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Miss Margarette Chapman
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Chapman

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Hollin Primary School

Following my visit with Eithne Profitt, Additional Inspector to your school on 17 and 18 March 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 November 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.

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 Executive Director, Children Schools and Families for Rochdale.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Hollin Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work including 12 part-lessons and two registrations, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, staff, the chair of the interim executive board (IEB) and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Achievement and standards

The school has worked hard since the inspection to develop an accessible and reliable electronic system for tracking pupils' progress in the core subjects. Elements of this in place to date are promising. More reliable features in previous assessment practice are being retained, albeit with some sharpening in accuracy, while new approaches are being investigated, including for mathematics. The school recognises that much remains to be done before the tracking system is fully functional and teachers' assessments are consistently secure across the core subjects. At present, the limited data available indicate the progress of Key Stage 2 pupils towards suitable targets in writing and mathematics, set using recognised national predictors. In all Key Stage 2 classes a significant proportion of pupils have either dropped back a National Curriculum sub-level or remained within the same sub-level since the previous assessment points earlier this year. Of particular concern are the limited gains being made by Year 6 pupils. The school is unable confidently to predict likely performance in this year's national assessments and tests.

A number of strategies and systems intended to support the attainment and progress of pupils who find learning challenging are now in place. These include targeted support for literacy in small group sessions as well as intervention programmes for mathematics. These sessions meet effectively the immediate needs of the pupils and the good progress that they make learning in small steps is clear. Progress made in lessons, however, is not always apparent. Teachers' assessments inform specific learning targets for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but these are not consistently planned into whole-class teaching or tasks. The school's tracking systems do not allow for the accurate measurement of these pupils' small steps of progress over extended periods of time.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise standards and accelerate achievement in writing, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2 – inadequate.
- Do more to boost the achievement of pupils who find learning hard, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils are generally well behaved and move around the school sensibly. They are polite and courteous and show positive attitudes to school life. There has been a small rise in their overall rate of attendance which now stands at 93%. The best attendance is in Year 6 where levels are in line with the national average. The school is taking a number of appropriate steps to improve attendance. Incentives have been introduced for pupils, including the weekly award of 'brainy bear' to the class with the best attendance. A new electronic system for contacting parents/carers on the first day of a child's absence has been introduced and this is proving more efficient in terms of staff time. It is too soon to evaluate its impact on pupils' attendance. A noticeboard in school makes the link for parents between the number of days a child is absent and the amount of learning time lost.

The number of persistent absentees has reduced because two children have moved out of the area. The rate now stands at below the median for schools in similar social contexts. Effective liaison with the educational welfare service helps the school reach families where problems are deep seated and, when necessary, a wider range of agencies is involved in addressing pupils' needs. A recent review of attendance procedures by the education welfare service recommends more thorough analysis by the school of trends in absence for vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Persist with developing strategies to raise attendance – satisfactory.

Quality of provision

There is clear evidence of improvements in elements of teaching across the school. Increased focus on learning objectives, improved learning environments, and the introduction of techniques for assessing learning during lessons, are now making pupils' learning experiences more relevant and meaningful. These features provide some solid foundations for learning but teachers do not always build upon these sufficiently well to promote good progress. Pockets of inadequate teaching remain and, while there have been some improvements in the quality of teaching, too high a proportion fails to be better than satisfactory. Pupils need to make much bigger gains in their learning but the overall quality of teaching is not strong enough to raise standards rapidly and eradicate the legacy of underachievement.

The teaching and learning consultant in residence and the group of staff working with her to monitor pupils' progress have been pivotal in fostering the climate for improvement and in shifting the focus of teachers' work firmly towards pupils' learning. Teachers use of a range of methods during lessons to check how well pupils have grasped new skills and ideas. The consistent use of 'steps to success', staged prompts linked to the desired learning outcome, is beginning to support

pupils' understanding of how they are learning and how well they are doing in lessons. Teachers' planning, especially in mathematics, reflects a growing awareness of the importance of providing activities that are matched to pupils' needs and that contain appropriate levels of challenge for all. The school recognises that, in practice, this does not always happen as not all staff have the skills to assess pupils' standards accurately. This hinders teachers' ability to match work sharply to the range of learning needs within their classes.

Where classroom management is strong, pupils behave well and are keen to answer questions and get actively involved in their learning. However, in less effective lessons this enthusiasm for learning is sometimes quashed by teaching that is too often based on question and answer sessions. These limit opportunities for pupils to explain their thinking or methods of working. Here, valuable teaching and learning opportunities are missed.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Use assessment information more effectively, particularly at Key Stage 2, to plan work that meets pupils' individual needs and enables pupils to make good progress – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The school has been slow to develop a plan for improvement that addresses the areas identified in the last inspection report through appropriately staged actions, clear allocation of responsibilities, quantitative success criteria and suitable evaluation procedures. The current draft plan has been produced at the request of the IEB. While based on the LA's action plan, in effect it only covers the period to the end of this academic year and not to the school's target date for the removal of special measures. It is unclear who will monitor actions and where responsibility for evaluating the impact of these lies. The headteacher is developing a pro-forma for reporting progress against the plan to the IEB but, in its current form, this similarly lacks sufficient distinction between monitoring actions and evaluating their impact. While staff are aware of some of the planned activities as a consequence, in the main, of the work of the teaching and learning consultant, the plan is not a working document in the school. Some aspects of it are backed up by detailed action plans, for instance, those covered by the intensive support programme for mathematics and writing: staff are more familiar with these areas. There is a lack of clarity at the most senior level about where detailed action plans are in place and what these cover.

Coherent systems for monitoring and evaluating provision are not in place. Some monitoring takes place, although previous arrangements for regular, formal lesson observations have lapsed. Information about pupils' progress is not used effectively as a monitoring tool, to hold staff to account for pupils' performance or to inform the school's strategic direction. The headteacher reviews teachers' planning termly and

core subject coordinators periodically review samples of pupils' work from all classes. However, recommendations from these reviews relate to administrative processes and not to raising standards and achievement. It is unclear how recommendations from the recent audit of provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities will be taken forward. The management of special educational needs is fragmented since several staff have responsibilities for different areas but no one person holds the strategic overview of provision or pupils' progress. Management information garnered from such reviews is not pulled together systematically or analysed with rigour so it does not inform the school's self-evaluation or strategic decision-making.

The IEB began its work very recently. Members bring a wealth of relevant expertise to their role in leading the school, the benefits of which are already becoming evident.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Develop robust systems to monitor and evaluate the school's work in order to better inform self-evaluation and development planning – inadequate.

External support

In line with its action plan, the LA has provided and brokered considerable, well targeted support for the school. Helpfully, the expertise of the co-located special school has been drawn on. Through the Greater Manchester Challenge, a teaching and learning consultant has been placed in the school full time for two terms. Her support is well received and its impact is evident. Support through the intensive support programme, already in place prior to the last inspection, continues. A National Leader in Education is available for a day each week to support the development of leadership: the school is just beginning to access this help constructively. The LA's school improvement officers are rigorous in challenging the school. The recently completed review provides a robust evaluation of the school's position and well judged recommendations.

Priorities for further improvement

- Complete the action plan and devise effective methods for evaluating and reporting on the school's progress.
- Fully establish a tracking system for core subjects as soon as possible and ensure that staff have ready access to it.
- Secure the reliability of assessment in the core subjects so that pupils' progress can be tracked accurately and interventions targeted appropriately.