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Mrs Lisa Titchiner
Acting headteacher
Sabden Primary School
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Sabden
Clitheroe
Lancashire
BB7 9DZ

Dear Mrs Titchiner

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Sabden Primary School

Following my visit with Alastair Younger Additional Inspector, to your school on 5-6 March 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in December 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed in consultation with the monitoring inspector.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Dave Byrne

Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Sabden Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 5-6 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, key staff, three governors including the chair, a selection of pupils and a group of parents. In addition, meetings were conducted with the local authority school intervention inspector and with the school improvement partner.

Context

Since the last visit in December 2008, a permanent teacher has taken up post with responsibility for the Key Stage 1 class. The Early Years Foundation Stage class continues to be led by a long term temporary teacher. The Year 3 and 4 class was taught by a temporary supply teacher during the monitoring visit. The acting headteacher has taken action to strengthen the senior leadership structure and the governing body has continued to develop and now has full membership.

Achievement and standards

Lesson observations, scrutiny of work and an analysis of the school tracking data indicate that the school is successfully improving pupils' achievement and standards. There is still some way to go, but the school is moving in the right direction. Children in the Nursery and Reception class generally do well and start Year 1 with standards that are above average. Data from teacher assessments in Year 2 for reading and mathematics show that progress has picked up well and scrutiny of pupils' work shows that there has been a good improvement in writing. Assessment data held by the school show that pupils in Key Stage 1 are on course to reach higher standards than those gained in 2008. Better partnerships being developed with parents are contributing to the pupils' accelerating progress particularly in reading.

Although the school's results at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2007 were in line with the national average, standards are now rising with good progress in writing. This is a result of a greater awareness in teachers the need to extend the more able pupils. Action is being taken to raise the expectations of pupils and for them to get more involved in setting their own targets for improvement. Work in pupils' books shows that the content and quality of handwriting and presentation are improving. Progress in mathematics and science is also picking up with a greater emphasis being given for pupils to use their good knowledge to solve mathematical and scientific problems.

Using better assessment and tracking systems for monitoring pupils' progress, the school is in a stronger position to keep an eye on the progress of individuals. This is enabling staff to respond better to the needs of pupils who could do better as well

as evaluating the effectiveness of teaching. The progress of the most able in upper Key Stage 2 in particular, is improving but could still be better.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Raise standards in Key Stage 1 and in writing across the school – good.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes remain a strength of the school. They soak up new ideas and thrive on anything that challenges their existing ideas. During an exciting lesson involving testing the permeability of different rocks, pupils in Years 3 and 4 demonstrated good skills of determination, cooperation and care in being accurate in their observations. When pupils are not given enough chance to get involved in their own learning and are expected to sit and listen too long, some pupils, whilst always being very well behaved, lose concentration and their minds wander. The school has introduced a new 'gold reward' scheme and pupils say this makes them feel valued and has helped them to work harder. Pupils are taking more pride in their work and becoming more involved in looking after their own classrooms. Older pupils proudly talk of the way they now plan and put up some of their wall displays. Table managers in Key Stage 1 demonstrate the way that pupils are successfully being encouraged to take more responsibility for managing themselves. Pupils are willing to help others; they are naturally caring. Pupils talk of the school 'feeling better' and lessons being 'more fun'. The obvious enjoyment of pupils is one reason for the maintenance of good attendance

Quality of provision

The acting headteacher has been proactive in increasing the confidence and knowledge of all teaching and support staff. Training courses, guidance from local authority (LA) consultants and visits to other schools have all had a positive impact on the quality of teaching. As a result it has improved and inconsistencies in teaching are reducing. Teaching is satisfactory overall with a higher proportion of good teaching than at the last visit. The very best teaching exists where teachers set high expectations for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning. In such lessons 'hands-on experiences' and constructive debate amongst pupils enable them to solve problems and results in animated and lively learners. Limitations of the information and communication technology (ICT) resources hold back the learning of some pupils, although good use of interactive whiteboards by some teachers is enhancing aspects of teaching. Despite improvements in planning, it is still not consistently effective in meeting the needs of the more able, particularly in upper Key Stage 2. Positive moves have been made to improve the quality of marking across the school. There is now much more awareness amongst staff of the value of marking in guiding pupils towards improving their work. Teaching assistants are getting better guidance from teachers and this assists them in making a good contribution to the inclusion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The curriculum is still heavily focused on literacy and numeracy but there is limited scope for pupils to use ICT to support their learning. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to speak and discuss in lessons but strategies for doing this are not exploited enough by all staff. There is a willingness amongst staff to take a broader approach to the way the curriculum is planned. Individual days have been trialled to show how subjects can be linked to benefit learning and promote creativity. The exploratory approach currently taken to improve the curriculum lacks urgency and, the benefits of linking subjects together to inspire both staff pupils are not being exploited enough.

Safeguarding procedures meet current guidance and are updated as required.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching so that the more able pupils are better catered for and expectations are raised for pupils to become more independent learners - satisfactory

Leadership and management

Although there is still some way to go, clear leadership by the acting headteacher is moving the school forward. Staffing is more settled and there is a developing ethos of high academic standards. A clear vision has been developed for the school's future, it is not formalised in a working document to assist in school improvement planning. Staff morale is better, parents are supportive of the changes in the school and there is a collective desire to remove underachievement. Improvements in the stability of teaching are having a positive impact on the overall progress of pupils. The better quality of staff development, including links with two outstanding schools, has started to broaden the views of staff. This is effectively widening the school's outlook and raising aspirations within it. Whilst the school is aware of most of its strengths and weaknesses, the procedures for school self-evaluation are not formalised enough to ensure the maintenance of the current improvement. Many of the needs of this small school are driven by the acting headteacher. A senior leadership team has recently been created, although it is still inexperienced and not yet taking on sufficient management duties.

The governing body is adapting rapidly to its role of not only supporting the school, but also monitoring its performance. It is now better structured to do this with the establishment of a committee system and a willingness to receive support and training from the local authority.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Secure future improvements by ensuring a stable staff team – satisfactory.

External support

The quality and impact of the external support provided by the LA have continued to be good. This is evident in the satisfactory, and sometimes good, progress since the last monitoring visit. Accurate evaluations of the school's progress against improvement issues, particularly by the school intervention team, have contributed to the development of the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Accelerate curriculum changes to exploit better the links between subjects.
- Take steps to formalise the systems for school self-evaluation linked to areas for school improvement.