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Mr S Cox
The Headteacher
Brownhills West Primary School
Shannon Drive
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Dear Mr Cox

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Brownhills West Primary School

Following my visit with Mary Usher-Clark, Additional Inspector, to your school on 13 and 14 May 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 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 governors and the Director of Children's Services for Walsall.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Watters
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Brownhills West Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 13 and 14 May 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents, including a wide range of pupils' written work, particularly in Year 2 and Year 6. They met with the headteacher, a leadership consultant, the science, mathematics and assessment coordinators, the chair of governors and representatives from the local authority.

Context

The deputy headteacher returned to work in the spring term 2009, after a period of extended absence. He is currently absent again, on long term sick leave. The English coordinator is also absent on long term sick leave and is not expected to return to work until January 2010. A temporary Year 4 teacher was absent for the inspection and the Year 4 class was taught by another temporary teacher 'loaned' from a local school. During the inspection, Year 6 pupils were taking part in the 2009 end of Key Stage 2 tests and Year 2 pupils' assessments were also being carried out by teachers. Subsequently, no lessons were observed in Year 2 and Year 6. The local authority has seconded an experienced teacher to lead developments in English and teach the Year 4 class for the autumn term 2009. This teacher is expected to start work at the school on 1 September 2009. In addition, the local authority has also brokered the services of another experienced teacher to teach the Year 4 class for four days each week until the end of the summer term 2009.

Achievement and standards

Standards are slowly rising. The school's most recent assessment information shows that approximately 75% of the pupils are reaching standards in line with what is expected for their age. Rates of progress are broadly satisfactory for the majority of the pupils but, as with standards, there is considerable variability between year groups and subjects. Standards in writing are below age related expectations in Years 3 and 4 and in mathematics in Years 4 and 5. Standards in science are improving. Pupils' books in Years 5 and 6 show a good range of science activities, with particular emphasis on science investigations. Science standards in Year 6 are generally in line with what is expected for the pupils' ages. Many pupils make good progress in reading, particularly in Years 5 and 6. Progress in writing and mathematics is more variable, for example progress in each subject is inadequate in Year 4, and too slow in writing in Year 3. Pupils' achievements are also too slow in mathematics in Year 5, although progress is currently improving at a faster rate than previously.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- improve the rate of pupils' progress in order to raise standards in English, mathematics and more particularly in science, where they are very low – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils behave extremely well and have positive attitudes. They enjoy coming to school and are kind and considerate to each other. Relationships are good. Pupils respect and like their teachers because they are well cared for and know they will be listened to should they have any problems. The pupils are keen to speak about their work, are good humoured and cheerful.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching continues to improve, but is still fragile. It ranges from good to inadequate and is satisfactory overall. Significant training and coaching for teachers have resulted in improvements in teachers' planning, increasing rates of progress and better attainment levels for pupils. In the best lessons, the pupils' work is sharply matched to their different learning needs and the pace of learning is rapid. For example, pupils made good progress in a Year 5 mathematics lesson because their work was interesting, relevant and challenging, and they showed confidence in tackling new and demanding work.

In weaker and inadequate lessons the pupils' learning is less effective because their work is either too easy or too difficult and teachers' instructions and explanations do not provide sufficient guidance to help the pupils make enough progress. On these occasions the higher attaining pupils are not challenged enough and the pace of learning is too slow, mainly because expectations of the range and amount of work that pupils are expected to do are too low. Similarly, while lesson plans indicate that there are different ability groups within the same class, often the actual tasks pupils are required to complete are pitched at the same level of difficulty. Another characteristic of weaker lessons is that pupils spend too long on the carpet listening to teachers talk, and not enough time applying their skills in challenging and interesting contexts.

Teachers' marking is generally improving, although it is less effective in Year 4. Most teachers provide constructive and useful written advice for the pupils, to help them know what they need to do next to improve their work and make better progress. This is particularly evident in Year 6. Because of significant improvements in the collection and use of assessment information to track pupils' progress and identify areas where pupils' achievements are too low, teachers have access to a range of increasingly valid and secure assessment data. This data is used satisfactorily to inform planning and to identify what interventions are required to help pupils make better progress. For example, in each year group there are carefully targeted interventions aimed at eliminating underachievement. In addition, some pupils work in age groups different from their own to help accelerate their progress. These

initiatives are having a positive impact on pupils' achievement. The progress made by the pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly satisfactory.

The provision and outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are generally satisfactory. However, there are missed opportunities for Nursery and Reception children to plan and work together and lessons in the Reception class do not always sufficiently embrace the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching, especially in Years 3 to 6, so that teachers have higher expectations of all pupils, particularly the more able – satisfactory
- ensure teachers have the assessment information they need to build on pupils' previous achievement and learning successfully – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is keeping a rigorous focus on tackling the key areas for improvement. With the help of a leadership consultant and the school's local authority improvement adviser, he is maintaining a careful and targeted programme of monitoring and evaluation, particularly to check the quality of teaching and learning. The quality and helpfulness of the written feedback to teachers has improved, although areas identified for teachers to develop are often too broad and not prioritised into sufficiently sharp targets for improvement.

Some of the key responsibilities carried by the post of deputy headteacher are currently being met by the headteacher. For example, the headteacher is acting as the special educational needs coordinator. As part of this role he has produced a comprehensive action plan to guide future developments and improvements for pupils who are on the school's register of special educational needs. This ensures satisfactory provision and monitoring of pupils on the register. The headteacher is also the acting literacy coordinator and is currently training another teacher to carry out this work in the autumn term. The uncertainties about senior staff returning to the school, and temporary arrangements for leadership responsibilities, not only place additional strain on the headteacher's role but also impact negatively on the school's ability to secure a sustainable and demonstrable capacity for further improvement.

The role of middle managers is developing well. The science and assessment coordinators provide increasingly good support to the headteacher and show an increasing understanding of their role in school improvement. The mathematics coordinator provides satisfactory support. Each coordinator has produced a helpful action plan, identifying areas of weakness and what actions need to be taken to eliminate them. Each plan is carefully focused on raising achievement and standards and shows what intervention is required to help achieve this aim.

The school's analysis of assessment information is rigorous and used increasingly well to target groups and individuals who need further support and challenge. The

accuracy of the assessment data has been validated by external moderation and this ensures that the school has a far more secure picture of pupils' achievement and standards than was previously the case.

The chair of governors provides good leadership to the governing body. She ensures governors keep a watchful eye on the school's progress and hold the headteacher and staff to account for the standards achieved by the pupils. The chair has also been in frequent contact with the local authority concerning the long term absence of senior members of staff.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- improve the quality of leadership and management, and ensure leaders at all levels evaluate the school's work more rigorously and drive school improvement more urgently – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority continues to provide a good range of support, mainly through the work of the school's improvement adviser, who has been particularly helpful in improving the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation, for example, the roles of middle managers. The local authority's progress team meets regularly, in line with the commitments in the local authority statement of action, and continues to broker additional funding and resources for the school.