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4 December 2008

Mrs Lynne Sproson  
Acting Headteacher  
Newlands Primary School  
Ullswater Road  
Millbrook  
Southampton  
SO16 9EA

Dear Mrs Sproson

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Newlands Primary School

Following my visit with Christopher Grove, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 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, the chair of governors and Executive Director of Children's Services and Learning for Southampton.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier  
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Newlands Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 November 2008

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher, the chair of governors, staff and pupils, as well as a senior inspector from the local authority.

## Context

The former substantive headteacher left and the deputy headteacher resigned at the end of the summer term. A headteacher and deputy headteacher from another school in the city have been working as acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher at Newlands for 70% of their time since May 2008. A senior member of staff from another school is also providing additional support to the school for two days a week. Two coaches have been working with staff to help improve the quality of teaching and learning in English and mathematics. The school employs specialist staff to teach music, science and physical education.

The school has successfully recruited staff to replace the four teachers who left at the end of the summer term. One of the current Year 6 teachers is on loan from another school and will be replaced by a newly appointed teacher in January 2009.

There is a new chair of the governing body and two additional new governors; the former chair is now vice-chair.

The school has appointed a new permanent headteacher who is due to take up her post in January 2009.

## Achievement and standards

The acting headteacher and the acting deputy headteacher have helped the school to develop a workable system to gather information about the progress that pupils make. However, different groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as well as those with a statement of special educational needs, are not being tracked sufficiently well to enable the school to compare how well different groups of pupils are progressing compared to their peers.

Standards remain very low, due mainly to a legacy of underachievement and some inadequate teaching. However, standards are beginning to rise, albeit very slowly in some areas. The progress made by pupils is most noticeable from September 2008. Since this time, standards in reading, writing and mathematics have improved for the vast majority of pupils in both key stages. Pupils are making better progress in mathematics than they are in English and are making more progress in reading than in writing. There are more pupils working within expected levels for their age in

mathematics in Years 1 and 4 and in reading in Year 1 than in the rest of the school. The least progress being made in mathematics is in Year 2. Furthermore, fewer pupils have progressed to expected levels in their reading in Years 2, 5 and 6 than in other year groups.

The progress that pupils are making in developing their speaking skills is very slow. Consequently, too many pupils struggle to talk coherently about their work, especially when key vocabulary is required. This is better in classes which include planned opportunities for pupils to share and discuss their work, and when there is good explicit teaching of key words. Pupils find it very helpful when new and unfamiliar words are clearly visible around the class.

There has been limited improvement in accelerating the rate of learning in science.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- accelerate progress and raise standards in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory

#### Personal development and well-being

According to pupils, the school has improved and they are finding lessons more enjoyable. Pupils appreciate the range of small equipment now available at lunchtimes, which helps to make playtimes more interesting and fun, although the behaviour of some pupils can at times be too boisterous. Pupils welcome having more adults on duty at playtimes as this contributes to their feeling safer and helps them to resolve minor disagreements amicably.

Pupils show a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. They know the value of eating fruit and vegetables regularly. Those who bring a lunch box to school say that they more frequently include fruit. Pupils also understand the importance of exercise, and recognise the dangers and effects of smoking and alcohol.

Effective action taken by the school together with the local authority's education welfare officer has resulted in a significant improvement to levels of attendance. The majority of parents now appreciate the detrimental effect that unnecessary absence has on their child's education. The proportion of pupils who arrive late for school has almost halved in under a term, but a minority of parents are still not taking sufficient responsibility for ensuring their child or children arrive in time for the beginning of the school day.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve attendance and punctuality – good

#### Quality of provision

The use of specialist teaching in some subjects is helping to improve the quality of learning in some areas, notably music, dance and physical education.

Teaching has benefited from the use of layered targets for mathematics and English. These are helping staff as well as pupils to know what pupils are expected to learn, as well as what they should and could do to achieve even better in English and mathematics. As a result, teachers and pupils are more focused on learning and are beginning to make effective use of targets. Teachers now have a more accurate view of how well pupils in their class are progressing; they also recognise now the extent to which pupils have been underperforming for several years.

The effective use of data and assessment information is empowering staff by encouraging them to reflect on what they can do to help accelerate the progress pupils make during lessons. This often includes revising areas of learning which were not sufficiently well taught in the past and resulted in gaps in pupils' learning. However, the quality of teachers' lesson plans is too inconsistent. Teachers use a range of formats for their daily planning, some of which lack sufficient detail to support fully the different and varying needs of pupils. In some cases, this leads to insufficient structured support to enable pupils to work successfully when they are not working with an adult.

