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Mrs J Ngenda
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Ngenda

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BLUEBERRY PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Lesley Traves and Judith Tolley, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 24 and 25 March 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in June 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 visit - satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Liverpool.

Yours sincerely

Steve Isherwood

Her Majesty's Inspector



SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF BLUEBERRY PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, senior managers, a group of pupils, a member of the interim executive board (IEB), a representative of the local authority (LA) and the school improvement partner (SIP).

Context

An acting deputy headteacher from a neighbouring school has been appointed on a short-term basis. A temporary advanced skills teacher from a local school has changed places with a member of staff in Year 1. One member of staff is on long-term absence. The three assistant headteacher positions will come to an end at the end of the summer term, allowing the school to appoint a permanent deputy headteacher. Interviews for the permanent headteacher appointment are to be held very shortly.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' work in lessons and in their books, together with the school's own tracking information, shows that their progress is beginning to accelerate. This is because the school has strengthened the way it monitors pupils' performance and consequently has a much clearer understanding of where improvement is required. In addition, senior leaders have successfully introduced several new strategies to improve pupils' achievement, which are leading to improvements in classroom practice and paying greater dividends. For example, 82% of Year 6 pupils are on track to reach their targets in mathematics. More pupils across the school are making better progress in writing because of a whole-school focus on improving their skills and in the moderation of their work. Pupils in each year group are beginning to catch up from gaps in their learning and the legacy of underachievement. This is down to the fact that improvements in teaching and learning are increasing the progress pupils make in lessons. Effective tracking systems have been introduced to identify pupils who are underachieving and those who are capable of working at a higher level. There are clearer expectations of the progress they should make. A new school timetable has maximised the learning time in all core subjects. There has been greater clarity in the deployment of support staff to target support for pupils more effectively. Staff training is well thought out and increasing teachers' confidence. As a result, although not yet consistent in all classes, teachers have a better understanding of planning work that matches pupils' needs and in identifying the next steps in their learning.



Nevertheless, standards for the higher achieving pupils are proving more difficult to shift. For example, pupils in Year 2 working at above average levels are failing to reach the higher Level 5 in Year 6 as they move through the school. This is because the level of challenge in some lessons is variable and the development of higher-order thinking skills lacks precision in some classes. This means that some pupils do not always achieve as well or as rapidly as they should.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science throughout the school – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

In the main pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe and secure. Their attitudes to learning have improved well with advances in teaching and learning. Even when activities are less engaging they try hard and concentrate well. Pupils are increasingly involved in their work, are more aware of what is expected of them and can sense that things are improving. As a result behaviour in the majority of lessons is much better because learning is matched to pupils' needs and interests with greater accuracy.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved further since the last visit. Of the lessons observed, most were satisfactory and a small number were good. Teaching quality is now much more consistent across the school. In the best lessons, pupils enjoy and understand their learning because they are given opportunities to explore and investigate ideas for themselves, often with a partner or in a small group. In a Year 4 science lesson, for example, pupils demonstrated their ability to hypothesize about why one circuit gave a brighter light than another. Elsewhere in Year 5, pupils were able to explain to each other how they arrived at their views about the main character in a story. In less effective lessons, although teachers' planning is now better informed by assessment information, higher attaining pupils are not always given sufficient challenge in lessons to achieve their best. Pupils are not always given enough opportunities to think about how they learn or to think of different ways to tackle their work. This is because pupil's work is sometimes over-directed resulting in limited opportunities for active and independent learning or for pupils to use their higher-order thinking skills.

Teaching assistants and teachers work effectively as a team to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and enable them to participate successfully in lessons alongside their classmates. Relationships between staff and pupils are good. Where teaching is good pupils are engaged and often excited by activities and they work well together to solve problems. When they are given the opportunity to discuss ideas with a partner they increase in confidence and, as a result, they are keen to share their ideas with the rest of the class. Pupils react less enthusiastically



where opportunities to do this are more limited or they are required to listen to the teacher for lengthy periods. On these occasions they find concentration difficult and can become restless.

As a result of the work of the 'Lead Learning' team, training is now regular and focused. This means that staff are more aware of what constitutes effective learning. Good practice is shared routinely and teachers are enthusiastic about improving their practice further. However, school leaders are not complacent: they realize that the next challenge is to increase the proportion of good and better lessons.

