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19 March 2011

Mrs V Pilkington-Smith
Headteacher
Larkholme Primary School
Windermere Avenue
Fleetwood
Lancashire
FY7 8QB

Dear Mrs Pilkington-Smith

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Larkholme Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17 and 18 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 third 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 – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

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 Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2011



Annex

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

- Raise standards, improve achievement and accelerate pupils' progress throughout the school by improving the quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum and by effectively monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's work.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that learning is good by:
 - matching work more effectively to pupils' needs
 - improving teachers' understanding of and the use of assessment to identify precisely pupils' next steps in learning
 - eradicating inadequate teaching.
- Ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils in developing their literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology skills.
- Improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the transition into Year 1 by providing a stimulating learning environment and teaching programme so that all children achieve well in their learning and development.
- Ensure that all those who lead and manage the school evaluate and monitor pupils' progress, putting in place effective targets and procedures to enable all pupils to achieve as well as they can.

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Larkholme Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection from 17 and 18 March 2011

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed six lessons and the same number of teachers, and also made brief visits to four other lessons. She observed aspects of the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other school staff, a group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. This monitoring inspection focused mainly on Key Stage 2.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection the associate deputy headteacher has returned to her own school. Another associate headteacher has worked full time at the school since November 2010. An appointment of a permanent deputy headteacher has been made and the appointee is due to commence after Easter. A class teacher on a temporary contract left in December 2010, and has been replaced with another temporary appointment until July 2011. One class teacher has been on long-term sickness absence since November 2010 and has been replaced with supply teachers.

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

Validated data confirm that attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2010 was below average and the attainment of boys was exceptionally low. Data which measure pupils' progress from their starting points at the end of Key Stage 1 and take account of contextual factors show that the progress made by this cohort was no better than for the previous Year 6 cohort in 2009. Overall progress was inadequate, mainly because progress in English was very poor. Middle ability boys made the fewest gains but middle ability girls also fared poorly in English. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities made satisfactory progress, because of the appropriate support received.

There are clear indications that the school has moved on from its history of underachievement. Rates of progress are improving for the school's current pupils, although they are not yet rapid enough to ensure that all reach their full potential. Data from the school's own assessment records, and pupils' work, suggest that more of the current Year 6 pupils are on track to reach the standards of which they are capable by the end of the year. This is the result of consistently good teaching in Year 6. One third of these pupils have special educational needs and standards in Year 6 remain below average overall. School assessment data still show some variation in rates of progress between classes and year groups. For example, too many pupils in Year 5 are not yet reaching the levels they should be capable of at this stage, largely as a result of slow progress during Years 3 and 4.

Work in pupils' books shows improving standards but for some upper Key Stage 2 children there are few lengthy pieces of written work. There is some evidence of writing skills being developed in other subjects but missed opportunities to develop numerical and other skills through subjects such as science.

Pupils enjoy their work in many lessons. They are eager to learn and apply themselves well and this makes a valuable contribution to their progress. They speak positively about being at the school and are enthusiastic about a variety of subjects.

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

- Raise standards, improve achievement and accelerate pupils' progress throughout the school by improving the quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum and by effectively monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's work – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Relationships between adults and pupils are good and the school is a happy place where pupils feel safe and valued. Behaviour is good for the very large majority of pupils. During the inspection an assembly provided good recognition of pupils' recent achievements, encouraging them to take pride in their successes. Pupils who had gained awards through the merit system were congratulated. Groups of pupils confidently reported on their sporting and musical achievements and were commended for these. The school's successful promotion of attendance and punctuality was effectively demonstrated through the cheers from the classes that had won the weekly cups for best attendance and punctuality. The headteacher judiciously used the opportunity to encourage further improvement.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching continues to improve, albeit at a steady rather than a rapid pace. Positive relationships and mainly good behaviour management ensure that lessons run smoothly. In Key Stage 2, more good teaching was seen than on the previous visit but inadequate teaching has not yet been eradicated. There remains a need to increase the proportion of good teaching to accelerate progress. Some weaknesses seen in previous monitoring inspections remain but were observed in fewer lessons. Less time is spent copying learning objectives and teacher-led sessions are generally shorter and more focused allowing more time for pupils to practise and apply their skills and knowledge. In a Year 3 literacy lesson there was a short teacher-led session which made expectations clear. Pupils settled quickly to their work writing letters to an author. All worked productively and the teacher monitored their progress well, making valuable individual interventions to help pupils. In contrast, in another literacy lesson too many pupils drifted off-task and this was not picked up quickly by the teacher so time was wasted.

