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28 November 2008

Mr Gareth Robertshaw
Headteacher
Westhoughton Parochial C of E Primary School
The Fairways
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Bolton
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Dear Mr Robertshaw

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Westhoughton Parochial C of E Primary School

Following my visit with Lesley Clark, Additional Inspector, to your school on 26 and 27 November 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth 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 – 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, 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 November 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed seven lessons or part lessons. The school's documentation was scrutinised and inspectors met with the key staff, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority's children's services.

Context

The headteacher and deputy headteacher took up post in September 2008. There is currently no long-term sick leave among the staff, but there is temporary cover for a maternity leave in Year 2. A temporary teacher was appointed to Year 1 in October 2008 to fill a vacant post. The governing body continues to work in partnership with the local authority's project group that was established to support the school.

Achievement and standards

Since September 2008, most pupils have continued learning at a steady pace. Some have made faster progress, particularly because a new system of working with individuals who have fallen behind in their work has been employed. These pupils have received a package of intensive support that has often paid dividends in helping them catch up. Furthermore, children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) has speeded up well as a result of major developments since the last monitoring visit, for example in room arrangement and the use of the outside area. In a small number of cases, in Key Stages 1 and 2, progress overall is still too slow in reading, writing and mathematics because of weaknesses in teaching. Nevertheless, the school is tackling these pockets of weak practice vigorously with some signs of success. The school's evidence about standards attained in 2008 demonstrates that by the end of Year 2 pupils were maintaining the improvement seen during the previous visit. Similarly, at the end of Year 6 standards were also maintained, except in writing. Progress in writing for pupils from Year 2 to Year 5 remains weak. In Year 6, pupils caught up enormously in writing but did not have time to make all the improvements needed. As with shortfalls in writing, the school is still trying to make up for previous gaps in pupils' learning in mathematics, particularly where the more able pupils are concerned.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- 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 have continued to respond very positively to the expectations placed on them by the new leadership. They are really proud of themselves, which prompted comments from older pupils such as 'Within 12 weeks we suddenly feel grown up – we find it amazing.' The recent emphasis on music, singing and performance has fired pupils' imaginations. As a result, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has received a boost. Pupils' behaviour remains a positive feature as does their regular attendance.

Quality of provision

There has been good improvement since the last visit in the way that pupils' learning is evaluated and the actions that teachers take as a result to move it on further. Teachers now make a useful appraisal of learning at the end of each lesson. This helps them to plan new lessons that are linked, more closely, to pupils' needs. Teachers' planning files are filled with evidence that this kind of evaluation is bearing fruit in most cases. Assistants are now deployed with greater precision and work more effectively because teachers know more about pupils' learning. Teachers' marking is increasingly supportive in praising pupils for their efforts and pointing out where improvements could be made. These helpful comments make regular reference to the newly introduced system of targets. Pupils find these targets clear and informative. For example, in a Year 6 lesson in which pupils were writing a story, they followed very closely the advice contained in their targets. They produced a high standard of writing, which contained a fabulous array of adventurous vocabulary and sentences of many different types all designed to interest and excite the reader.

Furthermore, recent improvements in the EYFS have not just been linked to the use of resources inside and outside the classroom. In addition, teaching is skilful at assessing how learning is developing and setting new challenges designed to quicken and extend children's progress in all areas of learning.

Despite these major advances, there is still some inconsistency in teaching across the school. Most teaching is achieving success in making up for the previous shortfalls in pupils' learning, but in some cases higher attaining pupils are still not working at a fast enough pace and there are missed opportunities for pupils to work on their own to investigate and use their initiative. In these cases there is too much teaching and not enough learning. Nevertheless, much of the teaching is now proficient at reviewing pupils' progress in English and mathematics and taking effective action. This does not yet extend to science. The subject leader is, with the

help of a local adviser and the support of a governor, currently trying to improve assessment in science.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

Leadership and management

The influence of leadership and management has grown dramatically since the headteacher and deputy headteacher took up their posts. Parents have commented very positively about what they see as 'massive improvements' in the school's ethos and direction. Pupils are also delighted to be more involved in helping to influence the school's future. They love the idea of the house system, which gives them an opportunity to take on extra responsibilities. These recent developments have created a culture of working together to improve standards and achievement. For example, governors are now collaborating more confidently with subject leaders to bring about improvements across the curriculum. The high expectations embodied in the school's coherent action plans are now thoroughly monitored for their appearance in practice. Lesson planning, assessments, pupils' workbooks and lessons are all scrutinised closely by school leaders in very productive ways. This degree of rigour has only been in operation for a matter of weeks, so the impact on pupils' achievement is not fully realised. There is still a legacy of underachievement resulting from previously inadequate teaching, which has to be eliminated before all groups of pupils can fulfil their potential. Nevertheless, the momentum towards pupils achieving as well as they can is strong and represents good improvement since the previous monitoring visit.

The good advances already made in the creation of a system designed to monitor pupils' progress have continued well. Leaders and teachers track pupils' achievements productively and provide very helpful support for pupils who are not at the required level for their age and ability. The work is expertly steered by the deputy headteacher, who displays a first-rate knowledge of the computerised tracking system and how it can be used for the benefit of all pupils.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

External support

The local authority (LA) has provided consistently good support, which has recently been extended to an outstanding level. The effect of this guidance has accumulated, particularly since the headteacher has made sure that every aspect of advice available has been used profitably. The school's monitoring of teaching is now thorough and effective, partly because it is underpinned by the LA's beneficial example. Developments in the Reception class, teaching and learning in general and in subject leadership all owe a strong debt to continuing direction from LA colleagues. Furthermore, Diocesan advisers have continued to provide very helpful advice for governors in how to monitor practice in general and liaise more effectively with subject leaders.

Priorities for further improvement

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