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18 September 2008

Mrs Janet Seddon  
Headteacher  
Beech Hill Community Primary School  
Netherby Road  
Beech Hill  
Wigan  
WN6 7PT

Dear Mrs Seddon

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Beech Hill Community Primary School

Following my visit with Christopher Griffin, Additional Inspector, to your school on 16 and 17 September, 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 April 2008. 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 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 for Education, the Executive Director of the Independent Schools Council (ISC), the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Executive Board (IEB) and the Director of Children's Services in Wigan.

Sonja Øyen  
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures; monitoring of Beech Hill Community Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 16 and 17 September 2008

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the four phase managers, a group of pupils from Year 6 and two representatives from the local authority (LA).

## Context

Following a review in June 2007 instigated by a headteacher seconded to the school, the LA identified Beech Hill as a school causing concern. It provided additional curricular support and partnership with a high performing primary school. The seconded headteacher took up the permanent post in September 2007. After the inspection in April 2008, the LA set July 2009 as the target date for the removal of special measures. It decided not to close the school because of the demand for school places in the area. A new one form entry school is planned to open in 2010. The construction of a Pupil Referral Unit in the school grounds is nearing completion.

The LA did not suspend the school's right to a delegated budget but did apply to the DCSF to replace the governing body with an Interim Executive Board (IEB). This was approved and took effect a week before this monitoring inspection.

During the summer term of 2008 there were several staff absences. Three teachers left at the end of the school year and three experienced teachers were appointed. The management structure has been reorganised to place accountability and responsibility with four phase leaders - Foundation Stage (deputy headteacher who has no class responsibility), Key Stage 1, Lower Key Stage 2 and Upper Key Stage 2.

The number on roll has fallen to 207. Fourteen children joined the Nursery on a part-time basis in September and the Reception year children had their first full day at school on the second day of the inspection.

## Achievement and standards

Underachievement is a major concern. Too many pupils did not make the progress they should in the last school year. This was because of weaknesses in the teaching and learning, particularly in staff's often low expectations of pupils' learning, the acceptance of work of poor quality and the very limited use of marking to help pupils do things better. In lessons, pupils are now generally making satisfactory progress but this is not enough to ensure that they catch up on missed learning in previous years and reach their potential.

Standards remain exceptionally low. The school's provisional results in the 2008 national tests show that standards dipped in mathematics and science at Key Stages

1 and 2. In mathematics, only half of the Year 6 pupils reached the level expected for their age, and, as in 2007, relatively few did better than this.

There were some success stories. Several of the Year 6 pupils with specific learning needs did as well as their peers, often from low starting points. The school also raised standards in writing at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 reflecting a whole-school focus on developing writing skills.

The school has set challenging targets for 2009 and expects pupils to make at least average progress (two thirds of an attainment level) over the year. However, current school data and records of pupils' progress are insecure. The work in pupils' books does not always match the level of attainment indicated in pupils' records.

Two key weaknesses are the lack of basic skills in English, mathematics and science, and the pupils' difficulty in applying what they know. Too many pupils do not have the necessary knowledge of letters and sounds to decipher unfamiliar words and to spell well. They are unsure of sentence punctuation and make errors when copying. They have only a tentative understanding of number and how to solve problems. Younger and older Key Stage 2 pupils struggled with basic number facts and few knew their multiplication tables well enough to give a rapid response to number questions. Although pupils know scientific facts and carry out investigations, they find it hard to evaluate their findings and to come to well reasoned conclusions.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science in all year groups - inadequate

#### Personal development and well-being

The good features noted in the inspection in April have been sustained. Pupils enjoy school. Attendance rose to 94% and classes compete to have the highest weekly attendance. Pupils generally behave well. In assemblies they sat still and listened attentively, and in a wet playtime they played board games and were content to amuse themselves. Older pupils commented that so far this term, there has been no poor behaviour. Last term one pupil was excluded for a fixed period. The older pupils welcomed the addition of basketball hoops in the playground, and the introduction of Star of the Day. They feel the headteacher is considering their suggestions through the reports of the Listening Council.

Given that the inspection was in the third week of term, all pupils knew school and classroom routines. It was difficult to pick out those who had recently started in the Nursery and Reception class as all the children happily chose what to do, interacted with others and responded positively to instructions. Reception pupils confidently showed parents their favourite activities. In lessons, pupils were initially interested

and attentive. However, especially in Year 2 and Key Stage 2, their attention often drifted. It was also noticeable how the boys tended to dominate discussions.

### Quality of provision

The school has not met the LA's success criterion of 100% satisfactory teaching by September 2008. Changes in staffing have strengthened the profile of teaching, and good features in many of the satisfactory lessons indicate the potential for the currently small proportion of good teaching to increase. There is effective practice that can be shared in managing pupils' behaviour effectively, structuring lessons into small learning steps and marking pupils' work to show how it has met the learning objective and what can be done better next time.

