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Mr Colin Lofthouse
Headteacher
Throckley Primary School
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Tyne and Wear
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Dear Mr Lofthouse

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Throckley Primary School

Following my visit with Suzi Clipson-Boyles, Additional Inspector, to your school on 7 and 8 July 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 May 2008. 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 not be appointed.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Education and Standards at Newcastle upon Tyne.

Yours sincerely

Brian Blake
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Throckley Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 7–8 July 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including nine parts of lessons and two assemblies, one of which was with the whole school. Documents were also scrutinised and meetings held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, other nominated staff, and members of the interim executive board (IEB). Inspectors also spoke with significant numbers of pupils during lesson observations.

Context

Since the previous visit to the school in April, a teacher from the Early Years Foundation Stage has moved into Key Stage 2 to take the Year 3 class; the Year 2 class teacher has moved into Key Stage 2 and now takes the Year 6 class. Two supply teachers are working in the school; one in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the other with the Year 2 class. The current deputy headteacher has gained promotion and is leaving the school at the end of the summer term. A new full-time deputy headteacher will start in October, and a seconded deputy headteacher will start in September and stay at the school for the whole of the autumn term. From September also, the supply teacher in the Early Years Foundation Stage will move to the full-time teaching post with the Year 1 class, replacing the current class teacher, whom is leaving the school at the end of this term. There will also be a further reallocation of core subject and key stage responsibilities from September, to reflect the staff changes.

Achievement and standards

Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning, but there is still too much variation in standards and rates of progress across the school, and between core subjects. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the children are making good progress, but there is a marked difference between the Nursery and Reception classes. At the end of this academic year, the Nursery children have achieved in line with the national expectations, with some achieving even higher standards. There is consistency in children's progress in Nursery across all areas of learning, except in creative development for the more able. The Reception class started the year below the levels expected for their age and are still below the standards expected. There is variation in their performance across the different areas of learning, with the lowest performance seen in creative development, reading, calculating, knowledge and understanding of the world, and language for communication and thinking. Overall, the Reception class has not benefited as much as the Nursery group from the improved quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage this year and, as a result, their progress has been slower. There has been ongoing work with baseline assessments since the previous monitoring visit and, contrary to previous judgments

by the school that attainment on entry to Nursery was significantly below the levels expected, this is now judged by inspectors to be closer to below.

Standards at Key Stage 1 remain close to national averages across the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science, with the overall rates of pupils' progress satisfactory. At Key Stage 2, variations remain in pupils' progress between subjects. Unvalidated school data for 2009 show that pupils' standards in English and science continue to improve and are getting closer to the national averages. In mathematics, standards are much lower than in the other two core subjects, with the gap between the school standard and national standard not yet closing fast enough.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the progress of pupils in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 2, by improving the quality of teaching and learning - satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

The school continues to successfully address a number of aspects relating to improvements in pupils' personal development and well-being. For example, pupils' behaviour is now more consistently satisfactory or better throughout the school than seen during previous monitoring visits. There is a reducing number of persistent absentees, with overall attendance of pupils improving and getting very close to the national average for primary schools. There remain some variations in attendance rates for different year groups, but the school is alert to this and is continuing to work hard in tackling unauthorised absence from school. Pupils' attitudes to learning are generally good, although there are a few occasions in lessons when teacher talk or learning tasks go on too long, which results in some pupils drifting off task. The school successfully encourages the pupils to appreciate and understand about life outside of school, including local, national and global communities. For example, a recent fund-raising event for a national charity linked to supporting those in other countries who are suffering from leprosy raised over £900 for those most in need. A subsequent whole-school assembly, with a representative from the charity, helped the children to celebrate their achievement, while also maintaining a dignified understanding of the plight of these people.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve attendance with a particular focus on the high proportion of children who take authorised absence - good