The school has improved its systems for monitoring pupils' progress, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Information generated from half-termly assessments is now presented in a clear and accessible way. Consequently, staff find it much easier to use: they can see at a glance whether pupils are making sufficient progress. The system is much more useful as a management tool, underpinning key decisions, such as where best to deploy adult support and where 'booster' or intervention programmes are needed. The school is working hard to ensure that assessment information is accurate and therefore, reliable. School leaders have used effectively the support of LA consultants to assess every pupil in English, mathematics and science, to provide a solid baseline from which to set challenging targets. Staff are starting to use this information to better effect, to plan work that is more closely matched to pupils' differing abilities and set targets for them. However, some inconsistencies remain: in particular, the challenge for the more able pupils could be improved. Training has been provided for staff in order to develop their skills and confidence in assessing pupils' work. School leaders are currently playing a strong role in monitoring teacher assessments in order to ensure rigour and accuracy. The quality and usefulness of marking continues to improve. There are more examples of marking being linked to individual targets and lesson objectives, which is helping children to understand what they need to do to improve. However, the quality of marking is still variable between classes.

The curriculum is improving steadily. The school has overhauled the timetable to ensure that learning time is used to best effect and to provide staff and pupils with a clear structure. Provision for literacy has improved. More opportunities are provided for pupils to practise their writing, through daily writing sessions in which the whole school takes part. Pupils report that they enjoy these sessions and particularly liked the writing 'Theme Week' which was practically based, with parents invited to take part. In addition, regular guided reading sessions have been implemented. Increased use is being made of role play in all classes to stimulate writing. Pupils are responding enthusiastically to this because it adds a fun element that fires their imaginations. The impact of these initiatives can be seen in improved pupil progress throughout the school. The provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved. There is now a better understanding of the needs of individuals and a coherent plan of how best to meet them. Consequently, progress



for these pupils is improving. The curriculum is not yet planned effectively enough to fully meet the needs of the more able pupils and to challenge them appropriately to reach their potential.

Planning for outdoor provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is more closely linked to learning inside the classroom and activities have a clear focus. Consequently, children in both the Nursery and Reception classes are purposefully engaged in worthwhile activities out of doors. Staff demonstrate improved understanding of when to intervene to move learning on and when to allow children free rein to explore. Opportunities are missed, particularly when planning the outdoor curriculum, to identify early writing opportunities through all areas of learning.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, ensuring greater but realistic challenge in lessons so that the proportion of good or better teaching increases substantially – satisfactory.
- Make better use of assessment information to plan lessons that precisely match pupils' needs and provide pupils with clear guidance on how to improve their work – satisfactory.
- Ensure that the curriculum is planned effectively to meet the needs of pupils of all abilities, including those in the resource provision and for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, through outdoor activities – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Following the outcomes of the last monitoring visit the school has picked itself up and has galvanised its resolve to get things moving and make things better for the pupils. No time has been wasted and excuses for the school's deficiencies have not been tolerated. Senior staff and teachers are putting the concerns of the past behind them and are keen to move forward to get the school back on track. Teamwork is much improved and morale is good. The acting headteacher has shown excellent qualities. Since her appointment she has provided strong and decisive leadership and has gained the support and confidence of the school community. In doing so she has accelerated the pace of change and taken significant steps to prioritise actions and reduce inadequate teaching. Expectations have been raised. Teachers are increasingly accountable for their work and possess a clearer understanding of the school's position and the way ahead. Their capacity to undertake improvements has been enhanced because monitoring and evaluation procedures have been strengthened and the school's action plan is now in place. The roles and responsibilities of staff have been clarified. As a consequence, there is clearer agreement on where further improvements are required and staff are aware of what is expected of them. Everybody is stepping up to the task in hand. As one member of staff commented, 'I enjoy working here now because I know what I've got to do each day.'

Significant efforts have been made to develop the capacity of middle leaders to undertake their work. This has resulted in an improved understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their subjects and in the achievement of pupils in lessons and in their books.

The work of the IEB has been clearly focused. For example, meetings have been standardised and members have been involved in visiting lessons and talking with pupils. As a result their strategic role in steering the school's recovery and in challenging senior leaders continues to improve.

The leadership team is not complacent and under no illusions about the task that lies ahead. Whilst taking pride in recent improvements and setting the school on the right course, they recognise that much further work is still required to raise standards and overcome the legacy of underachievement.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure leaders and managers at all levels, including governors, check rigorously on the quality of the school's work and take decisive action to improve it – satisfactory.

External support

The LA continues to provide an appropriate level of support and challenge to the school. On-going work is carefully targeted towards the needs of the school and in developing the capacity of the school to take greater responsibility for its actions. Overall, time given by LA officers to assist the school will reduce as the school's ability to manage and direct its own improvement strengthens and gains further momentum.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of teaching and learning that is satisfactory to good and better.
- Increase opportunities for the more able pupils that encourage independent learning and the development of thinking skills.
- Ensure greater consistency in the use of assessment information to plan work that challenges all pupils.