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29 November 2007

Mrs Shirley Wellings
The Headteacher
Western Springs Primary School
School Road
Rugeley
Staffordshire
WS15 2PD

Dear Mrs Wellings

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WESTERN SPRINGS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Rajinder Harrison, Additional Inspector, to your school on 20 and 21 November 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2006. 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. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children and Lifelong Learning for Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith HMI

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF WESTERN SPRINGS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the third monitoring inspection: 23 November 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including nine lessons, scrutinised documents and pupils' work, and met with the headteacher, the senior leadership team, groups of pupils, members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority (LA) and subject and phase leaders. They also analysed parent questionnaire responses.

Context

Since the second monitoring visit the school has had a period of staffing stability and has changed the year groups taught by some staff. There is a new Year 6 teacher and a seconded deputy headteacher has replaced the existing deputy who left to take up his headship at the start of the school year. Since the previous visit, the school has had a number of structural changes, including the formation of an outdoor play area for the Nursery. At the time of the inspection, the pre-school group are using the school hall as their base whilst their purpose built accommodation is being completed. This has allowed the school to have a morning and afternoon nursery class. A group of parents, supported by the local community and local youths, has landscaped the entrance to the school which now makes a very welcoming feature as pupils arrive.

Achievement and standards

In the Foundation Stage children start school with levels below expectation in most areas of learning. Because of the very caring relationships the school fosters, children settle quickly and are safe and well looked after. They make new friends quickly, work confidently and behave exceptionally well. Teaching is good. Interesting activities with a good balance between those that are adult led activities and those the children choose make learning fun. Children progress well and most achieve the expected levels by the end of the Foundation Stage. They perform least well in their literacy skills, particularly writing where they are working at below expected levels. Effective strategies, such as more speaking, reading and writing activities, are in place to address this. The classroom accommodation is very stimulating and well resourced and the outdoor areas provide attractive space where children can play and learn independently and explore and extend their skills.

In Key Stage 1 standards remain low, but confirmed results show that pupils have achieved higher in assessments in 2007. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics have all increased significantly on the previous year's values. Results in reading and mathematics are the best the school has had and show the strong

shoots of improvement. These results show much improved progress for children from the time they started school in the Nursery.

Results in Key Stage 2 tests showed a marked improvement in English, but mathematics and science results remained much the same as the previous year and low. The achievement for these pupils remained unsatisfactory mainly because improvements in the quality of teaching and the increased progress of pupils in lessons was too late to overcome the poor progress these pupils had made in previous years.

School records show that pupils make at least satisfactory progress, and in some year groups good progress, especially when lessons are challenging and well matched to pupils' abilities. A greater proportion of lessons are challenging than has been observed on previous visits.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- ensure teachers set suitably challenging tasks for pupils and increase the progress made in lessons – good.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils say they feel safe within school and that there are very few instances of bullying or other forms of intimidation. The majority of pupils say they enjoy school and this is confirmed by parents. However, attendance remains very low and punctuality, by a significant minority of pupils, is poor. These are areas where greater cooperation by parents would support the school's drive to improve.

Behaviour around the school and within lessons is good and reflects the good moral development of pupils and their well developed social skills. Parents commented upon the greatly improved behaviour of the pupils and when pupils have gone on educational visits they have been complimented for their good behaviour. Pupils are engaged in most lessons and say that the revised curriculum has helped concentration and done much to extend their enjoyment of learning. It has also helped enhance pupils' spiritual and cultural development, which are good.

Pupils are aware of the need to keep fit and to remain healthy. They also have a good understanding of how to keep safe. They support each other well and act as playground buddies. They are very proud of their school and make visitors very welcome. They also make a good contribution to the local community by acting as the 'green gang' or singing at the local church.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved, particularly in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 2. Lessons are engaging and challenge pupils so that they

make good progress. Planning has improved through good coaching and now it ensures work is better matched to the abilities of the pupils. When teaching is less good, mainly within Key Stage 1, work is not well matched to pupils' needs, the pace of lessons is slower, pupils are complacent and do not make as much progress.

The impact of professional development and peer support within school is evident from the improvements to teaching and to the curriculum. Lessons make better use of teachers' assessments and for the older pupils the 'learning conversations' have been effective in increasing motivation and engagement. Joint planning and good support from middle managers has led to an atmosphere, in most parts of the school, of mutual support and greater urgency in making sure lessons engage and challenge pupils.

The curriculum has been enhanced by the introduction of the Creative Curriculum initiative. This has been carefully planned and introduced and is giving a greater coherence and purpose to the work covered by pupils who say it makes work exciting and more meaningful. They enjoy the wide variety of activities they take part in, especially when it involves a visit off site or visitors to school. As one girl commented when she was writing a thank you letter for the work her class had done with the local power station the day before, 'I have never had more fun in my life.' This works best when staff are committed and work well together to plan and deliver exciting lessons. Staff and pupils both commented that behaviour has improved in the afternoon as a direct consequence of an improved and more relevant curriculum. Pupils also commented that they felt it helped their work in literacy and numeracy.

The school has a very good pastoral support and there are good procedures to ensure the safety of pupils. Targets are well known by pupils and they are given appropriate support to meet these. Additional support is provided to help pupils prepare for key stage tests.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- Ensure that procedures for safeguarding pupils are implemented rigorously – good.

Leadership and management

The very strong leadership of the headteacher has ensured the school continues to improve. She has been very well supported by the deputy headteacher who has worked closely with staff to coach them and improve the quality of teaching and learning. Middle management has improved and now is generally good with a strong nucleus that is well focused upon bringing about further improvements to the quality of provision, although there is still much to be done to overcome previous weaknesses. The school has an atmosphere of commitment to improvement and it must now consolidate the good work so far and sustain improvements to standards and achievement.

The school has worked well with the LA to implement the intensifying support programme (ISP) and this, along with support from staff within school, has delivered good professional development for all staff. The school has taken greater responsibility for its own development and this reflects the increased capacity for improvement. Governors are well informed and hold the school suitably to account.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- carry out rigorous monitoring of the school's performance to identify exactly where weaknesses lie. Draw up and implement plans to rectify the weaknesses – good
- improve the effectiveness of the governing body – good.

External support

The local authority continues to provide good support for the school. It brokered the secondment of a deputy headteacher from a local school and has completed a review of the school including observing all staff teach. The feedback has been used by the school to focus future developments. The local authority has given additional support from consultants and has effectively introduced the ISP programme.