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14 March 2011

Mrs C 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 Mrs Christine Millett to your school on 15 and 16 March 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 fifth 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

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.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Margaret Shepherd
Additional inspector

January 2011



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 3 and 4 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 fifth monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 March 2011

Evidence

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

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the deputy headteacher and the leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage have resigned. Appointments have been made for these two posts but the new staff will not be joining the school until the beginning of the summer term. In addition, one of the two seconded teachers has been appointed as the acting deputy headteacher. The accommodation has been improved with a new classroom and a new staff room. During the inspection three members of staff were absent.

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

The rate of pupils' progress continues to increase, although it remains inconsistent across the different classes and between different subjects. Progress in the Nursery and Reception is improving quickly and is more consistent across both classes. Progress in the development of Nursery children's reading and speaking skills is strengthening particularly well. Nursery children are much better at concentrating during whole-class story telling. Both Nursery and Reception children are much more confident in choosing independent activities and in sustaining their concentration during these tasks. This produces a calm and purposeful context for their learning. Improvement in developing children's calculating skills and knowledge and understanding of the world has been slower.

The rate of progress in Key Stage 1 has increased. This is due to a higher proportion of pupils reaching the expected levels and higher levels for their age. Pupils make better progress in reading than in writing and mathematics. More-able pupils make better progress in group work because teachers plan more difficult work, but in whole-class sessions there is still a lack of challenge for these pupils and their progress slows.

Progress in Key Stage 2 has continued to improve and the proportion of pupils attaining the higher levels is increasing. Progress is accelerating in the two Year 5/6 classes because these pupils have a better understanding of what they need to do to improve. Where progress has improved significantly this is because pupils have a much clearer understanding of how well they are doing and how close they are to reaching the next level. There is an increased urgency about their completion of tasks and they evaluate each

other's work more skilfully. However, this is not yet consistent across all classes. Pupils from the resource base continue to improve the progress they make whether they are in their own unit or working alongside their peers. In the majority of classes, pupils now look forward to their work. They settle more quickly to tasks and enjoy working with each other to complete tasks. In other classes improvements have been less rapid because the content of lessons is not as interesting and pupils lose concentration.

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

- Raise standards and improve progress in Key Stage 2 – good

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils appreciate the increased opportunities they have had to take responsibility. They are proud to be buddies and consider their roles very seriously. Other pupils value this new system and feel that they benefit from buddies' support at playtimes. The quality of the work of school councillors has increased significantly. They are pleased that they now meet weekly to discuss issues. They are developing very useful work-related skills such as running meetings and interviewing pupils who want to be buddies. Pupils believe that behaviour is continuing to improve. They understand more clearly that lessons are a time for learning resulting in a calm context for working. They move around the building sensibly and have an increased understanding of the importance of being considerate to each other and responding courteously to adults. Pupils in the resource base are making particularly good progress in developing strategies to manage their behaviour in relation to their particular disabilities. All pupils enjoy assemblies and express empathy for those less fortunate than themselves. Their understanding about other faiths and ethnic groups is increasing but is not yet comprehensive enough.

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

- Ensure pupils accept greater responsibility – good

The effectiveness of provision

All teaching was at least satisfactory with some good and outstanding teaching. Teachers' subject knowledge is strengthening and there are more opportunities for pupils to assess their own and each others' work. Weaknesses are still evident where there are slow starts to lessons, and the pace set is too slow to optimise learning. Although learning objectives are outlined increasingly clearly at the beginning of lessons, too often they are not related closely enough to individual pupils' targets as the lesson progresses. Teaching assistants have become a valuable part of the teaching team, and are increasingly effective when they work with groups. All staff are now very positive when responding to feedback on how to improve their work. The organisation of some teachers working in pairs for planning continues to promote better practice.

The provision for the outdoor learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved considerably. The quality of resources has improved, both indoors and outdoors. There is a wider range of activities that more closely matches children's needs and the quality of adult support for individuals is better. Some opportunities are still missed to extend writing skills in independent activities. The use of learning journals to record children's progress has improved. In the Nursery, group work and the use of stimulating and imaginative resources in the teaching of basic reading and speaking skills have improved considerably.

Information and communication technology (ICT) provision has improved significantly and is having a positive impact on learning through staff using it more confidently in lessons. The school is beginning to extend the range of reading resources after an analysis of different groups of pupils' needs. Children's writing skills are increasingly being developed in tasks across the curriculum. Care, support and guidance continue to be strengths of the school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has sustained her drive to improve provision and raise attainment. She continues to use her clear vision for the school's development to focus sharply on eradicating weaknesses and building on the school's strengths. The school is now in a much better position to sustain effective middle management, with a stronger permanent senior leadership team. However, two key members of this team have yet to take up their posts and take the lead in managing the changes. Although not at full strength, the current team works well together and has an increasingly strong commitment to improve the school. Action planning is more tightly focused with a stronger emphasis on monitoring and developing teaching and learning. Governors continue to build on the range of activities to extend their roles. All leaders now have improved self-evaluation skills, which are focused appropriately on the main weaknesses. Leaders have not yet extended this evaluation across all aspects of its work.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on areas for improvement:

- Make leadership and management more effective – good

External support

There has been a considerable improvement in the quality of support from the local authority. This is valued by the school and has been pivotal to school improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Provide a tightly focused induction process for the two new senior leaders to ensure that they take up their new responsibilities efficiently.
- Extend the scope of the self-evaluation processes to include the whole-school's provision.