

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 1231231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566 937
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email:
jsimmons@cfbt.com



20 April 2012

Mrs S Cornall
Headteacher
Highfield Primary School
Wright Street
Chorley
Lancashire
PR6 0SP

Dear Mrs Cornall

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Highfield Primary School

Following my visit with Derek Barnes, additional inspector, to your school on 18 and 19 April 2012, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2011. 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

Newly Qualified teachers may not 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 Executive Director for Children and Young People for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2012



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2011

- Improve the quality of teaching and thus raise pupils' attainment and achievement in all subjects, and particularly in writing, by:
 - making sure pupils know precisely how well they are doing in their work and know what to do in order to improve it
 - improving teachers' lesson planning and the use of adult support to ensure that the abilities and interests of each pupil are met
 - providing sufficient challenge in lessons to ensure that pupils achieve as well as they should.

- Improve the leadership and management of the school by:
 - taking effective measures to monitor and improve the quality of teaching
 - improving the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation procedures to accurately measure the impact of the school's actions
 - raising expectations of pupils' performance throughout the school
 - ensuring that the governing body challenges the school to address weaknesses and sustain improvement
 - rigorously applying systems and engaging with parents and carers to improve attendance.

Special measures: monitoring of Highfield Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 18 and 19 April 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, heard pupils read, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, staff, a group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and two representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the inspection a new Chair of the Governing Body has been appointed. There are also a number of new members of the governing body. One senior teacher has left the school. Two teachers are currently absent through sickness. Two teachers have been seconded to the school as a result of arrangements made with the local authority.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Although attainment remains below average, the evidence from lesson observations and from pupils' work indicates that pupils' progress is improving. School targets have been reviewed to ensure that they are sufficiently challenging. Work to improve the quality and frequency of assessments has resulted in regular data about pupils' progress being collected and better use is now made of this in lesson planning. The school tracking system now provides a clearer picture of pupils' progress as they move through the school, but some inaccuracies in teacher assessments earlier in the school year mean that a lack of clarity remains about the progress of some year groups. A priority for the school since the inspection has been to ensure that teacher assessment data are accurate and with the support of the local authority teachers' skills have been refined so that there is now increased confidence in teacher assessments. Recent school assessment data are indicative of accelerating rates of progress for some classes, especially during the spring term. In the lessons observed, pupils generally made at least satisfactory progress and there were examples of groups of pupils making good progress. However, given the legacy of underachievement for some year groups, rates of progress are not rapid enough to enable all pupils to catch up and reach the levels they should be capable of achieving. Pupils' presentation in books, including handwriting, is improving. The school has introduced strategies to improve writing skills, including opportunities to develop these through other subjects, and pupils' topic books show that these are beginning to have an impact, although levels of attainment remain low. There is ready acknowledgement that the impact of the school's improvement strategies on raising attainment in upper Key Stage 2 has been limited to date.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving. No inadequate teaching was observed. There are good relationships between teachers and other adults and children, which help to foster the good attitudes to learning observed in most lessons. Lessons are generally well planned and all teachers now use an agreed planning format which takes account of the need to differentiate work for pupils working at different levels. Teachers' understanding of data, and of the levels the individuals in their classes are working at, is improving but the extent to which the tasks set match the ability of pupils in groups is not sufficiently refined. Where there are gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding these are beginning to be identified and addressed, although there is still some way to go to ensure all gaps are closed. Interventions are in place for a number of groups where underachievement has been identified, but the effectiveness of these has not been fully evaluated. Instances of groups of pupils struggling in lessons because they did not have the necessary knowledge or skills to tackle the task set were observed and teachers do not always deal with this effectively enough. Individual pupil targets have now been set in terms of levels, but pupils' understanding of these varies. Some suitable examples of specific writing targets were seen in use in lessons and pupils clearly understood these and were keen to follow the advice and improve their work.

