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Mr Michael Mellin
Headteacher
Well Lane Primary School
Well Lane
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Birkenhead
CH42 5PF

Dear Mr Mellin

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Well Lane Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 October 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 December 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 Wirral.

Yours sincerely

Brian Padgett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

Build the school's capacity to work independently of external support by improving the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels and ensuring that:

- monitoring and evaluation arrangements are rigorous, outcomes are clearly recorded and addressed and clear links made to the implementation of robust improvement planning
- assessment arrangements are accurate and the system to monitor pupils' progress is robust so that any underachievement is quickly identified and tackled
- the governing body regularly reviews and evaluates the school's provision and contributes effectively to helping set its strategic direction
- safeguarding and child protection arrangements comply with current statutory requirements.

Raise standards in English, mathematics and science by ensuring that:

- more activities are provided to increase pupils' eagerness to write in all subjects
- pupils have more opportunities to improve their speaking skills
- the presentation of pupils' work is improved, in particular, their handwriting
- there is a consistent approach to teaching mathematical calculation in all classes with regular opportunities for pupils to use and apply their mathematical skills in a range of contexts
- pupils have regular opportunities to take part in practical science investigations and have more opportunities to discuss their tasks and record their work independently.

Improve the quality of teaching to a consistently good or better standard by ensuring that:

- all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve in lessons
- assessment information is consistently used to match work precisely to pupils' needs and abilities, in particular, those of the more able
- all teachers use questioning that challenges pupils to think more deeply about their learning
- the management of pupils' behaviour consistently matches the quality of the best practice
- pupils are regularly involved in the assessment of their progress, and that marking indicates how they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Improve the curriculum by ensuring that:

- in Years 1 and 2 it meets the needs and abilities of all pupils
- there are planned opportunities for pupils to practice their basic skills in a range of contexts
- sufficient resources are available so that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage can choose activities during learning outdoors whatever the weather.

Improve attendance by ensuring that:

- arrangements to monitor attendance are rigorous and robust and steps are taken to encourage good attendance and reduce persistent absence.

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Well Lane Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 05 and 06 October 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the teacher with responsibility for special educational needs, governors, representatives from the local authority, and parents and carers. Teaching was observed in all classes.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit, one teacher has left and several teachers have taken responsibility for different classes.

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

At the time of the first monitoring visit in April, there was concern that pupils in Year 6 would not reach their end-of-year targets and that standards would fall. In the event, attainment in the national end of Key Stage 2 tests improved. In English, the improvement was very significant. All of the pupils did well and more-able pupils attained the highest level. Provisional calculations by the local authority suggest that the value added to pupils' learning during Key Stage 2 in 2009/10 was significantly positive and corresponded to the progress made in its most successful schools. Attainment in English is now in line with the national expectation for 11-year-olds. In mathematics at Year 6 and more generally in basic skills at the end of Key Stage 1, tests and assessments suggest attainment is in the below-average range. However, this represents good progress from low baselines with a clear trend of improvement over two years. The difference between standards in mathematics and those in English are not a matter of concern, but would be if the gap between the two were to grow larger. The overall picture of standards and progress has not changed in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Only about a third of children move to Year 1 with levels of learning and development that equip them to cope with more formal learning. Nonetheless, children make good progress across all the areas of learning during their Nursery and Reception Years.

First-hand observation of pupils' learning suggests the school has accomplished a remarkable turnaround since the first monitoring inspection. In nearly all lessons observed, pupils were fully engaged in what they were doing and trying their very best. Presentation and handwriting were good. Pupils were proud of their work. They knew and followed the classroom routines and responded well to the teachers' insistence on them thinking for themselves, taking responsibility for their work and cooperating with others to make plans and solve problems. Pupils of differing abilities made similar progress. There is more support available to teachers than is seen in most primary schools and teaching assistance makes a substantial contribution to pupils' learning and enjoyment in groups. Pupils' keen interest,

particularly in books and in reading, suggests they thoroughly enjoy their lessons. Parents and carers back up this view. Newcomers to Foundation 1 (Nursery) are settling into the Early Years Foundation Stage very well even though most have no earlier pre-school experience.

Progress since the last monitoring visit on the area for improvement:

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science – **good**

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' attendance, a key issue for the school to address, remains stubbornly low, at around 92%. Traditionally, the beginning of the autumn term has been a time when attendance is lower than at other times, as parents and carers take advantage of holidays they can afford. However, the current absence rate belies the scale of the effort the school is putting into raising attendance. Teachers, pupils, and parents and carers are in no doubt of the importance of pupils being in school. Special assemblies celebrate the good attendance of individuals and classes. Parents and carers have a clear understanding of the school's position on attendance and agree with it. They know they have a case to make if they want to take children out of school, especially if their current attendance is under 95%. For those pupils with poor attendance, which often reflects deep and pressing family issues, the school works closely with the parents, carers and external agencies to support the child and family.

Punctuality is very good. Very few pupils are late for school. This is the result of concerted action by the school represented in its 'Five to nine, be on time' initiative. As with attendance, parents and carers are in full agreement with the school's stance on punctuality.

The behaviour of pupils is much improved. For the vast majority of pupils, they are far too interested in their work to think about misbehaving. They are making better progress and teachers make sure they know this, rewarding and praising their work. They are prouder of their school. They look smarter. Parents and carers make sure they are in uniform and pupils have new book bags for their reading books. When inappropriate behaviour occurs the school's behaviour management system is clearly and consistently applied. It has been enhanced by the appointment of a learning mentor called the 'behaviour champion'. A particularly effective feature of the behaviour management system is the provision to allow pupils thinking time before they move from a higher level to a lower level on the behaviour scale. Pupils appreciate this chance to pull back and try hard to recover their original level.

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

- Improve attendance – **good**

The effectiveness of provision

Nearly all the teaching observed during this monitoring inspection was good with none that was inadequate and some that was outstanding. This is a considerable improvement over the last inspection when too much teaching was inadequate. There are several reasons for the improvement. All classrooms, without exception, and corridors provide stimulating environments that support learning. In particular, there has been a transformation in the quality with which the school promotes reading and the enjoyment of reading and this is proving very successful. Teachers' planning is very thorough now, as is their assessment of pupils' work and marking. One of the main reasons for the pupils' increasingly effective learning is because teachers tailor the work to meet pupils' actual learning needs; they do not teach something because it is the next part of a scheme but because it is the next stage in learning. This is well illustrated in Year 1, where the approach of the Early Years Foundation Stage of learning through play has been extended, ensuring an appropriate curriculum and the smoothest of transitions for the many children who are not yet ready for more formal work. Nevertheless, thorough planning ensures that the requirements of the National Curriculum for Year 1 are met. Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together as teams, more effectively than during the last visit. Teaching assistants are now fully involved in teaching groups of pupils.

The main emphasis of the school's curriculum efforts have been on promoting reading and on the development of the outdoor area in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Both have been accomplished very successfully. Pupils are developing an enthusiasm for and enjoyment of books and reading, and parents and carers are enlisted as partners in this work. The development of the outdoor area in the Early Years Foundation Stage has enabled staff to provide as much to interest children outside as inside. It is used imaginatively and is thoroughly enjoyed by the children in all weathers.

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

- Improve teaching to a consistently good or better standard – **good**
- Improve the curriculum – **good**

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The most significant improvements in the school since the last visit are in the morale of the staff and the leadership of the headteacher. All of the differences between the last and the current visit, including the substantial improvement in the physical appearance of the school, can be attributed to these two factors. The whole staff has pulled together to tackle the issues facing the school. Staff are working very hard and gaining in confidence. They are now beginning to see the positive results of their concerted actions in improving pupils' achievement and enjoyment. The local authority advisers are beginning to recognise examples of good practice from Well Lane and share them with other schools. Pupils are clearly more settled and parents, who have maintained their loyalty to the school, point out many of the improvements with pride. Through its involvement of parents as partners in their children's learning, the school is raising parental interest and aspirations. This was very evident in the reading workshop for parents taking place on the first day of the

inspection. Leadership and management are improving at a number of levels. The work and performance of the school is tracked and monitored thoroughly, and members of the leadership team, such as the school's special educational needs coordinator, are managing their responsibilities more effectively. Even so, apart from the headteacher, other senior leaders and the governors do not have a high profile with parents, who, generally, are not aware of their work and impact on the school.

A great deal has been achieved since the first monitoring inspection. Progress has jumped from being inadequate to good in each area identified by the last section 5 inspection. The challenge for the school is now to sustain this level of improvement.

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

- Build the school's capacity to work independently of external support by improving the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels – **good**

External support

The growing success of the school is enabling the local authority advisers and School Improvement Partner to alter the emphasis of their support from one of direct intervention to one where the school increasingly takes the lead. This change is also evident in the mentoring relationship between the headteacher and his mentor, also a headteacher, which is now more of an equal professional partnership between school leaders. At both levels, support is of good quality. Senior staff within the local authority meet frequently with the school leaders to review improvements and receive reports providing the school with support, challenge and accountability.