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29 June 2012

Mrs Joan McGrath
The Executive Headteacher
Woodlands Junior School
Loxford Lane
Ilford
Essex
IG1 2PY

Dear Mrs McGrath

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Woodlands Junior School

Following my visit with Miranda Perry, Additional Inspector, to your school on 27 and 28 June 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 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 – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

One newly qualified teacher may be appointed in Year 4.

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Redbridge

Yours sincerely

Chris Wood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment and accelerate the rate of pupils' progress in English and mathematics by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders analyse the assessments of pupils' work in order to identify underachievement quickly and implement strategies to address it
 - ensuring that senior leaders robustly monitor these strategies to make certain they are fully effective.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good by April 2012 by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders rigorously monitor teaching and provide effective feedback
 - improving teachers' planning and use of assessment so that the learning needs of different groups of pupils are met
 - improving the quality of marking in order to provide consistent guidance to pupils on the next steps in their learning
 - ensuring that pupils are fully involved in their learning in lessons.
- Improve the effectiveness of the governing body by ensuring that it challenges and holds senior school leaders to account for pupils' attainment and progress and the quality of teaching in the school.

Special measures: monitoring of Woodlands Junior School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 27 and 28 June 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed parts of 18 lessons taught by 16 teachers. They also observed parts of a Year 6 Enterprise Day that was led by external practitioners. Six lesson observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders new to the school. Inspectors met with school staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority. They talked to pupils in lessons and break times and met with pupils from Year 3 and Year 4. They also met with a small group of parents and carers. Inspectors reviewed teachers' planning and scrutinised pupils' work in lessons. Inspectors also examined a range of school documents, including self-evaluation and information about pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour.

Context

The executive headteacher and associate headteacher have been in post since September 2011. An assistant headteacher was appointed in April 2012. A deputy headteacher, present during part of the monitoring inspection, will start in September 2012. There have been a number of staff changes since the last monitoring inspection, including a full restructuring of support staff. All classes have permanent teachers for September. A newly convened interim executive board will take over from the governing body shortly.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The rate of progress made by pupils in English and mathematics is accelerating quickly as a consequence of improving teaching and a curriculum that is much better matched to pupils' needs and interests. Pupils are now catching up well on past underachievement, although some variation between year groups remains. Leaders made astute changes to the Year 6 curriculum during the latter part of this academic year so that it focused sharply on English, mathematics and science. Pupils and teachers worked hard during this period so that the time available for learning could be exploited fully and pupils were fully engaged in activities. Consequently, pupils made quick progress from very low starting points. Generally however, the rate of progress made by pupils in Year 5 has been slower. Leaders have strengthened teaching for this group and have organised 'booster' sessions for those who have fallen behind. As a result, their rate of progress has risen steadily and their attitudes to learning have improved markedly.

Writing remains an area of comparative weaknesses across the school. Nevertheless, there have been significant improvements in this area. The Big Write initiative

enables pupils to write regularly for a range of purposes and much better use is being made of pupil-led discussion to rehearse ideas for writing. For example, a lively debate in Year 5 about whether computers cause obesity was helpful preparation for a piece of persuasive writing. Some teachers still lack confidence when modelling successful writing and pupils currently see too few examples of high quality written work.

The executive headteacher and associate headteacher have inspired staff who share their high expectations. Successful induction for new leaders enables them to take on their roles quickly; they are already beginning to make an impact. Senior leaders analyse information about pupils' progress thoroughly and evaluate the impact of their actions perceptively. They are well placed to introduce new initiatives or revise existing strategies to tackle underachievement. Middle leaders are successfully taking a more prominent role in helping teachers to improve planning and assessment. Currently, they have more limited experience of observing teaching or supporting colleagues through the meetings that are held to discuss pupil progress. Pupils and parents and carers say that clearer whole-school routines have increased enjoyment of learning, behaviour and attendance.

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

- raise attainment and accelerate the rate of pupils' progress in English and mathematics – good.

The quality of teaching

Over time, high staff turnover has hampered improvements to teaching. However, senior leaders' determination to recruit the best teachers possible has paid off. Recent strong appointments are in place and experienced teachers have been appointed for September. Senior leaders monitor teaching regularly and have an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. Training and individual support are well focused. Consequently, the proportion of consistently good teaching across the school has risen. Satisfactory teaching generally has increasingly positive features, although a small proportion of inadequate teaching remains.

Planning has improved significantly over time. Year teams plan together and there is much greater consistency between classes. Activities are logically sequenced and usually lead pupils through appropriately challenging stages of learning. Currently, some teachers are more confident when planning work that meets the needs of pupils of different abilities in mathematics than in English. Marking is regular and provides useful guidance on what pupils can do to improve their work. It accurately assesses attainment and progress. The best marking opens up a productive dialogue with pupils about their personal targets. On a few occasions personal targets are not reviewed regularly enough.

Improved teaching and a more exciting curriculum have increased pupils' engagement considerably. Most pupils are exceptionally keen to learn and feel a

sense of achievement when mastering new skills. For example, pupils in Year 4 demonstrated their enthusiasm and aptitude for modern foreign languages when learning a counting rhyme in French. Opportunities to work with visitors to the school are increasing pupils' confidence and understanding of the world of work. Reflecting on the enterprise project, one pupil commented maturely, 'We have learnt to resolve our problems. Today you will see us working as total professionals.'

In almost all lessons there are clear criteria by which pupils can assess their own progress. Often these are generated by the pupils through discussion with the teacher. In the best lessons teachers regularly check how well these have been achieved. Some success criteria are still too general or do not relate to progression in knowledge or skills development.

Teachers' use of questioning and their management of class discussion are generally much more confident and purposeful. In the best lessons, teachers challenge pupils to think harder and add detail to their responses. In some lessons the pace of learning is still too slow. Consequently pupils, particularly the more able, do not begin the challenging work that is planned quickly enough.

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

- improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good by April 2012 – good.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

At the time of the last monitoring inspection the school was asked to consider radical strategies for widening the capacity of the governing body. Having considered all options carefully, the school, local authority and Chair of the Governing Body made the decision to apply for an interim executive board. The application was confirmed as being successful on 19 June 2012. In the intervening period, the Chair of the Governing Body and Vice-Chair continued to monitor rigorously the school's progress against the areas for development. These two individuals and a third member of the governing body will now form the nucleus of a shadow governing body. Members of the interim executive board possess a wide range of professional skills and expertise. As such, they are well placed to help the school improve further. Clearly, they have not yet had time to impact on provision or outcomes. Nevertheless, they have considerably increased the capacity of the governing body to hold leaders to account.

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

- improve the effectiveness of the governing body by ensuring that it challenges and holds senior leaders to account for pupils attainment and progress and the quality of teaching in the school – good.

External support

The school and the local authority continue to work together very productively. The attached local authority adviser monitors the school regularly and offers timely support and challenge. Wisely, local authority advisers have focused on those areas of the school's work where they can have most impact. For example, on-going support has ensured that the daily 'snappy-maths' sessions have contributed to increasing rates of progress in mathematics. Crucially, the local authority responded quickly to the move to set up an interim executive board. This was achieved promptly, increasing leadership capacity in both the short and longer terms.