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Mr S Cox
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cox

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Brownhills West Primary School

Following my visit with Nina Bee, Additional Inspector, to your school on 28 and 29 January 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 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 – 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 Director of Children's Services for Walsall.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Watters
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Brownhills West Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 January 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, a leadership consultant, the assessment, science and mathematics coordinators, the chair of governors and the school's local authority school improvement adviser.

Context

The headteacher joined the school on 3 November 2008. The deputy headteacher remains absent on long term sick leave. The English coordinator has been absent since the beginning of the spring term 2009, because of illness. A leadership consultant is working at the school for two days each week. This post is funded by the local authority.

Achievement and standards

Standards are rising slowly and rates of progress are gradually increasing, although there are inconsistencies between year groups. Progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2 is generally satisfactory. In Key Stage 2 pupils' achievement is more variable. For example, progress in science lessons in Years 5 and 6 is satisfactory and better than in literacy lessons. Rates of progress in Years 3 and 4 in English and mathematics are not consistently satisfactory. Pupils' writing books in Years 5 and 6 show broadly satisfactory progress since September 2008, with pupils given far more opportunities to write at length and improve key skills. The school's most recent assessments are generally accurate and provide a more secure base against which to measure progress in the future.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- improve the rate of pupils' progress in order to raise standards in English, mathematics and more particularly in science, where they are very low – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

In all classes, pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are good. Even when pupils are given work that is too easy or when they have to sit and listen for too long, they do not misbehave. When outside, pupils play amicably together and are kind and thoughtful towards one another. They develop good relationships with the adults who work with them and appreciate the help they are given.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is slowly improving, but remains variable, particularly in Years 3 to 6, where the quality of learning in lessons is inconsistent. In all classes, teachers have good relationships with their pupils. Teaching assistants are well informed and generally contribute positively to pupils' learning, in lesson introductions and during group activities. Teachers' expectations of the quality and amount of work that pupils should achieve have improved. Lesson plans are thorough and show how pupils are taught in groups, according to their prior attainment levels. Despite this, the activities for these groups are not always well thought out. For example, higher attaining pupils are not always sufficiently challenged and lower attaining pupils are sometimes given tasks that are too difficult.

The quality of learning is adversely affected when the pace of lessons, particularly in Key Stage 2, is too slow. On these occasions, teachers spend too much time talking and pupils sit and listen for too long. The academic guidance that pupils receive varies considerably. There are good examples of marking where pupils are informed well about what they need to do to improve. However, too much of the teachers' marking fails to identify what is needed for further improvement.

Pupils' progress is tracked more carefully than in the past although, at present, reliable data is limited to this academic year. Recent assessment information is broadly accurate and shows the National Curriculum sub-levels pupils are reaching in reading, writing, mathematics and science. This information has been used satisfactorily to form groups within classes for literacy, numeracy and science. However, the use of assessment information is not as good as it might be. Teachers do not always use it accurately when they plan lessons. Some are not secure about what is needed to move pupils from one National Curriculum sub-level to the next one. For example, activities often embrace the ability groups but do not always cater for the individual needs within the group.

The curriculum has been amended so that pupils have more opportunities, through various intervention strategies, to reinforce and develop basic literacy and mathematical skills. Pupils are beginning to benefit from extra mental mathematics sessions and other lessons to improve their comprehension skills. In addition, pupils in Years 3 to 6 have additional teaching time to help reinforce and extend their mathematical skills.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching, especially in Years 3 to 6, so that teachers have higher expectations of all pupils, particularly the more able – satisfactory
- ensure teachers have the assessment information they need to build on pupils' previous achievement and learning successfully – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has introduced a range of important initiatives aimed at improving the school's collective leadership. There is a more rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluation. This includes observing the quality of teaching and learning in lessons, providing feedback to teachers about the quality of their work, regularly scrutinising pupils' written work, and checking teachers' planning each week. These actions have helped secure a more coherent and systematic approach to monitoring the school's work than was previously the case.

The headteacher and the subject leaders in English, mathematics and science are beginning to gather detailed information about pupils' achievements and the quality of teaching. The assessment coordinator is leading an important development to ensure teachers have more accurate and up to date assessments of pupils' achievements to inform their medium and short term lesson plans. The assessments are also used to identify groups of pupils who need greater support or challenge in lessons, according to their different learning needs. Regular meetings between teachers and the school's leadership have been introduced to monitor pupils' progress and hold teachers to account for the standards achieved by the pupils in their care. These actions have achieved some success, for example improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and increased rates of progress for some groups of pupils. Nevertheless, there is still much to be done to ensure that improvements become embedded in all year groups and subjects.

The school's analysis of assessment information is being revised to take account of some uncertainty about the accuracy of assessments made during the previous academic year. This is appropriate because the school, with the support of the local authority, should then be able to ensure that future analysis of pupils' progress is based on moderated teachers' assessments and validated assessment data.

Written feedback to teachers contains some useful pointers for development, but these are not prioritised into sharp and precise targets for improvement. Similarly, there are no review dates for following up the observations and ensuring teachers know when they are expected to make improvements. There is also insufficient link between the impact of teaching and the progress pupils make in lessons.

The chair of governors meets regularly with the headteacher and represents the governors on the local authority's regular progress team meetings. The chair provides sound leadership and ensures that the school's work is monitored by governors more effectively than previously.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- improve the quality of leadership and management, and ensure leaders at all levels evaluate the school's work more rigorously and drive school improvement more urgently – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority continues to work closely with the school's collective leadership. Regular meetings are held between the local authority school's improvement adviser, the headteacher and other senior staff. Subject leaders have benefited from advice to help them establish their role in monitoring and evaluation. The local authority recognises that teachers require further help to level pupils' work and then plan lessons which provide greater challenge and support for all groups of pupils. The local authority's progress team continues to meet to monitor the school's progress, in line with the commitments in the local authority statement of action.