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12 February 2009

Mrs Gill Winston  
The Acting Headteacher  
Willowbrook School  
Summer Lane  
Beacon Heath  
Exeter  
Devon  
EX4 8NN

Dear Mrs Winston

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Willowbrook School

Following my visit with Peter Kemble, Additional Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 February, 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 March 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 – good.

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 governors and the Director of Children's Services for Devon.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey  
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Willowbrook School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 February 2009

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, teaching and support staff, groups of pupils and parents, and two governors including the chair. A visit was made to the behaviour unit at St James' School and a telephone conversation was held with a representative from the local authority.

## Context

Since the last monitoring visit the headteacher has resigned. A new acting headteacher took up post on 1 November. After the resignation of the chair of governors, a new chair of governors was appointed on 3 February. Two governors have resigned and two new appointments have been made. A new teacher for Year 4 has been appointed on a temporary contract until the end of the summer term.

## Achievement and standards

Assessment data is now used consistently in teachers' daily planning and in lessons to ensure that work is effectively matched to pupils' needs, although the level of challenge provided by teachers is greater in Years 1 and 2. This is already beginning to have an impact on standards in the lower school. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are now making outstanding progress in reading and good progress in writing and mathematics. Standards are now satisfactory. Data from 2008 show that pupils at Key Stage 1 made significantly greater progress than pupils in similar schools. At Key Stage 2, standards remain inadequate. However, pupils are making satisfactory progress in gaining lost ground. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making good progress, particularly in developing communication, language and literacy skills, which are low on entry. The relatively high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making similar progress to their classmates. Some individual pupils, both in the main school and in the early years support centre, have made exceptional progress because effective management of behaviour has improved both their attitudes and achievement. Properly managed procedures for supporting and monitoring the progress of pupils who are at the early stages of learning English are now in place but not yet fully embedded. With very good support from class teachers and teaching assistants, these pupils are making satisfactory progress overall, with some making good progress.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards by ensuring teachers use assessment information consistently to provide suitable challenge for pupils – good.

## Personal development and well-being

During this visit, inspectors were impressed by the very calm and purposeful atmosphere in school. Children of all ages are happy, have very positive attitudes to their learning and treat one another and the staff with respect. They play safely and cooperatively, with older pupils aware of the need to support and look after younger ones. In assembly, the high quality and sincerity of pupils' singing demonstrated how much they enjoy and value the opportunity to share music together, and staff provided clear moral and social messages and allowed time for reflection. Exclusions have reduced as result of using the behaviour unit at St James' School as an extra resource. Pupils report that this has made a real difference to their behaviour and to the quality of learning in classrooms. New methods for rewarding pupils for hard work and good behaviour, particularly the 'Learn to Earn' system in Year 6, have increased pupils' motivation. The percentage of unauthorised absence and the number of pupils who are persistent non attenders have reduced, particularly for pupils in Years 5 and 6. However, the overall attendance figure is still below the national average and only slowly improving. Attendance in Year 6 is good but it is well below average in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Procedures for monitoring attendance are much improved, including calling parents on the first day of absence, stronger links with the education welfare officer, and more regular conversations with parents.

## Quality of provision

The curriculum is now more balanced. Pupils were consulted about alterations to the curriculum. They asked for more first hand experiences, practical activities in the classroom, trips and visits, group work and creative activities such as art and music. Although some of these plans have been implemented, some changes cannot be introduced until the next academic year. Literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are now considered in planning for foundation subjects, but still need to be embedded further, particularly at Key Stage 2. The progress made in introducing appropriate ICT experiences for pupils has been particularly rapid and has involved improving both resources and staff skills. A new ICT suite is now functioning, but software is still limited and the ratio of computers to pupils is still too low. Technical support is provided from St James' School, and a teaching assistant on the staff is supporting teachers in developing their skills. Ambitious plans for a new outdoor area for the Early Years Foundation Stage are in hand and negotiations for the necessary funding are taking place with the local authority.

Teaching and learning are now good across the school, with some outstanding practice. Coaching and support are in place in order to help improve further the small amount of satisfactory teaching that remains. This improvement is largely a result of more thorough, individualised planning based on assessment data, and effective marking and feedback to pupils. The introduction of education plans to meet the needs of groups of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has made it easier for teachers to match work to need, and a strong team of skilled



teaching assistants support these pupils very effectively. Pupils have welcomed teachers identifying individual 'next steps' for each of them so they know exactly what they need to do in order to improve. Work is now assessed regularly and teachers are confident in levelling it accurately. The use of ICT by teachers in classrooms has developed well since the last monitoring visit. All teachers now have laptops and the interactive whiteboards in every classroom are used well. As a result of better subject leadership, teachers are now more confident in teaching science.

Robust safeguarding systems are now in place. All staff have now had the appropriate safeguarding checks, accidents are recorded properly, and risk assessments are undertaken. All staff have been trained in child protection procedures.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure there is appropriate balance between subjects in the curriculum to provide all pupils with a broad experience of learning – satisfactory.
- ensure that procedures for safeguarding pupils meet current government requirements – good.

#### Leadership and management

The new acting headteacher took up her post in November 2008 after the last monitoring visit. She has accelerated the pace of change, particularly through the introduction of rigorous procedures to monitor every aspect of the school's work. Self-evaluation is very accurate and is based on a sound knowledge of the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. Monitoring procedures include regular lesson observations, scrutiny of teachers' planning and assessment, and frequent one to one conversations with staff. Senior leaders' judgements are then checked against the quality of pupils' work to ensure their accuracy. Subject leaders with job descriptions are now in place for all subjects. This has ensured that long term plans for all the foundation subjects are now available, although in some cases they have yet to be implemented by staff.

Teaching and support staff demonstrate exceptional commitment to the school, and this is evident from their very hard work to implement essential changes. They feel very accountable for their work and have had to adjust to new ways of working and regular monitoring. This has meant an increase in workload, but the majority feel that they now have a common sense of direction with a shared vision and purpose. They are beginning to see the impact of changes in their practice on pupils' attitudes, aspirations, achievement and well-being. The rapid introduction of many new procedures to improve the school's work has left some support staff feeling that they are insufficiently involved in decision making and that communication with them could be more consistent.

Parents' attendance at family assemblies is good, but fewer attend the curriculum meetings at the school. No parent survey was carried out at this monitoring visit, but inspectors spoke to some parents outside the school. Although some are still

concerned about the quality of education their children are receiving, particularly at Key Stage 2, the majority that inspectors spoke to felt that there had been improvements at the school in recent months, particularly in terms of leadership and pupils' behaviour.

An experienced new chair of governors was appointed very recently. New governors from the community, including a parent, have joined the governing body. Although these governors still need careful induction and training, they are very enthusiastic about the support they can give the school on its journey out of special measures. Meetings are now more focused and challenging, with governors well aware of the responsibilities they hold. The governing body has not yet consulted parents regularly as agreed in the local authority action plan. The major priority for the governing body in the immediate future is the appointment of a substantive headteacher from September 2009 who has the skills to sustain and continue the improvements already made.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve arrangements for senior leaders to monitor the work of the school so they have a more thorough understanding of the school's performance – good
- strengthen the role of the governing body so it can provide effective support and challenge to the school – good.

External support

The acting headteacher is a member of the local authority's school improvement service, seconded to the school until August 2009. Her previous successful experience as a primary headteacher and her determination to move the school out of special measures have ensured rapid progress since her appointment in November.

Priorities for further improvement

- Strengthen relationships with parents and seek their views each term in order to contribute to the local authority's regular reviews of progress.