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20 May 2008

Mr Stephen Hall
Associate Headteacher
Elm Wood School
Carnac Street
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Dear Mr Hall

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ELM WOOD SCHOOL

Following my visit with David Whatson, Additional Inspector, to your school on 6th and 7th May 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in December 2007. 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 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 Lambeth Department of Inclusion.

Yours sincerely

Michael Pye
Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ELM WOOD SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 6th and 7th May 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and pupils' work, and met with the Executive headteacher, the Associate headteacher, groups of pupils, governors, a representative of the local authority, and observed ten part lessons.

Context

This is a one form, inner-city primary, whose intake reflects the local community, which is very mixed in terms of housing, cultural and social backgrounds. The current headteacher joined the school in the previous month. Since the inspection the governing body has supported a move to establishing a federation with a local school. Prompt action by the school and local authority has meant that the development of the federation is well advanced. A common governing body, with one Chair of Governors is to be established during this month.

Achievement and standards

Progress in Years 1 to 6 was judged to be inadequate and standards were insufficiently high at the time of the last inspection. The school, commendably, established a new, more accurate baseline for pupils' standards in January, and has introduced a cycle of assessments of pupils' attainment. This, together with strategies such as meetings to discuss pupils' progress, is now ensuring a more effective tracking of achievement levels. Improvements to the quality of teaching and learning are also contributing to some good, accelerated, progress, but it is not consistent over subjects and year groups and it is as yet unclear whether this can be sustained.

Many pupils in the current Year 6 have made good and sometimes very good progress. More pupils are on track to achieve the levels expected for their age in this year's tests than in 2007. This is an improvement upon the findings of the last inspection. However, there are differences between subjects; currently standards in reading, mathematics and science are higher than in writing. Not all pupils in Year 6 are making the same accelerated progress. In reading, for example, whilst 60% of the pupils made the expected progress, the remainder did not make the progress that their classmates achieved.

Standards in Years 3 to 5 have also improved. The March assessments show that more pupils are on track to achieve the expected level. However, inconsistencies exist between subjects and year groups. For example, more pupils are on track to achieve the expected level in reading than in writing. In Year 3, there has been little improvement in mathematics compared to the improvements in reading, whilst there has been good improvement in mathematics in Year 4.

Compared to the 2007 assessments, more pupils in Year 2 are on track to achieve the expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's tracking information indicates that since January 2008, the progress of many pupils has improved. However, this is not consistent. In Year 2 progress is stronger in reading, with 81% of pupils on track to meet their targets, than in writing (74%), and over half the pupils have not made the progress that others have in mathematics. In Year 1 pupils' progress in writing is weaker than reading and mathematics.

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

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science and make sure pupils reach their potential – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Pupils demonstrate good positive attitudes towards their work. They have noticed how the school is improving, referring to the new artefacts and displays around the school. They are proud of their new books, which they feel is encouraging them to take more care with their work. The newly decorated environment has also been noticed with one pupil saying, 'It makes me feel I can learn better – it's brighter and happier'. Pupils enjoy coming to school, but attendance remains lower than at other schools. They are eager to earn the award for good attendance and there are signs that the gap between the national average for attendance and the school's record is closing. Pupils feel safe and secure and note and feel pupil mediators and adults are effective in helping to resolve any problems.

Quality of provision

At the time of the last inspection teaching and learning were inadequate. Pupils were willing to work hard but teachers' expectations were too low. After the inspection the school's new senior management team moved quickly to address this issue. Inexperienced teachers were moved within the federation, and a very rigorous cycle of lesson observations and scrutiny of work was introduced. This has had a positive impact and is making a significant contribution to the improving pupil's progress. However, there has been insufficient time since the last inspection for all pupils to make up the gaps in their achievement levels.

Teachers now plan with colleagues from across the federation, sharing experience and professional knowledge. This is resulting in pupils receiving work of an appropriately challenging nature in most, but not all, lessons. A Year 5 pupil said, 'we are being pushed now'. On occasions, movement from whole class to individual or small group work takes too long and slows the pace of learning. Teachers are making good use of the interactive whiteboards to motivate pupils, who, because of the environmental changes, say that 'we can reach them now'. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Other resources are being well used to ensure that pupils can achieve the learning aims of the lesson. Monitoring by senior managers and the local authority helps ensure a good level of feedback and guidance to staff, and this is reflected in the raised expectations of teachers. For example, pupils say they are now being encouraged to pay attention to the presentation of their work. In some lessons, adults miss opportunities to further

challenge pupils when questioning them. There is an improvement in the quality of teachers' marking, which now gives pupils good opportunities to respond to teachers' comments.

