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15 July 2009

Mrs L Willis  
The Headteacher  
Stoke Minster CE(A) Primary School  
Boothem Old Road  
Stoke-on-Trent  
Staffordshire  
ST4 4EE

Dear Mrs Willis

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Stoke Minster CE(A) Primary School

Following my visit with Nina Bee and Nasim Butt to your school on 8 and 9 July 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 January 2008. 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 be appointed in the Early Years Foundation Stage subject to the following qualification that they receive mentor support which is regularly scrutinised by school leaders and governors.

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 Stoke-on-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Davinder Dosanjh  
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Stoke Minster CE(A) Primary School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 July 2009

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, staff, groups of pupils, representatives from the local authority and held a telephone conversation with the chair of governors.

## Context

Since the last monitoring visit to the school, there have been no substantive changes to personnel or structures in the school. One class teacher has been on long-term sickness absence, which has impacted on pupil progress in Year 3.

## Achievement and standards

Although more pupils are making good progress in Key Stage 2 than during the previous monitoring visit, too many pupils in Year 6 have not made enough progress in writing, mathematics and science as they moved through Years 3 to 6. Nevertheless, school data show that many pupils in Year 6 have made good progress in reading, writing, mathematics and science during the 2008 and 2009 school year. This is because current teaching is often good in Years 5 and 6. A small minority of pupils are still underachieving in Years 3 and 4 and not making the progress expected of them.

Standards in Year 6 are broadly average in English, below average in mathematics, and well below average in science. Progress has been affected because teaching has not always been good enough as pupils have moved through Key Stage 2. In addition, the rate of progress pupils had made in the past had not been checked regularly enough. Pupils' progress is now more carefully tracked in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Those pupils who are identified because they are not on course to reach their targets are given effective additional support. However, there is not enough consistently good teaching overall to ensure that underachievement is eradicated.

Standards in Year 2 are below average. This represents satisfactory achievement overall, but too many pupils have not made the progress expected of them in writing. School data and lesson observations show that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to a good start and achieve well.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Target support in Years 3 to 6 to those who are in most need, especially higher and lower ability pupils identified as underachieving – inadequate.

## Personal development and well-being

Pupils say they enjoy coming to school and speak very fondly of their experiences here. They say their lessons are now, in the main, more lively and interesting. Behaviour in classrooms and around the school continues to be good because pupils respond well to the high expectations of their teachers. Good relationships between the pupils and adults in the school mean that pupils feel safe in a secure and orderly environment. Attendance is close to the national average and steadily improving as a result of the effective systems put in place to improve it. The school has successfully reduced the previously high levels of persistent absence. The school council has been involved in producing a pupil version of an attendance policy with appropriate rewards for high attendance. Good opportunities are provided in many lessons for pupils to undertake independent learning. In addition, pupils are sometimes given opportunities to make a useful contribution to the school community by being play leaders and representing their class on the student council.

## Quality of provision

Lessons were observed in all classes in Years 3 to 6, and in some classes in Years 1 and 2 and the Nursery and Reception classes. The teaching observed was mostly satisfactory with an increasing number of lessons being good. One inadequate lesson was seen. It is clear that teachers can produce satisfactory or better lessons. However, data show that pupils' progress is inconsistent because teaching quality varies between years and within subjects. Some teachers deliver consistently good lessons and consequently pupils make good gains in their learning. Other teachers are able to teach at a satisfactory level where a few pupils make insufficient progress. Senior managers understand that further professional development and targeted support are required to improve individual teachers' teaching to raise standards. In the good lessons, there is a high level of challenge for the most able pupils with opportunities to work independently and develop thinking skills. In these lessons teaching assistants are used well to work with lower ability pupils and there are well-structured tasks and activities to support the needs of these pupils. Pupils enjoy discussing and sharing ideas. When teaching is satisfactory, pupils are not making sufficient or fast enough progress in lessons. Lower attaining pupils and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not always understand tasks set. There are insufficient examples given to them so they do not always have a clear illustration of how to model their answers. Consequently, the pitch or level of the work is not quite right for individuals or specific groups.

