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20 April 2009

Mr Felix Rayner and Mrs Sue Ball
Executive Headteacher and Acting Headteacher
The Winchcombe School
Maple Crescent
Shaw
Newbury
RG14 1LN

Dear Mr Rayner and Mrs Ball

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Winchcombe School

Following my visit with Daniel Burton, HMI, to your school on 31 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 February 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may 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 Chief Improvement Adviser for West Berkshire.

Yours sincerely

Maria Dawes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of The Winchcombe School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 31 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work; scrutinised documents; and met with the acting headteacher, the executive headteacher, staff, pupils in their classes and at break-time, the chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and the School Improvement Partner.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the executive headteacher has been appointed to the substantive post from September 2009. The acting headteacher remains in post until the end of the academic year.

Achievement and standards

The school has comprehensive, well-moderated and regular assessment procedures in place. These show that the proportion of children working at age-related levels continues to rise. There have also been good gains in reading as a result of the catch-up reading intervention, with over 80% of pupils making more than one year's progress in their reading age in six months. The last visit identified that pupils were making less progress in mathematics than in literacy. Since January, the school has implemented focused mathematics intervention and recent assessments show that pupils' progress is now speeding up. Assessments in science shows that, overall, pupils are making faster than expected progress.

The pupils currently in Year 3 have made especially good progress in all three core subjects, with the majority of pupils on track to reach age-related expectations by the end of the summer term. Pupils in Year 6 are also making better progress and recent assessments show that the proportion of children reaching age-related expectations already exceeds the school's challenging targets for the summer in reading and mathematics. However, the rate of progress across the year groups continues to be uneven. Pupils in Year 5 are making considerably less progress than those in other years. In particular, a large proportion of pupils in this year who have learning difficulties and disabilities are making slower than expected progress. The school is aware that there is now a need to match and coordinate interventions more carefully to the specific needs of individual pupils in this year group.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise achievement and standards in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

The behaviour of pupils around the school and in lessons is consistently good. The senior leadership identified that behaviour at break- and lunchtimes could sometimes be less good than at other times and have recently introduced 'Huff and Puff' equipment in all three playgrounds. The children are eager to use the wide range of equipment, including skipping ropes, bats, balls and stilts, which give good opportunities for physical exercise. As a result, instances of poor behaviour have decreased and pupils are cooperating well with each other in sharing equipment and playing.

The robust action taken by the school in partnership with the education welfare officer has been very successful in reducing by over 50% the number of pupils who have very low attendance rates. However, senior leaders are aware that they now need to decrease the number of pupils who are absent for the odd day here and there by fine-tuning existing strategies and working more closely with a wider group of parents.

Quality of provision

The school's very regular monitoring of teaching and learning shows that the quality of teaching continues to improve and is now good. Central to this is the commitment of all staff to improving the quality of learning across the school. Teachers and teaching assistants readily embrace opportunities to improve their practice and there is a culture of open dialogue and discussion between staff at all levels. Professional development opportunities are fully exploited and staff share good practice through informal discussions as well as through regular meetings, joint planning and peer-coaching sessions. The impact of this can be seen in the increased proportion of practical and exciting activities to motivate pupils, the much more widespread use of a range of assessment techniques, including peer marking, and increased opportunities for pupils to respond to teachers' marking.

Teachers use information about pupils' prior attainment effectively to provide challenge and support for all pupils. In some classes, learning support assistants keep detailed records of pupils' progress during a lesson to inform future support. Pupils know their individual targets and what they need to do to improve. Teachers are now beginning to analyse carefully the regular formal assessments to identify specific topics that pupils need more support with. This information is being used to inform both day-to-day teaching and interventions. The quality of monitoring in the Early Years Foundation Stage is exemplary, with regular and invaluable formal and informal records of pupils' progress, including photographs of every stage of their development.

The school continues to provide an extensive range of interventions and the majority of pupils have some form of targeted support. In addition to the daily interventions, after-school booster classes have been introduced in all years for identified pupils, and a small number of pupils in Year 6 are benefiting from 90 minutes of one-to-one support every week. Staff recognise, however, that the range of interventions and



support now needs to be carefully evaluated to identify the most effective and to ensure that future provision more closely matches the needs of individual pupils.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve the use of assessment information to plan appropriate and challenging work for all pupils – good

Leadership and management

The senior leadership team continues to provide effective and committed leadership. The school is now benefiting from the stability provided by the permanent appointment of the executive headteacher to the post of headteacher from September. Key to the good improvements since the last inspection has been the commitment of staff to bring about changes for the benefit of the pupils. They remain highly buoyant and positive – as one commented, 'Despite being in special measures, people are enjoying their work and performing at their best!' The executive and acting headteachers have very skilfully inspired this commitment by regularly consulting staff at all levels and increasingly distributing leadership responsibilities. The coordinators of literacy, numeracy and science are taking a proactive role in developing their subjects and leading developments and improvements. They work well with year team leaders in coordinating planning and are increasingly taking on strategic leadership roles, including monitoring and evaluation.

Self-evaluation is robust and honest and has been particularly effective in improving the quality of teaching and learning. The most recent monitoring of teaching and pupils' assessments has fed into the updated action plan entitled 'Tweak, Embed and Sustain' which is rightly focused on ensuring that improvements in provision are continuing to improve outcomes for pupils. The senior leadership team is aware, however, that there is now a need to evaluate in a more detailed way which specific aspects of provision, particularly through intervention work, have been the most successful in order to maximise improvements most efficiently.

The IEB continues to offer high levels of support. Plans are in place to establish a shadow governing body to enable continuity of governance.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve leadership and management at all levels, especially in relation to monitoring and improving the quality of teaching and learning – good

External support

The school improvement officer knows the school very well. Staff are highly appreciative of the consultant support, which is well tailored to meet the specific needs of the school. The local authority is aware of the need for its interventions to diminish over time, in line with the school's rapidly developing capacity to evaluate for itself how well it is doing and to develop its own ability to implement improvements successfully.