The curriculum has been improved. The school reviewed the curriculum, and made changes so that it more fully meet the needs of pupils. These have resulted, for example, in pupils having more frequent handwriting and guided reading sessions. There are discrete information and communication technology lessons in the refurbished suite. Resources have been purchased, for example, in mathematics and in science that support the new emphasis on pupils investigating and solving problems. The pupils enjoy and feel motivated by the theme sessions, such as the federation's art fortnight. The pupils are also benefiting from the enhancement opportunities they have, for example, the brass band, and the drama work associated with the National Theatre.

Pupils say they feel safe and well cared for. They now have learning targets but not all know them. There are inconsistencies in the degree to which literacy targets are reinforced and referred to in other lessons such as history.

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

- Improve learning by ensuring that teachers have higher expectations of pupils and provide achievable challenges to pupils at all levels of ability – good

Leadership and management

The senior leadership team has acted quickly to address the issues raised in the December 2007 report. The school's improvement plan clearly identifies the necessary actions, and a review of progress has recently been carried out. The rigorous monitoring, involving weekly work scrutiny, lesson observations and interviews with pupils, has successfully raised the expectations of pupils and teachers, and improved the quality of teaching and learning. This has improved standards and achievement. However, there has been insufficient time for the full impact of these changes to be seen across all subjects and classes, and whether they can be sustained.

New policies and procedures, together with a new management structure, have been introduced. These have taken into account the needs of the school, but also those of the emerging federation. The advantages afforded by the federation are being well used, and have brought benefits in professional development opportunities for staff, support for newly qualified teachers, and shared learning experiences for pupils.

The cycle of monitoring and evaluation enables senior leaders to have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. It is regular and systematic and helps to inform development planning. However, there is an inconsistent approach to identifying measurable success criteria, against which progress can be judged.

Subject leaders have had an impact in improving the curriculum. For example, more opportunities for reading, speaking and listening, and investigative work have been introduced to meet the learning needs of pupils. These leaders, particularly the mathematics and science co-ordinators, have had few opportunities to observe lessons. This would enable them to gain a wider view of teaching and learning, the impact on standards and achievement, and subsequently inform their subject development planning. The tracking of individual pupils' progress is good, although the school has yet to develop a system for tracking the progress of different groups of pupils and thereby show where intervention is successful, or where further action is necessary.

Senior leaders and governors have also had to deal with the period of transition into federation. The governing body has moved quickly to help the school move towards the new arrangement. Strategic decisions have been quickly taken which have not only enabled the school to make the necessary changes, but that also meet the needs of this school within the context of the federation. For example, a new staff structure is in place for the next academic year, and new teaching appointments have been made. The governing body has been involved in these preparations. Improvements have also resulted from the cutting of the budget surplus through appropriate expenditure on resources for pupils and the redecoration of the school. Governors have also been involved in decisions concerning staff deployment and recruitment. Consequently, opportunities for the current governing body to actively get involved in the monitoring of the school have been limited.

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

- Improve the quality of leadership at all levels through monitoring and self-evaluation that provide a more accurate picture of teaching, learning, standards and achievement – satisfactory
- Strengthen governance, particularly in monitoring the school's performance more systematically, so that governors can hold it to account – satisfactory

External support

The school's senior leaders have used much of their own professional knowledge and resources, particularly the advantages afforded by the federation, to contribute to school improvement. In areas where the local authority has been actively involved, such as improving teaching and learning and in supporting the school over personnel issues, the quality of that support is good. The Action Monitoring Group, which includes the school improvement partner works alongside the school to raise the quality of teaching, and confirm the school's picture of standards and achievement. Additionally, the local authority has been particularly supportive in informing parents and governors about, and overseeing the move to, federation status.

The quality of the local authority's statement of action is satisfactory.

Priorities for further improvement

- In development planning ensure that measurable success criteria are identified against which progress can be judged.
- Extend the use of tracking systems to enable the school to identify the progress of different groups of pupils, and the impact of any support provided for them.
- Extend the role of subject leaders, particularly in mathematics and science, to ensure that they have a secure understanding of pupils' standards and achievement, and the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility.