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26 November 2010

Mrs Paula Moreton
Headteacher
Upton Heath CE Primary School
Upton Lane
Upton Heath
Upton-by-Chester
Chester
CH2 1ED

Dear Mrs Moreton

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Upton Heath CE Primary School

Following my visit with Sally Kenyon HMI to your school on 23 and 24 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 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 – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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, the Director of Children and Young People's Services Cheshire West and Chester, and the diocese.

Yours sincerely

Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

As a matter of urgency ensure that all safeguarding requirements are met by:

- establishing clear procedures that are regularly reviewed and understood by staff
- ensuring that the school's central record of checks on the suitability of adults to work with children is up to date
- ensuring that all staff and governors receive appropriate training.

Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate their progress, particularly for the more able by:

- raising the expectations of staff
- broadening the range of teaching styles to stimulate pupils' greater involvement in learning
- improving the quality of the curriculum to encourage pupils' independent skills
- making better use of assessment information to track pupils' progress and ensuring lessons are more exciting and challenging
- ensuring leadership is effective in driving improvement and establishing clear procedures to check on the quality of the school's performance.

Special measures: monitoring of Upton Heath CE Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 23 and 24 November 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher in her role as special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders in English, mathematics and science, the business manager, the learning mentor, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the second monitoring inspection in early April 2010, there have been several changes in staffing. The acting headteacher and the deputy headteacher seconded to the school were appointed to the respective substantive posts at the end of the summer term. Management and subject leader roles have been restructured. The number of pupils on roll has fallen from over 400 to 370.

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

Pupils' achievement is strengthening as a result of improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. There is a more purposeful and settled air to the school with pupils excited by many of the topics and activities in lessons. The thorough analysis of the data from assessments and tests in the summer term has given all staff a detailed picture of the impact of their teaching on pupils' progress and set clear expectations for the year ahead.

Overall standards of attainment dipped slightly at the end of Year 6 but remain above average. While most pupils reached the level expected for their age, and often did better in reading and mathematics, too few excelled in writing. This picture also typified pupils' performance at the end of Key Stage 1 and the Early Years Foundation Stage. Underachievement in writing is a continuing whole-school issue. Writing is the area where pupils' progress is slowest. Too often, pupils' writing falls short of the complexity of form and structure necessary to secure higher levels of attainment, despite the often mature use of language, and improvements in handwriting, accuracy of spelling and use of punctuation. When pupils are given clear guidance on what is needed, the quality of their work is often impressive. This is evident in some of the Year 5 pupils' narrative interpretations of the poem 'The Highwayman'.

Over the last school year, pupils' overall learning accelerated. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities made good strides. Nevertheless, there were inconsistencies between year groups and subjects which reflected the varying quality

of teaching. Some year groups moved on markedly in reading, writing and mathematics. In others, learning was more uneven. The school has identified possible reasons for the faltering progress of individual pupils and given careful thought to how best to tailor support to enable them to catch up.

There are signs that teachers' expectations are higher and pupils are rising to them. In activities, pupils are using their skills and applying what they know. For example, children in the Reception Year are drawing on their growing awareness of letters, sounds and key words, to read and write independently. However, teachers in all year groups are not always ensuring that quick gains in learning are consolidated and extended well enough. More-able pupils are still too often working below their potential. There is scope to ratchet up the challenge in the breadth and depth of activities, and in the probing of pupils' understanding, reasoning and awareness of their own learning.

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

- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate their progress, particularly for the more able – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' creative ideas, their ready willingness to be involved and strong work ethic have come to the fore in the fund-raising actions prompted by the school council resulting in over £1500 this term for different causes. They are also evident in the quality and quantity of the work resulting from home learning and in the playground discussions taking place between pupils about current topics and activities they have enjoyed. In lessons, once they were clear about what they had to do, pupils were usually quick to organise themselves and to become totally absorbed. They behaved well. Only very occasionally, some failed to comply with instructions or were a little forward in their comments to adults or other pupils. The setting up of the nurture room has enabled some pupils to opt for 'quiet time' rather than go outside at break times, and also to share any concerns and worries with the learning mentor about the behaviour of other pupils.

The effectiveness of provision

The provision is strengthening. The school has filled gaps in the curriculum and acted on suggestions from pupils, parents and staff to make the curriculum more stimulating and relevant to the pupils' needs and interests. The development focus has rightly shifted from English and mathematics to enhancing the quality of provision in science and other subjects. Topics have been extended to include projects for pupils to carry out at home and the very positive response shows the ready support of pupils' families. The new library and the purchase of additional books have increased the range of reading choice, especially for the older pupils. Similarly, the purchase of laptop computers and updating of broadband connections,

gives staff and pupils reliable, quick access to the internet and relevant software. This term, more than 140 pupils attend 27 after-school clubs, aimed at different age ranges, led by staff sharing personal interests and expertise including art, football and Russian.