The quality of marking is inconsistent across the school. A good feature is the placing of numeracy targets in the front of pupils' books so pupils know what they are aiming to achieve. Lower down the school marking does not address correct letter formation or sentence structure. Marking is not always clear about the level the pupil has achieved and what pupils need to do to get to the next level. There is insufficient academic guidance to inform pupils about their progress and the next steps. Marking does not always address whether pupils met the learning objectives of the lesson.

The school has made satisfactory progress in developing the investigative dimension of the science curriculum. A skills map, 'How Science works', has been put together by the subject leader detailing how scientific enquiry (How Science Works) is embedded in science teaching. Evidence shows that teachers are now beginning to build their work on pupils' prior understanding. Greater opportunities are being introduced for pupils to 'take charge' of investigations and develop their independent learning. However, this is not yet fully embedded. There are some indications that pupils' progress is beginning to be tracked in science and opportunities are missed to assess pupils on their investigational skills and to link their work more rigorously to the National Curriculum level descriptors for science. There is now greater progression in planning, enabling pupils to consolidate and apply their practical skills.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve rates of progress in Years 3 to 6 by ensuring that work is matched fully to the needs of pupils – satisfactory
- devote enough time to science in Years 3 to 6 to ensure that the curriculum covers all that it should and progress is improved – satisfactory.

## Leadership and management

The headteacher is working tirelessly to improve the school's overall effectiveness and address the legacy of underachievement. Staff and senior leaders are committed to raising standards and accelerating pupil progress. This is evident by the impact of interventions in Year 6 with improvements in writing, mathematics and science. Monitoring of teaching continues to clearly identify strengths and areas for further development.

Subject leaders are more involved in evaluating the school's work. They undertake a wide range of activities and play a role in determining the next steps for improvement. The action plans produced by the subject leaders in mathematics, literacy and science identify key priorities with focused targets and success criteria for each of the key actions. The actions identified are purposeful with timescales that are realistic. There are more detailed outcomes of work sampling in literacy and mathematics, with detailed reports on the impact of actions. The monitoring and evaluation in science are not yet sufficiently detailed. The observation of lessons in science is not yet sharp enough. Pupil progress meetings with individual teachers and senior leaders are becoming more rigorous with target groups of pupils being identified for intervention if they are not making the expected progress. Target groups are making better progress, but this has not dealt with all the pockets of underachievement.

The tracking of pupils' progress in Key Stage 2, based on their attainment at the end Key Stage 1, is not yet secure. Procedures to track the attainment and progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in Key Stage 2, and for those in the early stages of learning English as an additional language, are not yet robust enough.

The governors continue to increase their involvement in the school. Systems are in place to ensure governors receive regular information. They have engaged in a range of activities from learning walks to book monitoring. The curriculum monitoring meetings are effective in ensuring pertinent questions are asked about the impact of strategies and the progress being made by pupils. This is helping governors ensure they are developing a clearer picture about the school. The chair of governors and the headteacher are working effectively together.

All health and safety issues continue to be addressed and given high priority. Risk assessments and safeguarding checks meet current government requirements.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- carry out more rigorous monitoring of the school's work to identify the main priorities for improvement and ensure that all health and safety requirements are met – satisfactory.

#### External support

The local authority continues to provide a range of support to the senior leadership team and teachers by the use of consultants. Some of this has been more effective in supporting the school and leading to improvements. The monitoring report in July 2009 reviewed the work of the school and recognised strengths across the school. It did not review the work undertaken in science and the progress being made by Year 3 and Year 4 pupils. There were no areas for further development identified. Support from the education welfare officer has helped to improve the attendance of the decreasing number of pupils with persistent absence.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure appropriate interventions are in place to address the underachievement across the different year groups.
- Develop teachers' planning and assessment so the needs of pupils in the early stages of learning English as an additional language are better met.
- Ensure teaching meets the needs of all pupils, but particularly the lower attaining and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, so they make better progress.