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12 November 2010

Mrs Carol Coleman  
Headteacher  
Mount Pleasant Primary School  
Newton Lane  
Darlington  
County Durham  
DL3 9HE

Dear Mrs Coleman

### **Special measures: monitoring inspection of Mount Pleasant Primary School**

Following my visit with Alastair Younger, Additional Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 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 – **good**

Newly Qualified Teachers **may 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 the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Darlington local authority.

Yours sincerely  
Margaret Shepherd  
**Additional Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2009**

- Raise standards and improve progress in Key Stage 2 by:
  - improving teaching and learning so that more of it is good
  - making sure pupils are taught in stable groups of a reasonable size
  - making better use of pupils' targets for learning
  - setting work that is more challenging for the most able pupils.
  
- Make leadership and management more effective by:
  - enabling governors to hold the school to account more
  - introducing more rigour in the way staff evaluate the quality of the school's work, including its strategies to manage pupils' behaviour.
  
- Ensure pupils accept greater responsibility by:
  - creating more positions for them to take on
  - strengthening the role of the school council
  - making sure pupils fully understand how their misbehaviour affects others
  - teaching them to understand more about the different faiths and ethnic groups that make up our society.

## **Special measures: monitoring of Mount Pleasant Primary School**

### **Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 10-11 November 2010**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, including observations of 11 part-lessons, which ensured that every member of staff was observed. They scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, key staff, the school council, members of the governing body and two representatives from the local authority.

#### **Context**

At the beginning of the term, two teachers were seconded to the school for a year to cover maternity absences. An experienced Early Years Foundation Stage practitioner has been employed in the school for at least the rest of this term to cover for the absence of the leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage. She took up her post during the week of this inspection. All the members of the senior leadership team, apart from the deputy headteacher, are new to their roles.

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

Pupils' progress is improving but the rate at which they make gains in learning varies considerably between classes and between different subjects. It is slower in Key Stage 1 than in Key Stage 2. The national assessments in 2010 showed that attainment was significantly below average at the end of Year 2. These pupils left reception with very low attainment. The most consistent progress is in writing, with pupils producing well-presented final pieces of work. Attainment in Year 6 in writing remains below the expected level due to these pupils' lack of systematic progress earlier in the key stage. In Year 5, standards are at the expected level with several pupils producing sensitive and well-organised pieces of work. Although progress in mathematics is improving overall, pupils' rate of progress is inconsistent across year groups with the best progress observed in Year 6 in basic skills. Reading progress has similar inconsistencies through the school. The more-able pupils are not showing the same gains in their achievement as other groups. They do not make enough progress in lessons either in group work or in the whole-class sessions and say that they find the work too easy. Boys' progress is slower than that of girls, although in good lessons they engage fully in learning and make similar progress. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similarly inconsistent progress to their peers. Pupils from the resource base make good progress in relation to their targets both in their own unit and when they join the mainstream classes. The majority of pupils enjoy their learning, although in some lessons they remain passive when questions are not stimulating enough.

Data show that progress in nursery has been variable and too slow. Recent initiatives have led to improvements in the quality of provision with some children

responding confidently to teachers' questions. Progress in reception has improved considerably since the last monitoring inspection. These children learn best in group contexts, showing clear enjoyment, for example, in listening to stories. They now choose independent activities confidently and understand the importance of playing their part in the regular classroom routines.

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

- raise standards and improve progress in Key Stage 2 – **good**
- set work that is more challenging for the most able – **satisfactory**
- intensify actions to improve pupils' writing throughout the school as a matter of urgency – **good**

### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

The outstanding improvement in pupils' behaviour made in the last monitoring visit has been sustained. This is evident in lessons where pupils settle quickly at the beginning and clearly understand that they need to concentrate on their work and complete tasks. They have positive attitudes towards learning and when they have the opportunity they cooperate well with each other in shared activities. They move around the school very sensibly with consideration for others. Interaction with adults is respectful and polite. All of these features produce a calm and productive context for learning throughout the school. Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities and carry out allocated tasks sensibly. The school council is very new to its responsibilities. Councillors value their role in beginning to make decisions and in feeding back to their own classes. Although some pupils are able to talk about features of different faiths and ethnic groups, the work to develop their understanding of cultural diversity is in its very early stages. Pupils understand the need to come to school and their attendance rates remain higher than average.

