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Mrs Janet Sharps
Headteacher
Landgate School, Bryn
Landgate Lane
Ashton-in-Makerfield
Wigan
WN4 0EP

Dear Mrs Sharps

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Landgate School, Bryn

Following my visit with Liz Godman, Additional Inspector, to your school on 06-07 May, 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 December 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

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 Director of Children's Services for Wigan.

Yours sincerely

Katharine Halifax

Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Landgate School, Bryn

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 06-07 May 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, met the headteacher, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, representatives from the local authority and spoke to the School Improvement Partner.

Context

There have been considerable staffing changes at all levels since the inspection in December 2008. The new headteacher took up post at the start of the spring term 2009, and an assistant headteacher commenced duties at the start of the summer term 2009. Following the departure of the phase three leader at spring half term 2009, the governors and local authority agreed to the appointment of a second assistant headteacher to take responsibility for the 14 to 19 curriculum. Though the appointment is from the start of the autumn term 2009, the assistant headteacher designate is spending one day a week in school. This will extend to two days in the second half of the summer term. The deputy headteacher is currently on extended absence through illness. Changes have also been made to the number, hours and responsibilities of teaching assistants.

Achievement and standards

An improvement in the range and availability of information regarding pupils' achievements is beginning to allow leaders to track progress and identify gaps in learning, although some inaccuracies in teacher assessments mean this is not always reliable. However, patterns are beginning to emerge. For example, pupils' achievements are better in reading than they are in writing. Similarly, pupils' performance in number is better than their ability to use and apply their mathematical understanding. Pupils are not showing any marked improvement in their progress in science. Students in the 14 to 19 unit continue to make steady progress towards their nationally recognised Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network (ASDAN) qualification, but no other awards are available. This limits their options for life after school.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils continue to enjoy coming to school as they did at the time of the last inspection. As a result, attendance levels have been maintained. Pupils' understanding of a healthy lifestyle and of how to keep safe has improved due to an increased emphasis on this in the curriculum. Pupils' behaviour in most lessons continues to promote their progress, because a majority of staff manage behaviour effectively. However, in some lessons, the challenging behaviour of one pupil in the group triggers a similar reaction from the others and on these occasions learning continues to be adversely affected. Pupils' preparation for the future is improving as they acquire increasing literacy, numeracy,

personal and social skills. However, a lack of systematic and phased introduction to the world of work inhibits this for the older pupils.

Quality of provision

Adults continue to demonstrate a good understanding of teaching pupils with autism. As a result of targeted support, appropriate professional development and focused monitoring, the quality of teaching is improving. No inadequate teaching was observed. Teachers plan to a common format and are clear about the knowledge and skills each pupil will acquire in each lesson. Tasks are better matched to pupils' needs and style of learning, and resources are more age appropriate. On occasions however, learning is still hampered by a lack of suitable resources. Staff evaluate and record each pupils' learning consistently at the end of every lesson, but there is too much variation in the use this is put to. Similarly, there is inconsistency in the compilation of pupil progress files. For example, some teachers identify the next steps of learning, some label the work identifying the level of support the pupil has received, and others record the National Curriculum level or P Scale achieved.

The weaknesses identified in the curriculum at the last inspection persist. Whilst provision for literacy and numeracy has improved, other elements of the curriculum remain underdeveloped. There continues to be no consistent approach to long-term planning. As a result, topics within a subject, such as science, may be duplicated or omitted. Work has started in order to improve this, but curriculum revisions will not be implemented until September 2009. Proposals for improving the curriculum at Key Stage 4 and post-16 show increased opportunities for work-related and vocational learning and greater clarity as to what pupils will experience. Pupils' learning in a number of subjects continues to be adversely affected by a lack of resources and specialist facilities for teaching science, design and technology, food technology, information and communication technology, and art. In addition, in some classes, the way in which pupils with very challenging behaviour are grouped together also continues to restrict the access of all those in the group to a curriculum which meets their needs.

Staff continue to take suitable care of pupils' personal and social needs. Links with health and other professionals contribute well to pupils' well-being. Safeguarding arrangements meet legal requirements.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure all staff throughout the school use a common system, which includes individual learning targets, to assess pupils' attainment and track their progress – satisfactory.
- Ensure teachers plan lessons which build on pupils' previous learning in order to raise achievement – satisfactory.
- Provide all pupils and students with resources and materials appropriate to their ages - inadequate.

- Develop a curriculum to meet the needs and interests of all pupils – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The new headteacher has hit the ground running, immediately prioritising what needs to be done. She is determined that the additional challenge of the long-term absence of the deputy headteacher will not be a barrier to school improvement. She has quickly gained the confidence of staff and successfully engendered teamwork. The senior leadership team has been strengthened by the appointment of two assistant headteachers. This is already having an impact on assessment systems and in monitoring the effectiveness of teaching on learning. Furthermore, plans are well advanced for improving the 14 to 19 provision in September 2009. The inexperience of some subject leaders remains and this is reflected in the inadequate progress in the curriculum.

The introduction of a commercial programme to record attainment and track progress is beginning to give leaders and teachers a better picture of achievement. Regular assessment weeks are beginning to show emerging patterns in achievement, but leaders recognise this is still affected by some teacher inaccuracies. Governors are rising to meet the demands of their role. They have a better strategic overview of the school and are beginning to ask pertinent questions in holding the school to account.

Some progress has been made in improving the school's response to legal requirements. A written policy on promoting community cohesion has been developed for governors' approval. It has not yet been implemented and so has not yet brought about the necessary improvements in practice, particularly in relation to pupils' understanding of different cultures. Similarly, an equality scheme has been written, but it is too early to see its effects on ensuring equality of opportunity for all pupils. Changes to the annual report for parents are scheduled for June 2009.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure all statutory requirements are met – satisfactory.
- Establish systems so that leaders can monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority's statement of action meets requirements. Its implementation is providing beneficial support and advice to the school, such as expertise in the teaching of numeracy and literacy. Work with two partner schools has improved primary practice. Funding has been gained from the Greater Manchester Challenge to provide support for tackling weaknesses in the 14 to 19 unit.

Priorities for further improvement

- The priorities for further improvement continue to be those identified at the school's inspection in December 2008.