

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland
Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR
T 0845 123 6001
F 0845 123 6002

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



25 June 2009

Ms P Smart
The Federation Headteacher
Conway Primary School
Conway Road
Sparkbrook
Birmingham
West Midlands
B11 1NS

Dear Ms Smart

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Conway Primary School

Following my visit with Bill Goodall and Mary Usher-Clark to your school on 17 and 18 June 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

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 for Children, Young People and Families for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Watters
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Conway Primary School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 June 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the federation headteacher, deputy headteacher, associate deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, other senior staff and middle managers and a representative from the local authority. HMI also held a telephone conversation with the vice chair of the interim executive board.

Context

Since the last inspection there have been significant changes in the school's leadership team, teaching staff and teaching assistants. The headteacher is currently taking a period of authorised absence, agreed by the interim executive board and the local authority. The federation headteacher has full responsibility for leading and managing the school on a daily basis. The federation arrangements are expected to last for at least three years and are currently subject to a period of consultation. An associate deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher and upper school phase leader have been recruited and they started work at the school either at the beginning or during the summer term. Three teachers left the school at the end of the spring term 2009. Two other teachers have resigned and are expected to be leaving the school at the end of the summer term. Twelve new teachers and nine teaching assistants have been recruited, all on permanent contracts. Three of the 12 teachers have already started work at the school. Along with the teaching commitments of senior staff, this means that six classes and groups of pupils in Key Stage 2 are taught by different teachers than at the time of the previous inspection.

Achievement and standards

While standards remain very low and often well below the levels expected for the pupils' ages, rates of progress have slowly increased, particularly in the period between Easter and the end of May 2009. The school's most recent assessment information shows that in each year group, in reading, writing and mathematics, most pupils make generally satisfactory progress. However, pupils' achievement is still too variable, ranging from good to inadequate. The federation headteacher and senior staff recognise that rates of progress need to be consistently good and better in order to close the gap between the standards pupils are reaching and the level they should be at for their age. Currently the gap is not closing at a sufficiently speedy rate. Attainment in key skills in literacy and numeracy is extremely low.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- raise standards and increase the rate of pupils' progress throughout the school, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics – generally satisfactory to increase rates of progress but inadequate to raise standards.

Personal development and well-being

The great majority of pupils behave well and have positive attitudes. In lessons they work diligently and are motivated to do well particularly when their work is interesting, challenging and relevant. In the playground and around the school pupils play well together, in a calm and cooperative manner. Relationships are good and pupils show respect for each other and their different cultures. They respond particularly well when expectations are clearly set out and they know that sanctions will be applied for inappropriate behaviour.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved. The proportion of good lessons has increased from 14% to 47%, all in Key Stage 2. The proportion of inadequate lessons has fallen further from 27% to 19%. While this represents a positive step forward, some of the satisfactory lessons in Key Stage 2 were fragile and there were no consistently good lessons in the Early Years Foundation Stage or Key Stage 1 classes. The school is still a long way short of the target to ensure that all teaching is good or better. On this inspection, the quality of teaching was better in numeracy than in writing.

In the best lessons, the pace of learning is good and pupils make good progress, for example in numeracy lessons in Key Stage 2. Teachers' instructions and explanations are clear and help the pupils know exactly what they need to do to improve their work. Class routines are established well and good behaviour is reinforced. Relationships are good and the pupils' work is challenging.

In weaker lessons, the pupils lose their concentration when they are kept for too long on a single activity, for example listening to the teacher on the carpet or when tackling work without sufficient adult intervention. Weaknesses in teachers' subject knowledge sometimes cause confusion, particularly in English lessons. The pupils' work is still not matched well enough to their different starting points and this is impeding the pupils from making better and more rapid progress, particularly in writing. There are too many occasions when pupils receive over generous praise for work that is mediocre.

Pupils' targets are referred to in some lessons, particularly in Key Stage 2, but this is not well embedded in all year groups. The quality of teachers' marking is inconsistent. There are examples of good practice, for example in writing books in Years 5 and 6, but again, there are too many occasions when pupils receive very little constructive written feedback about how to improve their work. Similarly, some of the teachers' written comments give excessive praise for inaccurate work.

All teachers have been given assessment information about the pupils in their classes and groups. This has the potential to inform planning, but as yet has not impacted sufficiently positively on eliminating weaknesses in pupils' learning. This

relates mostly to pitching pupils' work at the right level to challenge their thinking and improve their knowledge and understanding.

Currently, the school's safeguarding arrangements meet government requirements.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning, including the use of assessment, to ensure that all teaching is good or better – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The federation headteacher has brought a clear sense of educational direction and purpose to the school's work. Her strong leadership skills are demonstrated in the improving security of medium and longer term strategic planning. She has high expectations and conveys these with authority, particularly when challenging weaker performance. There is a more coherent approach to tackling and eliminating the school's weaknesses. Morale has improved and a common sense of purpose is emerging. Teachers appreciate the improvements in communication and the greater transparency of decision making evident in the school's work.

The quality of the school's collective leadership has been further strengthened by the recent recruitment of other senior staff and with the deputy headteacher they form part of the new senior leadership team. The senior team is making a positive difference, for example leading developments in literacy and numeracy, establishing year group teams, and strengthening teaching for the pupils who have suffered most from staff changes and weaknesses in provision. Monitoring and evaluation are secure. The federation headteacher and other senior staff have observed lessons, giving feedback collectively and to individual staff. This has led to some marked improvements, although the quality of written feedback to teachers has not always been sufficiently rigorous. For example, when feeding back to groups of teachers, priorities for improvement are not always made explicit nor are they translated into precise targets for individual improvement. Similarly, it is not always clear when lessons will be checked again to make sure weaknesses have been eliminated.

The federation headteacher has refined and simplified the school's systems for tracking pupils' progress and attainment levels. Assessment information is used to provide a picture of achievement in all year groups and increasingly to hold teachers to account for the progress made by pupils in their care. Revisions have been made to the school's middle management structure, which should provide greater levels of accountability and consistency to the quality of teaching and learning.

The interim executive board continues to keep a watchful eye on the school's progress. Both the chair and vice chair of the board have a good grasp of what the school needs to do to eliminate persistent weaknesses and they provide good leadership. With other members of the interim executive board, they are driving the federation arrangements forward and provide good support for the federation headteacher.

These are all important developments which provide a secure platform for further improvement. Nevertheless, leaders and managers recognise that much remains to be done and that the school has to make up a lot of lost ground in a relatively short period of time. The challenge in the coming months is to lift expectations even further, secure rapid and sustained improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, and raise standards for all pupils.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- improve leadership and management and ensure procedures for monitoring and self-evaluation are robust and rigorous in securing rapid improvements in pupils' progress – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has moved swiftly to support the interim executive board and broker the federation arrangements with a local successful primary school. This has had a positive impact on improving the quality of education. The interim executive board is working closely with the local authority to consult parents and staff about the arrangements. Local authority staff continue to support improvements and the local authority is committed to providing additional resources to strengthen provision and outcomes for all pupils.