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18 June 2009

Miss Shirley Trimble
Headteacher
Weston Primary School
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Cheshire
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Dear Miss Trimble

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Weston Primary School

Following my visit with Eithne Proffitt, additional inspector, to your school on 16 and 17 June 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 October 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 the Interim Executive Board 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 second monitoring inspection on 16 and 17 June 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including eight lessons or parts lessons, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, other members of staff, two members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), a representative from the local authority and groups of pupils.

Context

The local authority 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. The number of applications for entry into the Reception class in September 2009 exceeded the number of places available. As a result, after the appeals procedure, the school will accept 20 children into the Reception class at the start of the 2009/2010 academic year. Since the first monitoring visit the Secretary of State has approved the establishment of an IEB to support the work of the governing body; this Board started work in March 2009.

Since the monitoring visit in February 2009 there have been some significant changes to the staffing structure. An acting deputy headteacher has been appointed recently to cover the long-term absence of the substantive deputy headteacher. The teacher from the Key Stage 1 resource base has now taken on the role of Year 1 and 2 class teacher. A teacher has been appointed to the Key Stage 2 resource base on a temporary basis.

Achievement and standards

Lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils work show that standards and achievement remain inconsistent throughout the school. The school's own tracking data support this picture. Progress for pupils in the Reception class has been good over this last year and most have reached the expected levels for pupils of a similar age. The school's most recent assessment information indicates that standards in English at the end of Year 6 are now broadly in line with the national average; this is due to an increase in the number of pupils gaining a higher level in writing. The picture is not as positive in mathematics. The number of pupils reaching the higher level has improved, while those reaching the expected level for their age remains in line with the national average. The school is confident that these teacher assessments are a secure reflection of the standards reached by the pupils. The start to identify pupils' current standards and setting attainment targets for pupils is more established. Pupils in Key Stage 2 talk confidently about their targets and their levels of attainment. The system to track pupils' progress, just introduced at the time of the last inspection visit, was found to be inappropriate. The school introduced

another system which is more suited to generating the information necessary to check the progress pupils make over each half term. However, the school is not entirely confident about the reliability of information collected previously to establish a baseline from which progress can be judged. As a result, senior leaders use information from lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils work together with assessment information to check pupils' progress. Although the main focus is still on how well pupils are doing in relation to what is expected for their age, there is a shift towards judging progress against what pupils can actually achieve.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development was not a focus for this monitoring inspection. Pupils were very willing to talk to inspectors and show great loyalty to the school. The inspector spoke with a representative group of pupils from Year 1 to Year 6; one comment, agreed by all, 'It's all about us now', sums up the positive changes that pupils feel have happened since October. Pupils say lessons are active and practical; particularly appreciating the increased number of scientific experiments they undertake and the increased amount of physical education they enjoy. Likewise, they enjoy the variety of organised activities after school which has increased since the last monitoring visit.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is patchy across the school. Teachers' confidence in teaching literacy skills has improved partly through the bespoke training received from the local authority consultants. Teachers plan a series of lessons which show activities intended for the different ability groups within the mixed-age classes. Teachers share learning objectives with pupils and set success criteria. Planned activities are more active and practical. For example, in a numeracy lesson in the Year 3/4 class, pupils started the lesson by estimating the length of objects around the room, measuring them, and discussing the accuracy of the answer. Teaching assistants are deployed more effectively and in the best lessons are used to give valuable adult input during the lesson. Teachers make better use of a range of resources, particularly computers and interactive whiteboards, to stimulate learning. A recently produced teaching and learning policy has promoted useful discussion about pupils' learning but, as yet, teachers place too much emphasis in planning on what they will teach rather than what pupils will learn. In some lessons the pace of learning is slow; work is not suitably matched to the needs of individual pupils and there is still scope to further challenge the more able pupils. This is due, in part, to the insecure assessment information held by the school. Staff have worked together to establish a marking, feedback and presentation policy which clearly sets out expectations throughout the school. It is too early to identify the impact of this policy.

Senior leaders have built on developments made at the time of the last monitoring visit. The whole-school curriculum map continues to be used as the basis from which teachers create medium-term plans and weekly plans. This process, now embedded,

provides a consistent approach to planning throughout the school and ensures pupils receive what is prescribed in the National Curriculum. Sufficient time is given to foundation subjects including Religious Education and geography. Investment in more science equipment has supported an increase in scientific investigations in classes. There has been little investment in resources for other subjects. Pupils comment readily and enthusiastically about recent changes, the variety of subjects they receive now, and show preferences about the different curriculum subjects. However, the school has not yet explored whether the planned coverage meets the particular needs of all pupils and there is scope to review planning further to ensure the more able pupils are sufficiently challenged. All staff are now involved in the wide range of out-of-school activities offered to the pupils on a regular basis. Opportunities to enrich and extend pupils' understanding of the topics they study are offered through well planned visits. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of very recent changes to the delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

Leadership and management

Since the last monitoring inspection, middle leaders have worked hard to establish their roles and develop an understanding of their responsibilities. After training from a local authority officer, subject leaders together created a team action plan with clear tasks and a time frame to judge the effectiveness of collective action. Working cooperatively, each subject leader has created an action plan based on the needs of their subject. Files have been set up which include sections pertinent to the monitoring and evaluation of that subject, including examples of good practice, planned visits and a record of professional development. This process has created a consistent and supportive approach to, and ownership of, all subjects of the curriculum. Progress in the development of subject leader roles is evident in the consistent lesson observations of literacy and numeracy which have taken place, together with the planned cycle of observations of other subjects.

The capacity of leadership has been strengthened by the temporary appointment of an acting deputy headteacher. This has created stability in the senior leadership of the school. Morale is higher and staff are working together as a team and within teams with the aim of raising achievement and standards for all pupils. The IEB has provided the catalyst for a more urgent approach to resolving issues and has established high expectations for ensuring accountability for decisions made by the headteacher; advice and guidance are sharply focused on what the school needs to do to improve. Leaders and managers have established some non-negotiable

expectations with all staff. Leaders and managers have continued to build an effective partnership with the local authority.

With the implementation of the IEB, the headteacher, governors, parents and staff are more optimistic about the rate of improvement the school can now make. Although staff absence is still affecting all staff, there is an acknowledgment that action is taken to minimise disruption. Senior leaders and staff feel more positive. Although parents have expressed some concerns about staffing turbulence, senior leaders took action to discuss any individual issues and the school looks forward to welcoming 20 pupils into the Reception class in September 2009.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

External support

Members of the IEB have used their expertise to accelerate effective action to ensure improvements are made. The IEB has established a positive partnership with the leadership and management of the school; providing valuable support and necessary challenge. The IEB has communicated to leaders and governors the urgent need to take effective decisive action. It provides a good model of effective governance. Governors are receiving ongoing training and development to equip them with the necessary skills to hold the school to account.

Advice from the local authority's consultants has been appreciated by senior leaders and by staff. Since the last monitoring visit the local authority and school action plans have been streamlined to create a more coherent, achievable school improvement plan. This is reviewed regularly and annotated to show progress against planned actions. In this way, all stakeholders can gauge success or identify where further improvement is needed.

Priorities for further improvement

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