While some good teaching was observed, there is still too much that is inadequate. Where teaching was most effective, teachers and pupils were focused on the learning intentions and learning was presented in an enjoyable and meaningful way. In these lessons, teachers inspired pupils to want to learn and to achieve well. Teachers ensured that pupils knew what was expected of them and checked their understanding and progress at regular intervals. Pupils were encouraged to talk to each other about their work. The rate of learning often increased considerably when pupils worked collaboratively on focused tasks. Pupils particularly enjoyed practical activities. However, at times these occurred at the expense of other skills, for example, there were missed opportunities for pupils to write or take notes to record their findings. Nevertheless, successful teaching made effective use of a range of different activities to meet the diverse interests and needs of pupils in these lessons.

Where weaknesses were observed in lessons, teachers spent too much time talking while pupils sat passively and became increasingly disengaged and disinterested. In some instances, this resulted in low-level disruption by pupils who had become restless. In these lessons, teachers as well as teaching assistants did not maintain a sufficiently good overview of how much pupils understood, the progress they were making or how well they were behaving. As a result, the teachers' expectation of pupils was too low. This slowed down the progress pupils made and at times resulted in little value being added to their learning.

The extent to which teaching assistants were able to support pupils effectively was largely influenced by the quality of guidance and direction they received from the class teacher. However, teaching assistants do not all possess the skills and understanding they require and some would benefit from additional training as well as better support and guidance.

The quality of marking remains too variable and is at times weak. Where it is best, teachers link their comments to success criteria; however, marking in some books is merely cursory and does not help pupils to understand how they can improve the quality of their work.

Senior leaders have evaluated the quality of the curriculum and, following the identification of weaknesses, have already started to bring about improvements. There is now more time dedicated to the specific teaching of English and mathematics and links between subjects are developing. However, links between other subjects and reading and writing, as well as mathematics, are not sufficiently evident in teachers' planning. As a result, there are still too many missed opportunities for reinforcing literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that information gained from tracking pupils' progress is used effectively, so that work is always well matched to pupils' needs – satisfactory
- improve the consistency of teaching to ensure that it is at least good throughout the school – satisfactory
- improve the curriculum through providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their basic skills in subjects across the curriculum – inadequate

## Leadership and management

The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher have enabled the school to develop a useful school improvement document. This is contributing to staff's view that the school now has a clear sense of direction and staff now have a better understanding of what needs to improve. The school is beginning to standardise the format used to record information and pupils' progress as well as how leaders and managers intend to help bring about much needed improvements. There are now subject action plans for the core subjects, but these vary in quality. These documents focus appropriately on pupils, but do not all include success criteria that can be measured. The senior leadership team are developing their role well. They have already undertaken an evaluation of the progress the school has made in English and mathematics this term. The improved use of data and assessment information is proving a valuable tool for holding staff to account for pupils' progress.

Senior leaders have a better understanding of their role, including how they can contribute to whole-school improvement. They have started to undertake lesson observations and some are beginning to support other staff to help improve their practice. However, lesson observations do not focus sharply enough on the standard of pupils' work or the progress made by pupils of different abilities. The school has yet to review and if necessary update the job descriptions for all staff. Consequently, staff do not all have an equally good understanding of what is expected of them or of the respective roles and responsibilities of their colleagues.

The governing body has been strengthened by the appointment of a new chair and additional governors. Governors meet every month and meetings are more focused on how well the school is doing and the progress pupils are making. Governors now have a more accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and a better understanding of their role. They recognise that some statutory documents are not fully in place and have already drawn up plans to remedy this situation. Governors are now more visible around the school and work more closely with staff. This has helped the school, for example, to improve the way its finances are managed.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve leadership and management by ensuring that systems and procedures to monitor overall performance are rigorous and applied well to effect improvement in teaching, achievement and standards – satisfactory

### External support

The overall external support for the school since it was subject to special measures is good. The local authority was instrumental in securing the services of an effective new chair for the governing body and the services of highly skilled senior staff from other schools to work alongside the school. The good external support provided by the acting headteacher and the acting deputy headteacher, as well as the work of external consultants and the senior inspector for the local authority, have all helped the school to develop systems to enable it to function more productively. This has led to the improvements since the last inspection. Some of the improvements are not immediately evident in the progress towards dealing with the key issues, but have been necessary prerequisites for the school to begin the process of recovery. Good examples include developing and improving links with parents and the progress made in improving pupils' behaviour.

The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have harnessed the goodwill of staff and parents to create a more positive atmosphere in the school and an appropriate working ethos. As a result, staff have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve; they are also better able to identify and track pupils' progress and to recognise underachievement. There are now good relationships in the school among staff and between staff and pupils. Pupils have benefited from access to more books and learning materials acquired with additional funding provided by the local authority.