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26 September 2008

Mrs J Humphreys
The Headteacher
Willowbrook School
Summer Lane
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Devon
EX4 8NN

Dear Mrs Humphreys

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Willowbrook School

Following my visit with Mary Usher Clark, Additional Inspector, to your school on 24 and 25 September 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 March 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

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 and the Director of Education for Devon.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary Massey".

Mary Massey
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Willowbrook School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 September 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the deputy headteacher, senior leaders, teachers and support staff, groups of pupils, four governors and a representative from the local authority (LA). Other LA officers were contacted by telephone. The headteacher was not present during the inspection.

Context

Two experienced teachers have been appointed since the last inspection to replace two who have resigned and one new part time teacher provides additional support to strengthen the Year 6 team.

Achievement and standards

Standards in mathematics and science remain inadequate but have improved since the last inspection. In English, standards are now average. Pupils are making good progress in reading as a result of focused intervention, and teacher assessments in 2008 show that they have met challenging targets. This is a result of effective work led by the literacy subject leader and supported by the local authority. Writing skills need further development. Progress in mathematics is satisfactory at Key Stage 1. A legacy of poor teaching and underachievement in mathematics for pupils in Key Stage 2 means that standards are low but pupils are now making better progress and beginning to make up lost ground.

A system to track pupils' progress is now in place and is used to help identify underachievement and monitor pupils' progress. However, its impact is currently limited and more time is needed for data about pupil performance to become consistently embedded into teachers' daily planning and ensure higher levels of challenge.

Pupils with special educational needs are making progress in line with their peers. Appropriate intervention is provided to support literacy, numeracy and social skills, and this is particularly effective at Key Stage 1, although there is more development needed at Key Stage 2. Strategies for teachers and support staff to develop listening skills for some pupils with behaviour difficulties are not yet broken down into small enough steps to make a real difference. Provision for pupils who are in the early stages of learning English is inconsistent. Resources are limited and, although support staff assist as much as they can, the lack of a clear policy is an obstacle to ensuring the maximum progress for these pupils.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards by ensuring teachers use assessment information consistently to provide suitable challenge for pupils – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Inspectors found no evidence that pupils' attitudes are any different from the time of the last inspection. Pupils feel safe and have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. Older pupils have sensible opinions about their school – they are serious critics who know how to make it better. Pupils enjoy coming to school and learning, reporting that they like their teachers because they have 'a good sense of humour'. No evidence was found that there has been an improvement in the procedures for monitoring and managing attendance, and overall figures remain below average.

Quality of provision

The school's own judgements about the quality of teaching and learning are broadly accurate. There has been some improvement since the last inspection because there is now no unsatisfactory teaching. Overall, the quality is satisfactory with both outstanding and good lessons observed. Teachers and support staff work very hard to improve the quality of pupils' learning and have been supported effectively by senior leaders and primary consultants from the local authority. This is now beginning to have an impact on progress. Some teachers lack confidence when teaching science, and appropriate and timely external professional development has not been provided. The quality of marking is inconsistent and a new policy for marking is not having a full impact. Targets are not used effectively by some teachers because the language used is too difficult for pupils to understand. As a result, pupils have a poor understanding of how to make their work better.

Subject leaders for foundation subjects are not clearly identified so there is no clarity about who is responsible for developing subjects or teachers' expertise. This leads to duplication of effort by staff, inadequate long term planning, and no accountability for outcomes. An information and communication technology (ICT) leader has recently been appointed and she is providing support for staff in developing an appropriate curriculum across the school. However, her work remains constrained because improvements to resources to make them fit for purpose are happening far too slowly. Provision for ICT, even when the new computer suite becomes operational, remains inadequate both for pupils and for the school's administration.

Curriculum planning for literacy and mathematics is sound. However, there is still no appropriate balance between subjects and many pupils are missing significant aspects of the foundation curriculum, although provision for religious education (RE) is now acceptable. Too little attention is being paid to the teaching and development of science. The headteacher has made some attempt to rearrange the timetable but the current system is no more equitable than at the time of the previous inspection. There is no shared vision for the curriculum amongst staff and long term curriculum planning for foundation subjects shows a lack of a progression in skills development.

The planning day set aside to do this work as a staff team at the beginning of the autumn term was cancelled by the headteacher.

Pastoral care in the school is good, and pupils' behaviour generally reflects this during lessons. The Early Years support centre provides outstanding care for some vulnerable children. The absence of an all weather cover prevents children in nursery and reception from making the maximum use of the outdoor area.

Safeguarding procedures remain inadequate. Two members of staff are without the appropriate safeguarding checks, and this is having an impact on learning. As a matter of urgency the local authority and governors need to ensure that arrangements affecting pupils' safety including fire procedures, risk assessments, first aid training and incident records are robust and comply with health and safety legislation.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure there is appropriate balance between subjects in the curriculum to provide all pupils with a broad experience of learning – inadequate
- ensure that procedures for safeguarding pupils meet current government requirements – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The local authority does not have confidence in the ability of the headteacher to take the school out of special measures and inspectors endorse this view. Although the headteacher was not in school, and therefore not able to present her own evidence during the inspection, her records show that her implementation of the action plan is limited. Where tasks have been completed, there is little evidence of monitoring, evaluation and effective strategic planning as a result. The work of the senior leadership team, under the headteacher's direction, is largely concerned with day to day operational issues.

A strong group of senior leaders have made an impact on improving standards and developing their own areas of responsibility, for example in literacy, mathematics and special needs. However, there is a lack of trust and effective dialogue between them and the headteacher. Communications are poor and they are not involved in strategic decision making. The lack of clarity of individual roles and responsibilities and the absence of job descriptions for staff, results in confusion and duplication, for example in managing child protection issues and the management of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Induction for new staff is unsatisfactory.

Staff suggestions are not acted on. For example, there was a request last term, agreed by the governors, for a commercial scheme of work to support science teaching. This has not been made available for the start of the autumn term. Neither senior leaders nor the governors have been involved in key decisions, for example writing the self-evaluation form, or planning the curriculum. Staff are not clear about how they can contribute to improving the school.

Governors felt that they were ill informed and lacking in skill at the time of the last inspection. A new experienced governor joined the team in the summer term and her expertise, as well as external training, is proving helpful in developing their ability to support the school effectively. However, these green shoots have not yet made a positive impact on the school's development.

Senior leaders, teaching and support staff are all working very hard to sustain the school and provide an acceptable level of education at this time. They are a strong and cohesive team who are very supportive of one another, which creates a positive ethos that permeates the school. The school advisor visits the school very regularly and has helped to maintain senior staff morale and provided access to other expertise within the local authority.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve arrangements for senior leaders to monitor the work of the school so they have a more thorough understanding of the school's performance – inadequate
- strengthen the role of the governing body so it can provide effective support and challenge to the school – inadequate.

External support

Support provided by the school's attached advisor and LA consultants has been effective and valued by the school staff. Support for the governing body was limited immediately after the last inspection but has now improved.

Impact of actions contained within the LA's statement of action, particularly in terms of compliance with health and safety legislation – unsatisfactory.