The quality of marking is improving. The school's scrutiny of books shows that teachers are following the revised marking policy. Some teachers do allow specific times for pupils to respond to comments made, but this is not universal and in some books there is little evidence of pupil follow-up. Learning objectives are typically shared with the class and are usually clear. Success criteria are also beginning to be used. On occasion, teachers do not pick up pupils' misunderstandings or confusion quickly enough. Teacher assistant support is variable and examples of very effective support were seen but in other instances the teaching assistant contribution was less effective, especially during longer teacher-led sessions. Teachers' questioning skills are variable. In the best lessons teachers explored pupils' answers, asking supplementary questions and making it clear when the pupil answer was not specific enough. In other cases teachers simply accepted the pupils' first responses at face value, without elaborating on or reinforcing correct answers or seeking to encourage deeper thinking where answers were vague or less relevant. The school has revised its teaching strategy for letters and sounds to ensure that all sessions are led by well-trained teachers, with teaching assistants providing support.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching and thus raise pupils' attainment and achievement in all subjects, and particularly in writing – satisfactory

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Inspectors' observations of behaviour in lessons and around school indicate that most pupils behave well most of the time. In corridors and around school pupils are courteous and respectful of others. Pupils show good attitudes to learning and are generally positive about

school life. They are attentive, interested and keen to answer questions. They engage well with the tasks set and move between activities sensibly. They settle to work with a minimum of fuss. Systems of rewards and sanctions are generally regarded as fair. Members of the school council are proud of their role, which they feel is valued by the school. For instance, they were pleased to have contributed to decisions about improvements to equipment in the school playgrounds.

Attendance remains below average despite much hard work by school staff. Strategies to encourage higher levels of attendance are beginning to show some limited impact. For example, during the inspection certificates for 100% attendance during the spring term were awarded in assembly and pupils clearly valued receiving these. Weekly class awards for attendance and punctuality are also being used and are helping to promote good attendance. Pupils with records of persistent absenteeism are targeted and regular attendance panels are held for those whose attendance dips below set levels. School leaders recognise that term-time holidays are a significant factor in absence levels and strategies to reduce this are being developed.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

There has been ready acknowledgement of the need for improvement in the outcomes for pupils leaving the school. The headteacher had sought the support of the local authority before the school went into special measures. Staff have worked hard to make progress since the inspection. There is a clear understanding of the issues the school is facing and there are specific plans to address these. Leadership and management have been strengthened by the addition of two seconded posts. These experienced staff have taken on the roles of literacy and numeracy subject coordinators in the short term. They were quick to grasp some of the essentials that needed to be tackled and this has helped the school to start to make progress and begin to deliver improvement. Nevertheless, there is still some way to go to ensure that attainment is raised sufficiently.

The school's senior leaders are involved in monitoring a variety of areas including lesson observations, teachers' planning, pupils' work, homework, marking and attendance. The outcomes of monitoring activities are beginning to be evaluated more thoroughly so that they can be better used to address specific weaknesses. Although all teachers are routinely observed, the follow-up of identified areas for improvement in teaching is not always focused enough. Staffing difficulties and changes are being managed carefully to avoid an adverse impact on rates of pupils' progress.

School policies have been revised, for example in relation to marking, attendance and calculations. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is being promoted effectively. For example, in one Year 6 lesson pupils were encouraged to reflect on and take pride in their achievements. Appropriate plans are in place to ensure that suitable appointments are made when seconded teachers leave at the end of the summer term.

The appointment of a new Chair of the Governing Body, who has very quickly gained an understanding of the key issues, has helped to strengthen the governing body's role. In addition, the appointment of new governors with particular areas of expertise, such as human resources, is also very valuable in supporting the senior leadership team to move the school forward. A governors' day in school is planned with a series of training sessions to increase governor knowledge and understanding of their role and the school. A standards and effectiveness committee has been established to monitor progress against the action plan.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the leadership and management of the school – satisfactory

External support

The local authority statement of action for the school has been evaluated and as it fulfils the requirements it is 'fit for purpose'. The local authority has provided much good and very effective support. This has included significant staff development work with teachers and assistance with seconded posts, as well as adviser support to leaders and managers. Specific staff development sessions have focused on issues such as differentiation, in-class assessment and assessment for learning and target-setting. This is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching. Governors and staff value the work and support of the local authority. A recent local authority review provided a succinct and valuable summary of the school's progress to date. In addition, the local authority attendance consultant is working with the headteacher and other staff to develop strategies further to improve attendance.