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning across the school continues to improve. The overwhelming majority of teaching is now satisfactory or better, with an increasing number of good quality lessons being seen. Senior managers' assessment of the quality of teaching and learning is accurate, and is based on first-hand observations

of lessons, including the scrutiny of pupils' work books. This work is helping staff to know where their professional strengths are, and which aspects of their teaching need to improve further. Teachers' planning remains consistently good in all classes at Key Stages 1 and 2. A similar quality of planning is seen in the Early Years Foundation Stage, but it is currently so detailed that the learning focus sometimes gets lost in the detail. Effective teaching is now showing better pace of learning for the different abilities in the class, less time for pupils on sitting and listening to extended teacher talk, and more opportunities for independent and group work. Not all lessons consistently show these characteristics, but all teachers are beginning to understand, more clearly, what makes for successful learning, and how focused and challenging learning tasks helps reduce off-task behaviour and improve pupils' progress and standards of work. Teaching assistants continue to provide effective support for targeted individuals and groups of pupils.

Assessment processes are continuing to improve. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, baseline assessment is now getting closer to a more accurate overview of children's attainment on starting in the Nursery. Recording children's progress throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage remains good. Across the rest of the school, assessment in English and mathematics are secure. Although the assessment coordinator has started to collect science data, this is still at a very early stage of implementation and not yet fully inclusive of all that pupils achieve in science at different key stages. Assessment information across the foundation subjects also remains underdeveloped, but the school has prepared itself well for the introduction of a new software program from September that will help with the regular collection and analysis of pupils' performance across the curricular range.

The overall quality of the curriculum has remained satisfactory since the previous monitoring visit. Provision for teaching the core subjects is good, with satisfactory overall provision across the rest of the curriculum. Recent work on developing a more 'creative curriculum' is adding breadth to pupils' learning, but developments in this area are still at a very early stage.

The school has maintained its good quality links with parents, and weekly newsletters and other more formal letters about changes and developments are helping to maintain a regular flow of up-to-date information about the work of the school.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve communication with, and involvement of, parents, carers and the community - good

Leadership and management

The pace of progress in the leadership and management of the school remains satisfactory overall, with good quality and well-focused support being provided by the IEB. Succession arrangements for forming a shadow governing body are now well advanced, and will be completed by September 2009; this conforms to the local

authority's planned intentions that were included in their original submission to the Department for Children, Schools and Families for the abolition of the former governing body, and the forming of an IEB. However, the period of time that the shadow governing body is intended to be in post appears not conform to the legal guidelines. Overall, senior managers continue to give a clear and shared view about future improvements in relation to a range of school improvements areas, including the issues for improvement from the previous inspection.

Changes to the named core subject and key stage leaders since the previous monitoring visit have not yet been fully consolidated within the school. Further re-designation of responsibilities for these areas is planned for September, when the school will have all but one of its full-time teachers in post. The new substantive deputy headteacher will join the school in October, at which time the full allocation of management responsibilities will be completed. During the interim period up to October, a seconded deputy headteacher from another local authority primary school will act as the Key Stage 1 coordinator. Overall, the realignment of responsibilities has been well thought through, but the school has yet to define, sufficiently clearly, the range of individual responsibilities allied to each of these management roles. The role of the Early Years Foundation Stage manager continues to progress well. The roles of the assessment coordinator and science coordinator are still at a very early stage of development.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the leadership of the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 2 and the core subjects - satisfactory
- Improve the capacity of the governing body to evaluate the work of the school and hold it to account - good

External support

Local authority and other external specialists have been used effectively to support the school's focused work on improving teaching and learning as an aid to raising standards and increasing the rate of pupils' progress in their learning. Notes of visits from the external specialists provide a useful overview of the work covered, together with some pointers on helping the school to more accurately assess the quality of its provision. The latest local authority action plan has not been updated to include its assessment of the overall progress being made against each of the actions identified in its 'statement of action', which was written following the designation of special measures in May 2008.

Priorities for further improvement

- Review and evaluate planning for the Early Years Foundation Stage in order to streamline it for increased effectiveness and use by teachers.
- Clarify the range of management responsibilities for each of the designated staff who have a leadership post for either a core subject or key stage.