. Inspectors met with pupils, staff, the executive headteacher of Wade Deacon High School and members of the Interim Executive Board. They looked in detail at pupils' progress data and achievement, scrutinised documents and analysed the information provided in 148 parental questionnaires.

Context

The substantive headteacher has resigned his post. The deputy headteacher from Wade Deacon High School is covering this vacant position as associate headteacher on a full-time basis. The deputy headteacher returned to school in late September following a period of long-term absence and is teaching a Year 1 class. Two new permanent teachers started in the Early Years Foundation Stage (Reception) in September 2010. One of these is a new member of the senior leadership team. Four teachers were absent from school during the inspection. Two are short-term absences. Two are long-term absences. Temporary supply teachers are covering the absences.

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

The standards reached by pupils at the end of Year 6 are above average. Most pupils attained the nationally expected levels for 11-year-olds in English and mathematics in 2010. A higher proportion of pupils reached the higher Level 5 in the government tests than is found nationally. Pupils attained particularly well in mathematics. In Key Stage 2, pupils continue to make better progress and a larger proportion are on track to meet the challenging targets set for the end of Year 6 than previously.

Key Stage 2 pupils are more involved in their own learning and assessment. They say they like the 'BEOTL', 'by the end of the lesson I will have...' and they are clear what they should achieve. In lessons, pupils spend a good balance of time on independent and group work and their exercise books demonstrate an increasing volume of work in a range of subjects. Although the level of challenge is mainly appropriate in Key Stage 2, pupils are still completing broadly the same tasks. This limits the progress of some more-able pupils and is sometimes too great a challenge for pupils of lower ability.

Pupils at the end of Year 2 continue to reach above-average levels in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the school's own data demonstrate that many pupils currently in Key Stage 1 have made very slow progress since the last monitoring visit. This data may not be a true reflection of pupils' actual progress because the school introduced a new method to assess pupils in September. However, data show a large proportion of pupils not on track to meet their targets. In addition, the end-of-year targets set for some pupils in Key Stage 1, particularly in writing, are unrealistic. Pupils' progress in lessons in Key Stage 1 is slower than in other parts of the school. This relates to the time the teacher spends explaining work to pupils and the weak assessment of what pupils already know to determine what they need to learn next. A significant level of staff absence in Key Stage 1 and 2 is slowing pupils' progress. A minority of parents expressed grave concerns about the ongoing disruption frequent staff absence has on their children's education.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have settled well into the school routines and are keen to learn. School data demonstrate that individual pupils are making good progress, particularly in learning their letters and sounds. They enjoy all the areas available to them in the classroom and work well independently and alongside the practitioners. During the inspection, children were making good use of the puppet theatre to re-enact the pantomime they had seen at the theatre recently. They demonstrated high levels of spoken language and a good sense of drama while playing with the puppets and wearing costumes.

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

- Ensure that pupils in Key Stage 2 make much better progress and attain higher standards, especially in mathematics and writing – good

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils continue to behave well. Their attendance is above average. During the visit, they were polite and friendly, particularly during lunchtime. An unexpected fire alarm led to pupils exiting the building during the inspection sensibly. They stood patiently waiting for instructions during the safety checks, demonstrating good levels of self-discipline and cooperation. The school council is taking a more active part in representing the pupils' voice. An example of this is the request made for more after-school activities, particularly in sport. Pupils are responsive in lessons and are keen to achieve.

The effectiveness of provision

The proportion of good teaching continues to increase in Key Stage 2. Most of the lessons observed were good. Lessons start promptly; teachers make good use of time, the pace is brisk and the pupils are involved in an appropriate range of practical and problem-solving activities. For example, in a good mathematics lesson, pupils were costing a visit for a family to a cinema. This was a multi-layered problem which they had to solve in several ways. The teacher presented additional challenge

by asking 'what if?' questions resulting in pupils re-working their original solutions and finding alternatives. Pupils were clear about what they had to learn and demonstrated their resilience in tackling problems. However, even in some of the good lessons, teachers do not always set precise enough expectations for all groups of learners linked to their assessment information. This means that some pupils do not have a high enough level of challenge and others do not always have sufficient time to finish their work, despite working at a reasonable pace. The provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is meeting their needs more closely and staff provide a good balance of targeted and independent activities.