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

- ensure pupils accept greater responsibility by:
  - creating more positions for them to take on – **good**
  - strengthening the role of the school council – **satisfactory**
  - making sure pupils fully understand how their misbehaviour affects others – **good**
  - teaching them to understand more about the different faiths and ethnic groups that make up our society – **satisfactory**

### **The effectiveness of provision**

The quality of teaching has improved since the previous monitoring inspection. No inadequate teaching was observed by inspectors but not enough is good. The strongest teaching is in Key Stage 2. The teaching is consistently effective in the resource base provision both when they are working in their own unit and when they are integrated into the mainstream classes. All teachers manage behaviour well. In Key Stages 1 and 2 there is an effective partnership with teaching assistants. The

work of the teaching assistants in the Early Years Foundation Stage is inconsistent. Key weaknesses in teaching are a lack of challenge for more-able pupils, insufficient sharing of learning objectives at the start of lessons and too few references to pupils' individual targets during the lesson. Planning is inconsistent. Some whole-class sessions are too long. Others are mundane and lack stimulating activities to promote engagement. The quality of marking remains too variable. Teachers' confidence in using information and communication technology varies considerably and the quality of basic equipment and the infrastructure is unreliable.

The best teaching is characterised by a fast pace and high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Imaginative activities, for example, the use of drama to stimulate writing and competitive tasks are used to increase the rate of learning. There is also a clear recap of learning and achievement at the end of sessions. Teachers continue to use the assertive mentoring well to assess writing and mathematics but are not as confident in assessing reading. Considerable improvement is evident in assessment and recording in the Reception class. This is used effectively as a basis for future planning. Its use and contribution to improving children's progress remain limited in the nursery.

The joint planning of the curriculum between the two Year 5/6 classes and the Years 3 and 4 classes is working well. The quality of the curriculum to support writing is well balanced throughout the school but the basic skills curriculum in mathematics and reading is too variable. Some good examples of links across the curriculum are developing but not enough to promote understanding of different faiths and ethnic groups sufficiently for all pupils. The indoor curriculum for Early Years Foundation Stage has improved but there remain key weaknesses outdoors. Resources for this key stage are limited. Care, support and guidance are strong. The care and support of resource base pupils is excellent.

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

- improve teaching and learning so that more of it is good – **satisfactory**
- make better use of pupils' targets for learning – **satisfactory**
- improve teaching and the curriculum in Reception Year – **good**
- work with the local authority's Early Years Foundation Stage team to:
  - improve outcomes and the quality of provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage – **satisfactory**
  - improve planning and the strategies to observe, record and report children's development in the Early Years Foundation Stage – **satisfactory**

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The very effective leadership of the headteacher is making a significant contribution to school improvement. She has great determination to drive the school forward to eradicate all the weaknesses of the school and to build on the strengths. She works closely with the governing body, who greatly appreciate the quality and range of

information that they now receive to support their decision making. Governors' new monitoring systems are working well and helping to ensure that the governing body is starting to ask the right questions. The headteacher produces well-focused development plans and her contribution has improved the quality and effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation. She is working to build the school's capacity for further improvement by inducting all new members of the senior leadership team effectively. These new senior leaders are very enthusiastic and have made a very good start to taking on their new responsibilities. However, half of these new members are temporary members of the school staff, who are seconded until the end of this school year only. This leaves the school vulnerable at management level at a time when securing the capacity for improvement is crucial to the school's future success. The leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage by the headteacher are effecting speedy improvements through identification of key weaknesses and appropriate use of outside specialists to improve provision.

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

- make leadership and management more effective by:
  - enabling governors to hold the school to account more – **good**
  - introducing more rigour in the way staff evaluate the quality of the school's work, including its strategies to manage pupils' behaviour – **good**
- make sure that pupils are taught in stable groups of reasonable size - **good**
- streamline the tracking system so that it is readily understood and used by staff for core subjects in the first instance – **good**
- ensure that reliable assessment methods are in place to monitor pupils' progress accurately and target interventions accordingly – **good**
- simplify the action plans and devise effective methods for evaluating and reporting on the school's progress – **good**.

### **External support**

The quality and impact of external support provided for the school is very mixed. The support for the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. The amount of time spent to support staff in improving provision by local authority specialists has had a very positive impact on provision in reception. The support for identifying good quality staffing to cover the Early Years Foundation Stage leader's absence has also made a positive impact. The support to ensure that middle management in the school is sustainable in the long term is inadequate and is having a negative impact on the future capacity for the school to improve.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Ensure the sustainability of the middle management team to safeguard future capacity for embedding ambition and driving future developments.
- Develop the Early Years Foundation Stage outdoor learning area, resources and quality of support from additional adults.

- Develop the information and communication technology provision, including reliability of equipment, the technical infrastructure, staff training and confidence.