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11 March 2009

Miss D Garratt
The Headteacher
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Dear Miss Garratt

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Conway Primary School

Following my visit with Doris Bell and Fran Ashworth, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 25 and 26 February 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 November 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – 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 Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Watters
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Conway Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 25 and 26 February 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the senior leadership team, the chair and a member of the interim executive board (IEB), a representative from the local authority and the headteacher who is leading the new federation arrangements.

Context

In January 2009, following a series of consultations, the local authority and IEB federated the school with a neighbouring successful primary school. The federation arrangements include additional and extensive support for the school's leadership, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and raising achievement. The deputy headteacher has recently been deployed to teach a class of Year 6 pupils and another teacher has changed year groups to teach in Year 5. There are three teachers employed on a week by week supply basis. The IEB has recruited a teacher to lead improvements in mathematics and in Key Stage 2, and it is expected that this teacher will start work at the school at the beginning of the summer term 2009. The deputy headteacher is also leading improvements in literacy, having taken on the role of English subject leader at the beginning of the spring term 2009.

Achievement and standards

Although there has been a slight rise in standards since the previous inspection, pupils' attainment levels remain low and often well below age related expectations. Similarly, while rates of progress are showing some signs of increasing, they are not yet accelerating at a sufficiently speedy rate. Progress in writing in Key Stage 1 is uneven but generally satisfactory. It remains inadequate in Key Stage 2. Weaknesses in spelling, grammar and sentence structure continue to impede progress in Years 3 to 6 where pupils' phonic knowledge and understanding is weak. Rates of progress in mathematical calculations are broadly satisfactory in each key stage.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- raise standards and increase the rate of pupils' progress throughout the school, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Most of the pupils behave well and have positive attitudes. They work hard and are extremely keen to improve their skills and knowledge. Many are polite and courteous and respect their teachers. In a small minority of lessons, however, pupils' behaviour

deteriorated when their work lacked challenge and class rules were not applied well enough by their teachers.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved. The proportion of lessons judged good has increased from 4% to 14%, with 59% of lessons graded satisfactory. The proportion of lessons judged inadequate has fallen from 38% to 27%. However, there are still too few good lessons, where pupils make good and accelerated progress, and still too many lessons, particularly in Key Stage 2, where pupils do not make enough progress because of weaknesses in the quality of teaching.

In the best lessons, for example in the Year 6 classes, teachers' expectations are high. The pupils are highly motivated, their work is challenging and questions are used effectively to probe their understanding. There is a good pace of learning and pupils know what they need to do next to improve their work.

The quality of teachers' marking has improved and is more consistent than it was at the time of the previous inspection. Marking in both mathematics and writing is better because pupils' work is checked frequently and very little is unmarked. Teachers are becoming more adept at providing pupils with helpful comments that show them what they need to do to move to the next level.

Teachers' assessments are becoming more accurate and reliable. Assessment information is used more effectively to ensure that pupils make better progress in lessons, but this is not yet secure in all classes and year groups. While there are very few occasions when pupils are praised excessively for work that is mediocre or poor, there are still times when pupils receive over-generous praise for efforts and actions that should be accepted as normal routine and practice.

In the least effective lessons, teachers' subject knowledge is weak and their instructions and explanations often cause confusion. Planning remains weak because the pupils' work is not matched well enough to their different starting points and capabilities. This means that pupils often struggle with their tasks because they do not have the skills and knowledge necessary to complete their work successfully. There is still too much emphasis given to teaching age-related units of work, rather than making sure that pupils' tasks are aimed at eliminating persistent errors and misunderstandings.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning, including the use of assessment, to ensure that all teaching is good or better – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

As a result of considerable support and intervention by the local authority, the accuracy of the school's assessment information has improved significantly. Local

authority consultants have checked the school's assessment data and moderated teachers' assessments. This means that the school has established a more secure and accurate benchmark against which to measure pupils' attainment and progress.

Until recently, when she was deployed to teach a class of Year 6 pupils, the deputy headteacher has continued to work successfully alongside teachers, coaching and training them to help improve the quality of teaching and learning. She is a good role model and has been influential in helping improve the quality of lesson planning. The headteacher has improved the systems used to provide written feedback to teachers, ensuring that greater priority is given to setting clear targets for improvement. There is greater security about the school's monitoring and evaluation of its performance and the headteacher has produced helpful summaries of pupils' progress and their achievements. Regular evaluations of progress are becoming more robust, for example meetings with teachers to discuss the impact of their work on raising achievement. As a result, there is a more rigorous focus on eliminating underachievement.

The temporary senior leadership team is benefiting from support and advice provided through the federation arrangements. Teachers on the team are becoming more confident, and have produced useful action plans to show how their work should contribute to raising standards and achievement.

Despite these positive developments, the school's leadership relies heavily on external support and help. The federation arrangements are likely to be strengthened further as the IEB and local authority seek to ensure that the school develops a robust and secure internal capacity for improvement.

In addition, there is not yet a strong sense of team work and morale is fragile. It is imperative that the school's leadership establish a common sense of purpose among all staff, with greater clarity and coherence than is currently the case. For example, communication between the school's leadership and teachers is not always sufficiently transparent nor does it adequately support school improvement.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- improve leadership and management and ensure procedures for monitoring and self-evaluation are robust and rigorous in securing rapid improvements in pupils' progress – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority provides a good level of support. It has been instrumental in challenging the school's leadership while, at the same time, providing help and advice to achieve success. There are encouraging signs that teaching and learning are improving and standards are beginning to rise, albeit slowly and from a low base. The local authority is working effectively with the IEB and the introduction of the federation arrangements with a local successful school is already having a positive impact.