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6 February 2009

Miss Shirley Trimble  
Headteacher  
Weston Primary School  
Lambstickle Lane  
Weston Village  
Runcorn  
Cheshire  
WA7 4RA

Dear Miss Trimble

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Weston Primary School

Following my visit 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

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's Services for Halton Council.

Yours sincerely

Eileen M Mulgrew  
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Weston Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 February 2009

## Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, including eight lessons or part lessons, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, senior leaders and other members of staff, the local authority (LA) officer and members of the governing body.

## Context

The LA has decided not to close Weston because it is a popular school within the local area and plays an important role in the local community. Following consultation, the LA has agreed to establish an interim executive board to support the work of the governing body. This is currently awaiting approval from the Secretary of State.

Since the inspection in October 2008 there have been some changes to the staffing structure. The deputy headteacher is currently on long-term sick leave but is expected to return to the school very shortly. As a result, two senior leaders share the responsibilities of the deputy. A member of staff has left the school and has been replaced by a supply teacher. The staff in Key Stage 2 are on temporary contracts.

## Achievement and standards

Throughout the school standards are low and pupils' achievement is inadequate overall. Pupils make a good start to their education in the Reception class and evidence from inspection shows that progress for these pupils is accelerating. However, progress made by pupils throughout the rest of the school is patchy. From the school's assessment information, standards at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 remain low and few pupils are doing well enough for their age.

A start has been made on identifying pupils' current standards and annual attainment targets for English and mathematics have been set for all pupils. Systems to track pupils' progress annually have been introduced and the school is now refining this system to effectively check the progress pupils make over the term or half term. However, the current focus is on how well pupils are doing in relation to what is expected for their age, and not whether they have made enough progress or not.

## Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development was not a focus for the monitoring inspection, as this was identified as satisfactory in the October 2008 inspection. Pupils say they enjoy coming to school because the lessons are more fun. Pupils behave very well and are proud to show their well presented work. Elected school councillors are now having more opportunities to contribute to the development of the school. For example, all pupils were asked the question 'What do you want to see changed in the school?' and school councillors have the responsibility of collating the responses and presenting the findings to the headteacher. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the increased number and variety of organised activities after school; similarly about the variety of curriculum subjects they now enjoy, for example art and geography.

## Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning remains too variable across the school; lack of continuity in staffing provision still remains. The school has started to develop the quality of teaching by encouraging teachers to consider the impact of their work on the gains in pupils' learning. As a result, pupils are expected to sit for an appropriate amount of time listening to the teacher, giving more time to pupils' learning. In group or individual work pupils are not always clear about the task set or what is expected of them. Work is not always matched well enough to pupils' needs or the task is too complicated, and too often there is insufficient challenge for higher attaining pupils. The pace of learning in some classes is still too slow and there are missed opportunities for learning. For example, the use of photocopied sheets hinders pupils' opportunities for applying writing skills. In contrast, a literacy session in Reception class included counting bars of chocolate to be used later in baking. Pupils are very tolerant of the less stimulating teaching and while they may become restless, they are not seen to be disaffected. While marking still affirms pupils' efforts it does not link to targets set nor does it explain how pupils can improve their work. The school recognises that this aspect of its work needs to be consistent throughout the school and has plans to review its policy on marking.

Senior leaders have made some appropriate decisions about ways to improve the curriculum since the last inspection. The time given to subjects to obtain a better balance has been reviewed and amended. A whole-school curriculum map shows the topics pupils will cover over each year and links between literacy and numeracy and the different subjects. Medium-term plans are in place to show the content of each subject to be covered in each year group. Weekly planning is completed by each teacher and senior leaders monitor classroom practice to ensure practice adheres to the planning. A wide range of out-of-school activities are now in place for pupils from Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Visits to enrich pupils' understanding of the curriculum have taken place. The good range of engaging activities planned for the Reception pupils continue to give the children a good start and there are plans to extend the positive features into Key Stage 1.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2008:

- Ensure that staffing provision is of a sufficient standard to be able to deliver improvements throughout the school – inadequate.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that most lessons are good or better – inadequate.
- Meet fully the requirements of the National Curriculum – satisfactory.

## Leadership and management

The headteacher, governors and staff are determined to move the school forward and to raise standards and achievement for the pupils of Weston. Through a series of meetings the school has formulated a vision statement committed to this aim; it is now ready to be sent to parents. This is an important move forward as the school now has a platform to base its development work. Members of staff each have an area of the curriculum to lead and are keen to develop their subject. The LA has led an initial training session about roles and responsibilities for subject leaders, action plans are being developed and there is a clear process for improving this aspect of the school's work. However, the impact of this is yet to be seen in the overall development of roles.

After the inspection all support for the school by the LA was withdrawn. This enabled senior leaders to develop action plans and to identify the most appropriate intervention for the school. Senior leaders are starting to define where support can be most effectively and efficiently targeted. For example, plans for teachers from Weston to visit an outstanding local school to observe the quality of teaching are being discussed. To ensure the work of the school is not distracted by support and guidance from different sources on differing fronts, the LA is brokering the amount of support offered to the school.

Senior leaders have followed the detailed plan of action and drawn on the guidance and support from the mentor headteacher. Some of the objectives are repeated and could usefully be grouped together, and many of the success criteria could be sharper to enable governors and senior leaders to gauge the impact of action more specifically.

Despite initial action on the areas for improvement from the inspection in October there is frustration felt by the headteacher, governors, parents and staff about the lack of more rapid improvement. Staff absence is affecting all staff as senior leaders deal with managing their own role and the work load of colleagues. Parents are very supportive of the school but are still concerned about the impact on their children's learning. However, the number of parents wanting places for their children in September 2009 is greater than the number of places the school has available. Governors were consulted about the appointment of an interim executive board but are discouraged that this is not yet in place.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2008:

- Develop the roles of middle managers and coordinators in core and foundation subjects - inadequate.

### External support

The LA allocated a senior school standards and effectiveness officer to the school three weeks before the inspection in October 2008 and she is now a member of the governing body. A headteacher from the local authority is acting as a mentor to the headteacher. The LA's original statement of action needed some amendments and now meets requirements. Action plans are appropriately resourced and relevant and have been amended to include a two-year timeframe with 'milestones' so that the progress the school is making can be evaluated. There are clear, quantified success criteria. Arrangements for the school to evaluate the support from the LA are in place through the single school update and the cross service monitoring group. Although the LA plans and school plans are similar in content, it would now be prudent to more closely align them to ensure support and challenge result in a brisker pace of improvement.

### Priorities for further improvement

The school should continue its work on the priorities identified in the October 2008 inspection.