The overall quality of teaching remains variable. Very few lessons have the sparkle and cumulative challenge that ensure pupils fly in their learning. Although good strides have been made in the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics, there is still some way to go to ensure learning is good in every lesson. Teachers' planning is usually detailed giving a clear structure, clear learning intentions and clearly defined activities for pupils of differing abilities. Lesson planning in other subjects is not always so clear. Staff have acted on advice and supported one another in sharing ideas and effective practice. Displays in corridors and classrooms support and celebrate pupils' learning and staff draw on a good range of different learning activities. Resources are well prepared, although there is a tendency to over-rely on commercial materials which sometimes constrain pupils' learning. Other hindering elements include too few resources for the pupils involved, the dismissal of pupils' valid ideas and views in favour of the teacher's, not following the agreed marking guide, not demonstrating or making explicit the stages in the task, not identifying what will count as success, and allowing pupils too little time to finish. One common weakness is the missed opportunity at the end of lessons for pupils to evaluate their own learning and to decide what will help them do even better.

The accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment has increased especially in relation to reading, writing and mathematics. Here, the guidance of consultants from the local authority and group moderation activities has been beneficial in identifying the defining criteria for levels of attainment. The current priority is rightly to achieve the same level of confidence in assessing pupils' attainment in science.

The provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has been closely matched to individual needs. Distinguishing between those pupils who have specific learning and/or personal needs, and require one to one support in class, and those pupils who have fallen behind in their learning has enabled the school to map provision very carefully. Support staff have received updates and training in how to deliver programmes to help pupils to catch up in reading, writing and mathematics and there is a well-thought-out timetable to ensure these pupils do not miss out on prime classroom sessions. Class teachers are fully aware of their responsibilities in meeting pupils' needs and in tracking their progress. Now that this aspect of the school's work has been made truly fit for purpose, the coordinator is aware of the need to shape further decisions about provision on the effectiveness of action taken this term.

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

- Raise the expectations of staff – good

- Broaden the range of teaching styles to stimulate pupils' greater involvement in learning – good
- Improve the quality of the curriculum to encourage pupils' independent skills – satisfactory
- Make better use of assessment information to track pupils' progress and ensure lessons are more exciting and challenging – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The appointment of the deputy headteacher and headteacher to substantive posts has ended the uncertainty regarding continuity of senior management. Staff commented that they feel the new school year has started smoothly and calmly, that team spirit is strong and all staff are committed to ensuring the school is one of the best. The headteacher is able to delegate with confidence knowing that things will be done. Staff holding posts of responsibility are initiating and sustaining action; professional pride is becoming apparent in the realisation of the positive difference their work is making to what the school provides. Although the science leader is new to the role, she has already drawn up a clear action plan based on an audit of current provision. Having taken steps to improve and ensure greater consistency in the provision in English and mathematics, the subject leaders are now ready to take responsibility for evaluating the impact of teaching on learning and to pinpoint where further developments are needed.

Safeguarding is no longer an issue for improvement. It has become an integral part of the school's work and refinements to procedures and records have strengthened the quality. For example, the weekly question for staff on an aspect of safeguarding ensures all have a good level of understanding of their responsibilities, key procedures and current information. Good consideration was given to procedures to ensure pupils' safety and welfare when leaving clubs after school. Safeguarding, along with related health and safety elements, is monitored conscientiously and staff take prompt action to deal with any issues arising.

Members of the Interim Executive Board have been supportive, given a good steer and been critical in evaluating the school's progress. The Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the headteacher have a realistic view of the school's situation and its priorities. They are actively looking for solutions to sustain the impetus for improvement, to share more widely the school's growing success, and also to look at how a governing body may be reconstituted. They are working with the local authority to ensure that support matches the school's needs, and to make efficiencies over an agreed period in the light of a falling budget arising from a drop in numbers on roll and spending to ensure the school has the resources it needs. This situation provides an apposite time to redefine the roles of administrative, teaching and support staff, and to tighten procedures relating to financial management.

The vast majority of parents in their responses to the recent school questionnaire commented positively on the improvements in school and its communication with them. They raised some valid points for action which the school has already taken into account and some queries which the headteacher has answered.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement

- Ensure that all safeguarding requirements are met – good
- Establish clear procedures that are regularly reviewed and understood by staff – good
- Ensure that the school's central record of checks on the suitability of adults to work with children is up to date – good
- Ensure that all staff and governors receive appropriate training – good
- Ensure leadership is effective in driving improvement and establishing clear procedures to check on the quality of the school's performance – good

External support

The support from the local authority has been well targeted and effective. Since the last monitoring inspection, the local authority wisely took a step back to allow the school to decide where support would be most beneficial. As a result, staff and local authority consultants have worked together productively. Advice and suggested practice has been well received and acted on especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage, English and mathematics. Subject leaders have worked alongside consultants to monitor teachers' planning and to review pupils' work. The leaders have then applied this knowledge independently and worked confidently with teaching staff, leading some training sessions and indicating expected practice. The school has also made additional links with recommended schools within and outside the local authority to discuss effective practice and to look at their procedures.

The local authority has provided substantial financial support to enable the upgrading of the school's information and communication technology system and also the purchase of computer equipment for pupils. It has funded two teaching assistants for a year to ensure the school can provide support and intervention programmes for identified pupils. The school has also benefited from advice and support from local authority services in aspects of safeguarding and support for pupils with specific needs.

The recent thorough review carried out by a team of local authority officers gave a detailed, balanced picture of the school with recognition of the areas where there was improvement and also clear guidance on where further action was needed.