Teachers are becoming more adept at planning work for pupils at different levels. Pupil progress meetings continue to be held regularly with the headteacher and provide an appropriate means for checking on individual progress. This is helping to pinpoint

underachievement more quickly. The process is also being used to raise targets for those who are achieving well. Because class teaching is not yet consistently good enough to ensure that all pupils make rapid progress, there are a large number of intervention groups to support those who are underachieving. The impact of interventions has not yet been evaluated systematically. Marking continues to make much use of praise. There is some helpful next step marking, especially in Year 6 books, but this is not yet consistent across the school. Some effective use of peer marking was also seen in Year 6 books.

Lessons are usually well contextualised and Year 5 pupils responded with real concern and interest to a series of short vivid video film clips about deforestation. The school is using a themed approach to the teaching of different curriculum subjects but planning does not always make it clear how these will be used to develop literacy and numeracy skills. The use of one exercise book for most work makes it difficult to track progress in the full range of national curriculum subjects, and some pieces of work appear to have no connection with those preceding or following. Nevertheless, there are examples of writing being developed through other subjects and pupils report that they are enjoying the themed approach. Information and communication technology (ICT) is now having more impact. Shared class sets of wireless netbooks are now used regularly and add interest and variety to pupils learning experiences, as well as helping them to develop their ICT skills.

Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage continues to improve with a greater variety of activities, despite the limited outdoor space. During the inspection good use was made of the St Patrick's Day theme.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that learning is good – satisfactory
- Ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils in developing their literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology skills – satisfactory
- Improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the transition into Year 1 by providing a stimulating learning environment and teaching programme so that all children achieve well in their learning and development – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

In the absence of a permanent deputy headteacher the headteacher continues to display resilience and determination in the continued drive for improvement. All staff share her ambitions, showing a genuine willingness to tackle weaknesses and raise achievement. The school now has a wealth of assessment data but on occasion this is interpreted overoptimistically because reference is made to pupils' starting points at the beginning of the year rather than, for example, the levels attained at the end of Key Stage 1. There is increasing recognition of the need to raise expectations, especially for more-able pupils, and to accelerate progress of underachievers. The associate deputy headteacher has made valuable contributions, tightening up the target-setting process for teacher assistant-led intervention groups and developing a system for monitoring their impact. She has also led Year 5 and 6 interventions.

Leadership has been strengthened as the roles of the subject leaders have developed. In mathematics, planning and work scrutinies are carried out systematically and the outcomes used to focus on further improvements. Staff training has been delivered on the use of 'working walls' in classrooms. More practical resources have been purchased. In literacy, the coordinator is increasingly taking responsibility for progress monitoring and work scrutinies but there is still a reliance on external training and support. In ICT, policies have been reviewed and curriculum planning for different year groups refined to highlight the specific skills to be developed. New equipment is enabling the school to make better use of the opportunities afforded by new technology, for example through videoconferencing with a local museum. The coordination of science has addressed gaps in the science curriculum. Coordinators are beginning to be more involved in evaluating the quality of teaching for their subjects.

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

- Ensure that all those who lead and manage the school evaluate and monitor pupils' progress, putting in place effective targets and procedures to enable all pupils to achieve as well as they can – satisfactory

External support

Local authority support continues to be good. Advisers provide much valuable support, including identifying suitable senior staff to support the school in the absence of a permanent deputy headteacher. Consultants continue to provide advice and guidance, particularly for literacy, but also for specific aspects of teaching and learning such as plenaries. In recognition of the school's developing capacity to drive improvement from within, the amount of support is reducing.