Staff are working hard to engage the pupils, to encourage them to try and to establish good relationships. All are making effective use of the interactive whiteboards to interest and involve the pupils. They are planning and preparing their lessons carefully, sharing ideas and setting up their classrooms to support pupils' learning. Not all aspects are equally effective in fostering pupils' learning. Although the teachers know what they intend to teach, their planning does not indicate exactly what the pupils will learn and the steps needed to learn it. As a result, chances are missed to reinforce the key points and to call pupils together during and at the end of lessons to check their understanding and to clarify what they need to do well. Teachers too often were quick to take an answer rather than give pupils time to discuss and explain their thinking. In some lessons, too much new information was introduced so pupils' learning was insecure and in other lessons, too little was given to develop pupils' knowledge and skills. In part, this reflects some teachers' limited knowledge in how to teach aspects of reading, writing and mathematics, and also gaps in their awareness of the features of levels of learning.

The teaching assistants are drawing on recent training to take an active role in supporting individuals and groups, and in keeping their own records. There were many good examples of repeated questions, prompts and explanations to help individual pupils as well as praise and achievement shared with the teacher and class. However, some assistants tend to remain on the periphery of class work and wait too long to intervene.

There has been a shift in focus to the early recognition of needs and tailored intervention to support pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The inclusion manager has reviewed and tightened procedures so that class teachers and assistants are clear about their responsibilities. Staff in the Nursery and Reception class are drawing on their observations of the children to note concerns and to decide how to support individuals, especially in developing their speech.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have rightly placed the use of assessment at the heart of the plans to raise standards. Systems to track pupils' progress have been revised drawing on the practice in the partner school. Although everything is in place to facilitate the half termly reviews of pupils' progress, the teachers do not all

have the necessary expertise to evaluate pupils' attainment accurately. A useful start was made in the summer term to develop their skills in assessing pupils' writing and in focusing on targets as part of planning lessons.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Eradicate inadequate teaching so that the overall quality improves enough to ensure that all pupils learn effectively - satisfactory
- Improve the use of assessment and target setting to help pupils reach their potential – satisfactory

## Leadership and management

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have been very effective in changing the culture within the school. Their strong teamwork, shrewdness, resilience and willingness to lead by example have gradually removed opposition and fostered a common sense of purpose. Staff, pupils, parents and the school advisor all commented favourably on the change in atmosphere in school since the beginning of this term. 'It's a different school', 'We've been freed up', and, 'It's OK to be wrong', were typical remarks. Beech Hill is now well poised to move forward after a summer term of slow progress when the negativity and obstruction of a small number of staff hindered joint working. Discussions about the need to change were met with hostility and a refusal to accept that there were issues about the quality of teaching and learning. Much of the headteacher's time was given to dealing with matters normally resolved at classroom level. Some staff defied the headteacher's instructions; an example was the disposal by some teachers of books and lesson plans despite the agreement to pass them on to the pupils' next teachers.

Changes in staffing along with changes in ways of working support the emerging 'can do' culture and the shift to putting the needs of the pupils first. New members of staff have brought enthusiasm, an awareness of good practice and a commitment to raise standards. While working constructively to motivate and encourage, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have left no one in any doubt of the seriousness of the school's situation. They have revised and devised policies, systems and procedures, clarified professional responsibilities and ensured that performance management is in line with requirements. As a result, everyone knows what is expected of them and systems are more robust and rigorous than before.

The school's plan to raise attainment links with the LA support plan and the issues arising from LA reviews as well as the inspection report in April. The 50 objectives cover a wide range of aspects but the school has kept closely to the plan and met those objectives that refer to setting up procedures and establishing systems. The plan is less clear on how the school will plug the gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills, and accelerate pupils' progress. Success criteria often lack a clear indication of the expected outcomes for pupils.

Middle management expertise is limited. Phase leaders are new to the role and in the very early stages of gathering evidence about the quality of provision and pupils' progress. Although staff have discussed the features of good teaching and learning, there is little from the monitoring of classroom practice to steer staff development sessions to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The fabric of the building is poor and damp is a constant problem. The headteacher is determined that the pupils shall have the best. She has drawn on significant reserve funds to make essential repairs, refurbish the Nursery and Key Stage 2 classrooms, and to upgrade equipment. Classrooms are now pleasant places for pupils to learn.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure leadership and management at all levels are strong enough to improve pupils' achievement – good

#### External support

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have had good personal and professional support from the partner school and the LA during a very difficult period. The senior adviser supported the headteacher in making clear to governors and staff the reasons behind as well as the implications of the judgement of special measures.

The school advisor reviewed the school's plan and suggested ways to sharpen it and to track progress. The LA support plan structured the steps taken in the summer term and ensured the school is on a sounder footing. The plan is less clear on how the LA intends to achieve some actions in this and the spring term, including 'skilling up phase leaders'.

The LA has approached several people with relevant experience and skills to be members of the IEB which will meet monthly. A programme of training for governors has been agreed.

The extent and form of the partnership with another primary has taken some time to clarify. In the summer term, a few teachers at Beech Hill benefited from observing teachers in the partner school as well as coaching and guidance on planning lessons.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Teachers' marking to help pupils improve their work.
- Activities that encourage pupils to discuss reason and explain.
- The identification of clear steps in learning.
- The accuracy of teachers' assessment of pupils' attainment.
- Number bonds, multiplication facts and the spelling of common words.
- The monitoring of classroom teaching and learning in English and mathematics to identify common and individual aspects for development.