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6 February 2009

Mr M Wynne
The Headteacher
Yardley Wood Community Primary School
School Road
Birmingham
West Midlands
B14 4ER

Dear Mr Wynne

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Yardley Wood Primary School

Following my visit with Sheila Boyle, Additional Inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 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 January 2008. 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 governors and the Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Yardley Wood Primary School

Report from the monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 February 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, met with the headteacher, the chair of governors, and spoke to pupils and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The school has appointed two phase leaders, from within the existing teaching staff, since the last visit.

Achievement and standards

Achievement continues to be inadequate because pupils do not make consistent progress in each year group, particularly in science. There continues to be good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Year 6. Inspectors' observation of lessons and the school's improved tracking of pupils' progress point to improved learning in English and mathematics. However, lessons observed and the analysis of pupils work indicate that in most year groups pupils are not making sufficient progress.

The school continues to ensure that lower attaining pupil make satisfactory progress through improved teaching and increasingly well targeted interventions involving teaching assistants. Pupils who have English as an additional language are carefully monitored and make satisfactory progress. However, the progress made by more able pupils remains inadequate because they are not consistently challenged in lessons and many do not have sufficient awareness of how they can improve.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science and accelerate the rate of progress of the average and above average attaining pupils – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils generally have good attitudes to their work and behave well. In the most effective lesson pupils develop mature attitudes and cooperate well with each other. Pupils are happy and enjoy school. They are polite, friendly and relate well to visitors, staff and each other. Their dispositions to learning are good. The school's new social and emotional learning programme is beginning to help pupils develop their communication skills and celebrate personal achievement. However, independent learning skills remain

underdeveloped because pupils are not sufficiently aware of the criteria used to assess their progress.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last monitoring visit. However, some teaching continues to be inadequate. A common factor in the improvement is teachers are planning better and more teachers are focusing on what the outcomes of the lessons should be. A strong feature at the start of many lessons is the sharing of lesson objectives so pupils know what they must achieve, although expectations for the most able are not always high enough. Pupil enjoyment has increased as a result of a greater range of activities in lessons. Behaviour management is good. In the better lessons seen pupils made good progress because teachers' expectations were high, activities were well matched and challenging to pupils of differing ability. In these lessons, teachers used questioning well to assess learning throughout the lessons and reinforced key ideas by asking pupils to evaluate their own learning. Learning accelerated in one lesson because pupils were given opportunities to think hard, explain their understanding and reasoning, and present their work to the class. Teaching was highly effective in a Year 6 history lesson because pupils were given the time to very sensitively analyse in depth the situation of a boy evacuated to live away from his home.

There are still too many lessons with weaknesses that prevent all pupils progressing well. Whilst the needs of the less able are generally met well, through differentiated work and support from teacher assistants, the needs of the most able are not. Evidence from work samples and lessons show that not all of the pupils are challenged at the level appropriate for their abilities. Even where teachers organised alternative activities for the more able these were often not effective because teachers did not ensure pupils were able to think more deeply about the underlying concepts or critically apply their learning. In the lessons where teaching is least effective teachers still spend too much time sitting on the carpet listening or unnecessarily consolidating previous learning, particularly for the most able.

Teachers now set targets in English and mathematics, but these are not always well understood by pupils. Frequently, pupils are not clear about how to reach their targets. Although the levels pupils are currently working at are prominently displayed in every classroom, little evidence was seen in lessons or in teachers' marking of pupils being guided as to how they could move towards the next level. There is practice that is more effective in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where children are more regularly actively involved in identifying the small steps being made on route to achieving longer term targets. There is also some effective developmental marking in Year 6. The information gained from teacher assessment and the new systems for tracking of pupils' progress are not yet being used well enough to match work to pupils' different starting points and abilities.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning, ensuring teachers plan lessons which provide all pupils with sufficient challenge and activities that are well-matched to their ability – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The school's senior leadership has ensured major improvements to the school building. This is contributing to improved parental perceptions of the school and is making pupils feel safer. Middle leadership has improved as a result of the appointment of leaders with an excellent knowledge of their phases. The school has sensibly recognised the need to ensure an accurate picture is maintained of subjects across the entire school in light of the shift in emphasis away from subject leadership. The school is making better use of the expertise it has by ensuring its best teachers are now able to influence weaker members of staff. Middle and senior leaders are providing effective support that is resulting in improved teaching and learning. Through its restructuring and the appointment of permanent deputy headteacher, the school is developing strength in depth so that improvement depends less on the headteacher. The headteacher has been effective in continuing to build a positive shared vision that is motivating staff to work hard to bring about improvement.

Progress has been made in how the school uses data so that the school has a more accurate view of the progress pupils make over time. This is being fine tuned so that it provides a better overview of the progress of different groups. A concise curriculum overview has been developed to support monitoring. The school is beginning to consider the contribution all subjects can make to the raising of standards. The priority given to English and mathematics is such that science has not yet received attention.

Although the school broadly knows its strengths and weaknesses, deficiencies in monitoring remain. Lessons are graded accurately but the school does not focus enough on the achievement of different groups. This prevents the school gaining the detailed knowledge of precisely why more able pupils do not make sufficient progress. The monitoring of planning has improved but not enough attention is given to pupils' work as a source of evidence about the consistency of learning and teaching.

Improvement planning at all levels is focused on the key issues, although there is a lack of measurable targets, particularly related to the progress of higher attaining pupils. This makes it difficult for governors to be clear about the improvements made in key areas and contributes to their slightly over-optimistic view they have of the progress being made. Action has been taken to address inadequate teaching in the school, but this has yet to be fully effective. The school continues to meet the government's safeguarding requirements.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of leadership and management to bring greater rigour to monitoring the work of the school – satisfactory
- ensure all safeguarding procedures are fully met – good.

External support

The most recent local authority review is a useful contribution to the school's improvement because it highlights the deficiencies that are preventing good progress being made. The plans to develop a more collaborative approach to review would appear to be well timed. Advanced skills teacher support has improved the diagnostic skills of teaching assistants so support can be better targeted.

Progress on priorities for further improvement

- Ensure more effective use of success criteria and objectives in order that all pupils are consistently challenged.
- Further clarify the roles of staff in evaluating the work of the school and monitor more frequently in order that staff receive more timely guidance on how they can improve.

These additional priorities continue to remain areas for further improvement.