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Mrs Lisa Titchiner
Headteacher
Sabden Primary School
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Lancashire
BB7 9DZ

Dear Mrs Titchiner

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Sabden Primary School

Following my visit with Shirley Herring Additional Inspector, to your school on 30 June and 1 July 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth 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 – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 30 June -1 July 2009

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, staff, pupils, members of the governing body and two representatives from the local authority. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes in lessons and around the school were also observed.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a permanent headteacher has been appointed and a permanent teacher has been appointed to the Early Years Foundation Stage, taking up the post in September 2009. There is one long-term temporary teacher currently in the school.

Achievement and standards

The school has clear evidence that the rate at which pupils make progress is increasing in all years. The considerable legacy of underachievement, especially by those capable of reaching the higher levels in writing, has pulled down results at Key Stage 2 in 2009.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils start school in Nursery with standards that are above those typical for their age. Satisfactory progress occurs and by end of Reception and standards are above average. In Key Stage 1, progress is currently good and has improved rapidly since the last inspection as a result of better teaching. Provisional results for 2009 for Year 2 show a marked improvement in comparison to 2008 with a strength in reading.

In Key Stage 2, progress slows. The rate is very dependent on the quality of teaching and learning. The needs of the most able are not consistently met which reduces their standards. The results for the current Year 6 in 2009 indicate that the proportion likely to reach the expected levels in national tests in English has fallen back especially in writing. Writing remains a struggle for some older pupils, mostly boys and sustaining their interest and enjoyment is a challenge the school has taken on. Standards in reading are above average and the large majority of pupils speak very well and most do so confidently. In mathematics and science, standards are slightly lower than last year. In 2009, the school's performance targets are unlikely to be reached with a particular weakness in achievement in writing.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' behaviour around school and in lessons is good. In discussion, pupils said that bullying is rare. They are generally polite and do what they are asked. However, they sometimes lack the self-discipline to follow routines such as putting away equipment without a fuss. This sometimes slows down the pace of a lesson. Pupils are very clear about classroom rules and respond well to the routines and procedures in classrooms. Pupils usually have positive attitudes to learning and are eager to show what they can do. Some, particularly boys, do lose concentration and become restless when an activity lacks interest and is prolonged. All the pupils that the inspectors talked with spoke politely and with interest, especially when explaining the different roles and responsibilities that some have as members of the school council; others are proud to be playground helpers. They were keen to talk about the reward system which results in golden time for good work and desirable behaviour.

Attendance continues to be above average. Pupils say that they enjoy school because of the friends they make and feel that lessons are increasingly more fun. They say the best lessons are when they are trusted to do things practically and to solve problems without teacher direction during hands-on practical work. The school is increasing opportunities for pupils to work independently and take responsibility for their learning though this is taking time to have an impact. Pupils make a good contribution to community life, for example taking part in the village show and the Clitheroe Dance Festival. They are developing a global perspective through links with a school in Spain, Food Aid and issues about sustainability.

Quality of provision

Since the previous monitoring visit, the school has continued to work to improve the quality of teaching and learning overall. Support by the local authority has enabled the school to reduce weaker aspects of teaching and improve practice. Lessons are generally livelier with higher expectations for pupils to think for themselves and to take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers are assessing pupils' work regularly and are increasingly aware of their prior attainment and the levels at which pupils should be working. The needs of the pupils are generally met well, although the challenge for the most able is still not consistently high enough particularly in writing in Key Stage 2. The role of teaching assistants is improving with a clearer strategy for their professional development. They actively support individuals and groups and take the initiative to help other pupils as necessary. Their role in directly teaching groups and individuals for example, those who need specific support and encouragement is in the process of being improved.

Class management is generally effective, and relationships are very good. Teachers are gaining in confidence to trust pupils to guide and direct aspects of their own learning but there is still some way to go. An increased emphasis on providing

practical activities is making learning more fun and capturing the pupils' interest. At times however, pupils say lessons are rather dull. They say this is particularly the case when too much 'class discussion' occurs and they cannot get down to their work.

Although learning objectives are usually clearly displayed, they are not always referred to during the lesson to help pupils to evaluate how well they have done and how to improve. Marking is good where it gives pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work and teachers' comments are followed up and where pupils are involved in evaluating their own work. Generally, pupils know how well they are doing and what is needed to improve although the expectations for them to evaluate their achievement are not high enough to have an influence on raising standards.

The curriculum is in the process of a significant overhaul. In the Early Years Foundation Stage the provision is satisfactory but important aspects, for example the use of the outdoors, are not fully developed. In Key Stages 1 and 2, planning is becoming more creative and based on the interests of pupils. It is already boosting the progress of pupils. Two Year 6 boys, planning some writing linked to the Second World War Blitz, excitedly told inspectors how much they like the new, hands-on approach. More emphasis is being given to writing although the quantity and range remain rather narrow and standards are not yet high enough. The school is in the process of introducing a clear policy for pupils' personal, social, health and citizenship education.

The school is very caring and care is taken to ensure that pupils are safe and that safeguarding requirements are met.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Accelerate curriculum changes to exploit the links between subjects so that progress improves – good

Leadership and management

The recent decision to appoint a permanent headteacher has added impetus to the improvements that have been introduced since September 2008. As a result, the school has made good progress since the last visit. The headteacher leads by example and has gained the respect of pupils, staff and governors. A strong sense of teamwork between staff and governors has evolved which gives the school the capacity to improve in future. Many good strategies are in the process of being introduced that are moving the school forward. School self-evaluation has improved significantly and is represented in an innovative school improvement plan. Priorities have been rationalised to manageable steps. These are designed to improve teaching and learning by building an accurate understanding of the ability of each pupil and raising expectations of them to act independently.

The lack of a clear management structure in recent times has meant that some essential strategic tasks are not yet being fully shared. The headteacher takes responsibility for most aspects of managing the school. There has been a re-assignment of subject coordinator roles. As yet they have received little training for these roles. External support for teaching staff is generally well coordinated to meet the staff's individual professional development needs.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Take steps to formalise the systems for school self-evaluation linked to areas for school improvement – good

External support

The quality and impact of the external support provided by the local authority have continued to be good. This is evident in the good progress since the last monitoring visit. Local authority officers have a realistic view of the school's progress to date but feel it is now improving rapidly. This is because of the good support and direction provided, particularly by the intervention team adviser, and the benefits gained from advice consultants and links with two outstanding providers. Progress has been held back by uncertainties in staffing and the lack of a permanent headteacher for two terms. Staffing issues are now almost resolved and the school is set to move forward at faster pace.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of provision in Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Devise and implement strategies that enable the headteacher to spend more time performing essential management tasks.
- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 so that the needs of the most able pupils are consistently met and better progress occurs in writing.