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13 May 2011

Miss Alexandra Butler
The Headteacher
The Willows Primary School
Pyle Hill
Newbury
RG14 7SJ

Dear Miss Butler

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Willows Primary School

Following my visit with Melanie Knowles HMI to your school on 11 and 12 May 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 March 2010. 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 West Berkshire.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Russell
Her Majesty's Inspector

PROTECT-INSPECTION



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2010

- Speed up pupils' progress and hence raise their levels of attainment in all classes by:
 - ensuring teachers understand and articulate what can be expected of pupils, given their accurately evaluated starting points from entering the school, from the start of a school year, or at the start of a topic
 - ensuring that the tasks and activities set for pupils in lessons match their needs and that learning moves at a swift pace.
- Develop further the school's curriculum by:
 - ensuring that provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or difficulties is properly planned, organised and evaluated
 - completing the work started on designing and implementing a curriculum that supports the development of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas as required, and enables them to enjoy their learning.
- Improve aspects of care, guidance and support by:
 - strengthening the school's effectiveness in enabling pupils to behave well at all times
 - working further to improve pupils' overall attendance and reduce the numbers of pupils who are persistent absentees
 - working systematically with those pupils whose circumstances makes them vulnerable so they engage fully in their learning and enjoy it.
- Secure the leadership and management of the school by:
 - as a matter of urgency, establishing a permanent and effective senior leadership team
 - developing the roles and skills of the leadership team and middle managers
 - improving the effectiveness of governance.

Special measures: monitoring of The Willows School**Report from the third monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 May 2011****Evidence**

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, members of staff, pupils, parents and carers, the School Improvement Partner and members of the governing body and school improvement board.

Context

The executive headteacher continues to work across two schools, typically spending three days a week at The Willows. There have been very few changes in staffing over the past term; there have been no changes in teaching staff.

A new governing body is currently being established; it will take over from the school improvement board in September 2011.

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

Attainment is rising as pupils increasingly make better progress. They were making at least satisfactory progress in all of the lessons observed during the inspection; in some cases, they were making good progress. Attainment is low in the older year groups because pupils did not make enough progress when they were younger and have a lot of catching up to do. Younger pupils are increasingly working at the expected levels for their ages.

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

- speed up pupils' progress and hence raise their levels of attainment in all classes – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour continues to improve. Pupils have good attitudes to school and to learning. Exclusions are now extremely rare. While a small number of pupils present particularly acute challenges, these pupils are well supported and managed by teachers and teaching assistants; this helps to ensure that learning is not disrupted. Lunchtime incidents have reduced significantly as a result of changes to lunchtime routines and useful additional training for mid-day supervisors. Attendance is low, but rising gradually.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching was at least satisfactory in all of the lessons observed during the inspection; in many lessons, it was good. The school now has some very effective teachers. Less effective teaching typically has one or more of the following features:

- weaknesses in classroom management and routines, leading to wasted time
- ineffective use of the time at the end of the lesson to check and consolidate learning
- weaknesses in the teacher's use of questioning.

Although the quality of marking is still a little variable, it has improved and increasingly provides helpful guidance to pupils about how to improve their work. The way in which staff set individual targets for pupils has recently changed. While still quite new, this is a very promising development.

There have been significant improvements to the curriculum. Planning for the integrated curriculum (where subjects are taught together in a combined way) was a significant weakness at the time of the last visit; it is now much better. Pupils benefit from a wide range of visits and exciting events linked to curriculum topics; these help to enthuse and motivate them. Integrated curriculum lessons provide pupils with useful opportunities to develop their writing skills across a range of contexts.

Teachers now work much more closely together when they plan their lessons. This has improved the quality of planning and is also helping to ensure that pupils in different classes receive a more consistent curriculum experience. Lesson plans now accommodate individual pupils' different abilities much more closely. However, although teachers' lesson plans are better, not everyone has the skills necessary to deliver these improved plans successfully.

Pupils are well supported. Those with particularly acute needs are given considerable help, as are their families. Much good work is being done to reduce pupil absence.

The approach to recording the progress of the youngest children is inconsistent and opportunities for more informal observation of their progress are often missed. Staff also miss opportunities to model language for these children.

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

- develop further the school's curriculum – good
- improve aspects of care, guidance and support – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive headteacher and her deputy continue to provide strong, clear and effective leadership. They have a clear and realistic understanding of the school's

strengths and weaknesses. The school is now improving rapidly – something that parents both recognise and appreciate. Staff morale is very good.

The effectiveness of the school's middle leadership is also developing well. Middle leaders, for example, now play a stronger role in leading planning across their teams. They are making much greater use of data about pupils' achievement, for example by checking the progress that different groups of pupils are making. They also monitor the effectiveness of their team plans more carefully by looking at the impact of the plans' actions on pupils' achievement and other outcomes.

A range of useful work is being undertaken to improve teaching. While the overall quality is improving, the proportion of lessons where teaching is good has not increased significantly in the past term. This is because the support provided to individual teachers to help them to improve their practice is not sufficiently personalised to their particular needs.

Very good work has been done to develop the school's governance. The school improvement board provides sharp challenge and support to school leaders. The introduction of a new governing body for September 2011 is being very well managed. The governing body's statutory instruments, policies and procedures are in place and the school improvement board has already established clear expectations about the new governing body's style and ways of working. New governors also benefit from an individualised induction programme.

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

- secure the leadership and management of the school – good.

External support

The local authority's regular reviews of the school's effectiveness act as a useful supplement to HMI monitoring visits and provide the school's leaders with valuable advice. A range of useful support is in place. Local authority support for the development of phonics, for example, has led to a clear improvement in standards. Local authority officers have also played a very useful role by moderating teachers' judgements about pupils' levels of attainment.

There is now much more extensive joint working with the headteacher's other school: links are in place at many levels – pupils, leaders, staff and governors. These links enrich pupils' curriculum experiences and help to support developments across the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop the way in which leaders work with individual teachers to help them to develop their teaching, ensuring that support is closely tailored to teachers' specific needs.