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9 October 2008

Mrs L Carnes  
Stockton Heath Primary School  
West Avenue  
Stockton Heath  
Warrington  
Cheshire  
WA4 6DT

Dear Mrs Carnes

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Stockton Heath Primary School

Following my visit with Susan Walsh and Peter Jones, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 7 and 8 October 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 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 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 Strategic Director of Children's Services for Warrington Borough Council.

Yours sincerely

Marguerite McCloy  
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Stockton Heath Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 October 2008

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other members of staff, local authority (LA) representatives and members of the governing body.

## Context

In September the school moved into its new building on the same site. The old building is in the process of being demolished. As a result, the school is operating on a reduced site until January 2009 when the new playground and car park is due to be completed. The independently run nursery, Little Lot, which had previously occupied a separate building within the school grounds, is now situated within the new school and shares outdoor facilities with Stockton Heath's Early Years Foundation Stage.

## Achievement and standards

In 2008, children's skills on entry to Year 1 are generally above national expectations, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development. However, their skills in linking sounds and letters, writing and calculation are much closer to national expectations.

The school's assessments of pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2008 show standards overall to be marginally above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Results are slightly better than in 2007 for all subjects with the best improvement in mathematics. However, not enough pupils are reaching the higher level in all three areas. Even though there was a small increase over the school's 2007 performance at the higher level, particularly in mathematics, these were still below national averages.

There have been difficulties with the reliability of the outcomes of tests for Key Stage 2 pupils in 2008, due to problems with national marking systems. However, the school's own assessments, including re-marking of test papers, have concluded that its provisional results are accurate. These show a close correlation with the school's 2007 results in mathematics and science, with standards close to the national average. Results have improved in English, with 93% of pupils reaching average standards or better, an 11% improvement on the school's performance in 2007 and now above the national average. As with the Key Stage 1 assessments, the picture is less favourable when the proportions reaching the higher levels are considered. These fell slightly in English and mathematics and more significantly in

science. This indicates that overall attainment is still not high enough given the above average starting points of a significant proportion of the school's pupils. Nevertheless, these results reflect the satisfactory progress that inspectors noted in lessons observed during the visit. The school has introduced a range of strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning and its leadership and management. Some have only recently been implemented, and others have yet to be introduced. As a result, it is too early to assess their impact on raising achievement.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise achievement for all pupils, especially in English, for boys and those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities – satisfactory
- Raise standards in Key Stage 1– satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development was not a focus for the monitoring inspection, as this was identified as a strength of the school in the April 2008 inspection. By the end of the academic year to July 2008, attendance improved to reach above the national average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning remain variable. The school has started to develop the quality of teaching by encouraging teachers to consider the impact of their work on the gains in pupils' learning. There are pockets of lively teaching where teachers have good subject knowledge and enthuse pupils because their expectations are high. However, too much of the teaching is still unexciting where lessons move on at a pedestrian rate and work is not matched well enough to pupils' needs. Too often there is insufficient challenge for higher attaining pupils. Pupils are very tolerant of the less stimulating teaching and while they may become restless, they are not seen to be disaffected.

There have been important improvements to the marking policy with teachers being encouraged to be positive while still identifying areas for improvement. However, the implementation of the policy is inconsistent and some important errors in punctuation, spelling and grammar go uncorrected. The use of pupils' learning targets is being developed, although it is too early to see any impact. There are some issues with the organisation of lessons and the curriculum in Key Stage 1. In particular, self-chosen activities are not always adequately planned for. The planning for reading workshops has improved with more interesting activities and a closer link with overall literacy skills developing in some classes. However, the impact of reading workshops is still inconsistent and the school is reviewing this aspect of the curriculum.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school – satisfactory

ESBD (Emotional, Social and Behavioural Difficulties) Resourced Provision:

Improvements to the curriculum and the quality of teaching have boosted pupils' achievement to satisfactory overall, although it is better in mathematics than English. Pupils' standards in English are still very low, reflecting their previous experiences. Pupils with low levels of literacy are very sensitive to their shortcomings and often lack the confidence to put pen to paper.