The quality of teaching in Key Stage 1 is weaker than at the last monitoring visit. Inspectors observed mainly satisfactory lessons. Typical features of these lessons include: too much time spent on the introduction to activities by teachers; pupils becoming inattentive; and too many uncompleted tasks in pupils' exercise books. Teachers' lesson plans do not link clearly enough to the different ability levels in the class. Most pupils tackle the same work, even though their ability levels are sometimes significantly different. Teachers are not always secure in determining how to plan effective learning opportunities for lower-ability pupils or to set a high enough challenge for the more able. This means the curriculum is not relevant for all pupils. Teachers' plans are not linking the information from their own assessment information to identify coherent next steps for pupils' learning. In addition, inaccurate target-setting data do not enable teachers to have an accurate overview of pupils' comparative rates of progress.

A small minority of parents expressed concerns about the quality of teaching, linked to their children's motivation and willingness to attend school. Parents appreciate the recent information received about their children's attainment, though in some cases this has led to concerns regarding their rate of progress.

Pupils' exercise books are marked regularly and teachers are encouraging in their comments. There are pockets of very good marking where pupils' targets are clearly linked to their progress data; however, this is inconsistent across the school

Subject leaders have made an audit of the curriculum areas and planning now identifies the skills, knowledge and understanding in all subjects. However, there is not yet a coherent whole-school plan in place which links subjects together. Opportunities for independent work and problem solving are increasing and pupils say their lessons and the curriculum are more exciting. The partnership between Wade Deacon and the school continues to enrich the curriculum. For example, through the regular provision of French. However, staff are now taking more responsibility for leading curriculum change and providing a wide range of school-based and off-site activities, which parents and pupils appreciate.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stage 2 – good

- Improve the quality of the curriculum – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The associate headteacher continues to lead the school with determination. Standards at Key Stage 2 in particular have risen significantly under his leadership. Parents testify to this and to the improvements the school has made since he started in January 2010. Recent appointments to the school and senior leadership team are effective. Subject leadership is improving and the impact of effective work by some senior leaders to improve reading is evident in the higher reading levels reached by Year 2.

However, progress since the last monitoring visit has slowed to satisfactory because not all senior leaders are supporting the associate headteacher effectively enough. For example, senior leaders did not pick up the errors in Key Stage 1 target-setting data in recent pupil progress meetings. This means teachers are not able to use this information effectively to check on the progress of pupils. As a result, this weakens the performance management system in place for staff in Key Stage 1. Although effective systems are now securely in place to drive school improvement and increase the levels of accountability, the lack of drive and leadership and management skills at a senior level is frustrating the efforts of the associate headteacher to secure consistency in improvement across the school. In addition, high levels of staff absence are contributing significantly to weakening the capacity within the school and this means the school is still too reliant on the excellent support provided by Wade Deacon High School.

The Interim Executive Board has the skills needed to challenge and support the school's performance effectively. However, it has not actively sought the views of parents frequently enough to check on the progress the school is making. Since the resignation of the substantive headteacher, it is now active in the process of securing the future leadership of the school. However, seemingly insurmountable barriers are slowing its efforts to resolve other serious staffing issues regarding levels of staff absence.

Approximately one third of parents responded to the Ofsted questionnaire. In 76% of those responses, parents are happy with the education their children receive overall. The majority who made positive comments recognised the improvements made since the intervention from Wade Deacon High, in particular the positive impact of the associate headteacher. However, 36% of the questionnaires received had negative comments. Most of these related to continual staff absence and the consequent disruption to their children's education. Others referred to issues around their children's progress, lack of challenge in lessons, inconsistency in setting homework, too few extra-curricular activities, information about pupils' activities being sent home too late for working parents to make childcare arrangements and a general frustration that staff do not respond effectively to their concerns. A very

small minority of parents raised concerns regarding the safeguarding of the health and safety of their children. Inspectors shared these concerns with the school.

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

- Improve the quality of leadership and management – satisfactory

External support

The school continues to receive outstanding support from its partnership with Wade Deacon High School. The impact of the leadership from the executive headteacher, a National Leader of Education is positive as is that of her deputy headteacher, currently headteacher at Farnworth. However, the local authority is not providing strong enough support to the school with regard to staffing issues, particularly those relating to long-term absence and capability. This means that some leadership and management issues identified in previous monitoring visits remain unresolved.

Therefore, the capacity within the school is reduced and it remains too reliant on external support.

Priorities for further improvement

- The Interim Executive Board should take decisive action to reduce the high levels of staff absence.
- The Interim Executive Board should seek to take greater account of parental views.
- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stage 1 by making better use of assessment information to inform lesson planning and securing the accuracy of pupils' end-of-year targets.