

9 July 2008

Mr Graham Burrows
Executive Headteacher
Westhoughton Parochial Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mr Burrows

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WESTHOUGHTON
PAROCHIAL C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Eithne Proffitt, Additional Inspector, to your school on 7 and 8 July 2008, 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 June 2007. 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 – good.

Newly qualified teachers may not 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, the Director of Bolton Council Children's Services and the diocese.

Yours sincerely

Roger Gill
Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF WESTHOUGHTON PAROCHIAL C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 7 and 8 July 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed a range of lessons. The school's documentation was scrutinised and inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the headteacher and deputy headteacher designate, members of the leadership team, class teachers, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The school continues to be led by an interim executive headteacher. Since the last visit, the governors have appointed a headteacher and a deputy headteacher who take up their posts in September 2008. The interim headteacher is to leave this term along with the present deputy headteacher who is retiring. There is now a full complement of teaching staff.

Achievement and standards

The initiatives introduced since September 2008 are starting to influence pupils' progress. Up until February 2008, the school's efforts to raise standards and improve achievement were thwarted by the large gaps in pupils' knowledge, which had occurred over several years. Now, owing to the improvements made in teaching, pupils' progress is speeding up. This is demonstrated most noticeably by the rate at which learning in Year 6 has accelerated this year. Since February 2008, for example, these pupils have caught up in reading, writing and mathematics at double the expected rate for their age. Standards in other year groups are generally rising steadily. The progress made by pupils with learning difficulties and by those capable of above average attainment is improving in line with the developments in teaching. Standards are still not high enough but there are encouraging signs of improvement.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2007:

- Raise standards and improve progress to at least satisfactory levels for all groups of pupils – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development was not a key area for development identified in the inspection report of June 2007. Thus it was not a focus of this visit. However, pupils' behaviour is still a positive feature of their personal development as expressed by their conduct in lessons and around school and their continuing above average attendance.

Quality of provision

There has been good improvement since the last visit in the way that pupils' learning is evaluated regularly. Valuable records of pupils' previous and current learning now exist which enable leaders to determine which pupils are on track and which are still some way off their academic targets. Furthermore, teachers are now more effective in making accurate judgements about pupils' writing. This, in turn, means that the pupils' tracking record contains valid information and can be used purposefully to judge progress. Previously, there was little consistency between the judgements made about pupils' writing from class to class. Good guidance from the LA consultant for teaching and learning has improved this weakness in teaching. Teachers' marking is generally more helpful now in praising pupils for their efforts and pointing out where improvements could be made. These helpful comments sometimes make reference to pupils' own targets, which many confidently rattle off by heart. The regular monitoring of pupils' progress means that small groups of pupils with similar difficulties can be identified and taught the specific skills needed to overcome them.

While there has been good progress in establishing a system for regular review, the degree to which effective action is taken as a result of this depends on the quality of teaching across the school. Most teaching is successful at using assessments to help speed up pupils' learning but there is still some teaching that fails to stretch the higher attainers and boost the progress of pupils who find learning difficult. The lack of a consistent approach in taking effective action when using assessment remains an issue.

The school has recently implemented the current national recommendations for literacy and numeracy. This means that literacy lessons often make useful links with other subjects, for example history, to make learning about sentence construction more relevant and interesting. Role play, quick-fire discussions with a partner and other ways of promoting skills in speaking and listening all contribute to the improvements in progress. However, some lessons drag and pupils lose interest because these methods are not used often or skilfully enough to create the context for quicker learning.

Provision in the Reception class has improved because new resources have been purchased and the room has been reorganised to accommodate them. The increased range of activities available has resulted in a greater choice for children. They show more confidence and maturity when working independently. Advances in the facilities outside have been less successful. This is partly but not entirely due to the small space for learning outside. Nevertheless, the school knows about this problem and is working hard to resolve it.

Pupils' learning sometimes benefits well from the evaluations conducted at the end of lessons. Teachers have been introduced to the skills of adjusting pupils' learning in the light of the progress they have made but not all are yet practising these skills successfully. Even the satisfactory teaching sometimes fails to use this information to set high enough challenges for pupils capable of more demanding tasks. Moreover,

the occasional incidences of inadequate teaching do not promote learning well enough for higher or lower attaining pupils.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2007:

- Regularly review the progress that individuals are making through the year and take effective action when necessary – satisfactory.
- Ensure that teachers use the information they hold about individuals' standards and progress to good effect when planning and teaching lessons – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The productive partnership created with the governors and the LA has contributed well to the recent improvements. The interim executive headteacher has continued to provide the school with clear educational direction and been responsible for maintaining the momentum produced by the partnership. The action plans for English and mathematics, which were in place in February 2008, are beginning to influence the progress made by pupils.

The most important advance made by the school in recent months is the creation of a system designed to monitor pupils' progress. Leaders and teachers can now track pupils' achievements confidently and spot where they are failing to make the required progress towards their ambitious targets. For example, it is often writing that has been slower to improve than other aspects of learning. Evidence from the system can now pinpoint which year groups need even more support to remedy this issue.

The quality of teaching has been checked more rigorously of late in terms of pupils' standards and the progress they are making. This means that the interim executive headteacher knows why some teaching is accelerating pupils' learning and why some is struggling to promote satisfactory progress. Clearly, not all pupils are achieving as well as they can, but the school continues to make satisfactory progress towards this objective.

The school is about to go through a radical change in leadership but the governors, interim executive headteacher and LA have paved the way well for this transition. The governing body now works very closely with the LA group that was established to support the school. Moreover, the governors' plans for improvement are now incorporated within the school's development plans.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2007:

- Ensure that school leaders at all levels provide clear educational direction to enable pupils to achieve as well as they can – satisfactory.
- Firmly establish effective systems through which to monitor and improve pupils' progress – good.

External support

The LA continues to provide good support for the school. It has played an important role in helping the school conduct effective monitoring of teaching. Moreover, it has given good assistance in improving the resources, and the way that they are organised, in Reception. The consultant for teaching and learning has provided valuable advice about how lessons could be improved to quicken the pace of learning and raise standards. Diocesan advisers have worked hard in helping the school review the effectiveness of its accommodation.

Priorities for further improvement

The priorities for further improvement continue to be those identified at the school's inspection in June 2007.