New strategies are motivating pupils to improve their behaviour and they are beginning to develop self-discipline. They are proud to explain how their behaviour has improved. During the visit pupils' behaviour was good and no inappropriate behaviour was observed.

There has been a determination to improve provision in the unit by implementing the National Strategies for literacy and numeracy in order to ensure that the curriculum is a better reflection of mainstream provision and more closely matches pupils' needs. Lessons are now more carefully planned and pupils' previous learning is taken into account. Tasks are often well matched to pupils' abilities and expectations have risen particularly in mathematics. These changes are motivating both pupils and staff. Pupils are being encouraged to assess both the quality of their work and the effort they put in. Marking has improved and pupils are responding well to praise and suggestions for improvement. Opportunities to write are getting better and are often linked with subjects that interest pupils.

Pastoral care remains good and is underpinned by consistently good relationships between staff and pupils. The quality of targets on individual education plans have improved but are sometimes still too broad. Leadership and management of the unit have improved significantly both through the leader's own endeavours and through working closely with the LA. Good teamwork is evident as skilled support staff work well together to improve pupils' rates of progress. The school is aware that there is still insufficient access to information and communication technology and there are plans to have this in place in the near future.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve provision and outcomes for pupils in the resourced unit – good

## Leadership and management

The headteacher and deputy headteacher work together well and have managed the school through a turbulent six-month period which has included the move to the new school building. Despite their initial shock at the outcome of the last inspection, it is to the credit of the leadership team, governors and staff that all are committed to improving their own performance in order to improve pupils' achievement. In the relatively short time available between the last inspection and this visit, leaders and all staff have been working very hard to overcome low morale and implement action plans for improvement, with the support of the LA. This has resulted in some improvements becoming evident, for example, in the organisation of planned monitoring activities, and in the quality of the Enhanced Provision.

The school has a more realistic view of its work and recognition of what needs to be improved. The school's improvement plan has been reviewed to focus on the key issues identified at the last inspection and to incorporate the LA's support plan. However, the document is quite cumbersome and the school is aware of the need to ensure that evaluation is more succinct and provides clear evidence of the impact of the school's actions on outcomes for pupils.

The skills of subject leaders and middle managers are variable and the structure of the school's leadership team is not as effective as it should be. Senior leaders have undertaken useful 'learning walks' to monitor aspects of the school's curriculum and teaching. Senior leaders are generally aware of some strengths and weaknesses in the teaching across the school. Lesson observations have taken place but these are not yet specifically focused and rigorous enough to fully evaluate the quality of learning for all groups of pupils.

Not all middle leaders have had sufficient experience or opportunity to develop the necessary skills to increase their effectiveness, for instance, in monitoring and evaluation of their area of responsibility. The school is aware that this is a matter to be addressed with some urgency. The forthcoming review of the leadership structure, roles and responsibilities is a vital factor in developing the school's capacity to improve. The governors are also aware of the importance of this task and are preparing for the review. The governing body committee structure has been changed in recent months and is appropriately organised to enable governors to be more involved in checking on and contributing to the school's progress in the areas for improvement.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve leadership and management across the school, especially the school's self-evaluation – satisfactory

## External support

Although the LA did not judge Stockton Heath to be a school causing concern, it did place the school in the category of 'enhanced support' in September 2007. This was mainly due to financial pressures and other demands in relation to the move into a new school building. The LA was also surprised by the outcome of the April 2008 inspection, but has worked quickly with the school to establish a monitoring team which is overseeing the delivery of the LA's support plan. One priority has been to enhance professional development in teaching and learning, subject leadership and assessment. Some early evidence of the impact of this can be seen in, for example, the development of the school's marking policy. The LA has allocated an Inclusion Consultant to work on its support plan in the Enhanced Unit provision. This has clearly contributed to the improvements evident in provision and leadership there.

Action plans are appropriately resourced and relevant. Each plan includes success criteria by which the effectiveness of the LA's intervention and support can be evaluated. However, some of the planned actions are too broadly described and not specific enough to identify exactly what needs to be done to meet the success criteria. The LA is aware of this, and recent amendments have been made to their plans.

## Priorities for further improvement

The school should continue its work on the five priorities identified in the April 2008 inspection.