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Mrs Janet Seddon
Headteacher
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Wigan
WN6 7PT

Dear Mrs Seddon

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Beech Hill Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 30 November and 1 December 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in April 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

The school may appoint a temporary teacher who, although having qualified teacher status and some teaching experience, has not completed the induction year.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's and Young People's Services for Wigan.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Beech Hill Community Primary School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection: 30 November and 1 December 2009

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the phase leader responsible for development of the creative curriculum, and the chair of the Interim Executive Board.

Context

In September, 18 children joined the Nursery and 31 children started in the Reception class. Since the last inspection, the Nursery has been recognised by the local authority as a model of good practice in the development of children's listening and speaking skills.

During the inspection, two temporary teachers were teaching the classes of absent teachers. The deputy headteacher was sharing the teaching of a class of Year 4 pupils with the class teacher who has recently returned after a long absence.

At the end of term, classes in Key Stages 1 and 2 will move into temporary accommodation on site to allow demolition of the existing buildings and the building of a new school. The teacher of a class of Year 5 pupils is leaving.

This monitoring inspection focused particularly on the school's response to the five priorities for further improvement identified in the third monitoring inspection and on the school's capacity for sustained improvement.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Pupils' achievement is strengthening and standards are rising, albeit slowly, because of an increasing amount of good, structured teaching and a strong focus on developing pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils generally enjoy their learning. Before choosing and becoming engrossed in an activity, Nursery children confidently found their photograph on the interactive whiteboard and then dragged and dropped it into a smiling face to indicate how they felt about coming to school. In other classes, pupils were also engaged, especially when there was something to see or do that sparked their interest.

The school's data indicate that most pupils are on track to meet their targets and a growing proportion is exceeding them. A small number of pupils in Year 6 are already doing well for their age in reading and just under 50%, overall, are working at the level expected for their age in reading and mathematics; this is a stronger picture than in previous years. Similarly, children in the Nursery are making good



progress in recognising signs, logos and letters in their name. They counted and added small numbers when using a die to share out snowman cards. Year 2 pupils wrote about what they had done over the weekend in the style of a poem and most remembered to use correct sentence punctuation. They helped each other to spell tricky words using their knowledge of letters and sounds.

Despite some good progress this term, the legacy of gaps in learning is evident in the work of pupils in Years 5 and 6. For example, pupils were comfortable following a mathematical procedure but found it hard to explain the underlying mathematical concepts. Although some work was well presented and showed marked strides in the consistency and neatness of joined handwriting, it often lacked complexity of content and there were errors either in basic spelling or in copying accurately. Likewise, younger Key Stage 2 pupils failed to spell key words correctly, including 'house' and 'went'. This is despite significant progress in linking letters and sounds (phonics). The school has identified correctly that pupils are not applying their phonic knowledge well enough with the result that fluency and confidence in reading and writing are lagging behind.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science in all year groups – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour is generally good and pupils often show thoughtfulness and consideration for others. It was only when pupils were unclear about what to do that concentration and behaviour slipped. There have been three fixed-term exclusions this term for unacceptable verbal and physical behaviour. The school has managed well a small number of pupils who find it hard to control their moods and behaviour.

Attendance, at around 93% so far this term, has not hit the school's target. While some classes do well, with the class of Year 5 pupils often being the best attendees, there remain a small number of pupils whose poorer attendance rate is being closely monitored.

The effectiveness of provision

The report from the third monitoring inspection identified two priorities to aid progress in dealing with the two key issues related to the quality of provision: first, the need to grade lessons, to identify specific points for improvement that will make a difference in the short term and to carry out quick return monitoring to ensure that the points are acted on successfully; second, the structured development of the creative curriculum to ensure that there is progression in the development of key skills in identified subjects.



The school took positive action to widen the programme of monitoring lessons and to ensure that classes were ready to deliver the creative curriculum in September. It has also ensured that teachers use assessment and target setting to guide their planning. As a result, there is now a higher level of consistency in aspects of teaching, especially the emphasis on planning learning through the identification of the steps to success and activities that will promote them.

That said, a concern arises from the change in staffing profile which has diluted the overall quality of teaching. Some pupils are not making the consistent progress they should. Support from the deputy headteacher and phase leaders is proving beneficial. A key aspect of the school's developing capacity to improve further is the stronger teaching of those staff who have profited from intensive professional development in the last terms; this is reflected in the quickening progress of the pupils in their classes and their ability to share effective practice with others.

The increased regular monitoring of lessons, with specific points for improvement and swift return sessions, has heightened the responsibility of phase leaders in driving up standards and given all teachers a clear picture of their teaching. The best monitoring reports have highlighted clearly the impact of teaching on learning and given helpful practical suggestions on how to strengthen it. Some points raised in monitoring reports were confirmed by this inspection.

- Not all teachers' planning has the detail needed to clarify the learning steps.
- The quality of plenary sessions varies with some merely being a check on what has been done rather than a probe into how well pupils have learnt.
- Pupils working independently do not always have all they need.
- Worksheets are taking the place of practical activities.
- Several teachers are using too loud a voice.

In the most effective lessons, the adults work well together to model the learning. They break it down into manageable, small steps and question, explain and repeat information to ensure that all pupils understand. This was at its very best in the work of the Nursery team.

The school has raised its expectations of pupils' progress to one sub level each term and for some pupils to make even more progress if they are to make up ground lost in previous terms or to fulfil their potential. Where pupils have done well, targets have been raised. The comprehensive review of the progress of pupils with particular learning needs, and those who have not done as well as expected, has led to sturdy professional debate about how best to support them. The school is aware that some intervention programmes have not been as effective as expected in accelerating progress. As a result, this term there is a more informed view of how to tailor support. Initiatives, such as the project to encourage boys' writing, have taken off well. Pupils were keen to help Goldilocks write and post party invitations.

This term all classes have used science-based topics to provide a range of problems and experiences which have drawn on pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. Pupils and staff have responded



positively to the focus on practical activities. Year 6 pupils' visit to a recycling company has informed the setting up of their own mini companies with market research into slogans and jingles, and consideration of profit and loss. A sound start has been made in mapping out the progression in key skills and in deciding how best to assess pupils' progress, especially in science. There are some positive signs that pupils are relating scientific knowledge to real life. For example, after the topic on forces, older pupils were heard to tell younger pupils quite authoritatively that the harder they threw the ball the further it would go.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Eradicate inadequate teaching so that the overall quality improves enough to ensure that all pupils learn effectively – satisfactory
- Improve the use of assessment and target setting to help pupils reach their potential – good

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The report from the third monitoring inspection identified three priorities to aid progress in dealing with the key issue related to leadership and management: first, the need to clarify the role and responsibilities of the deputy headteacher to maximise the use of her skills and expertise; second, the need for rigorous analysis of data to 'get beneath the figures' and to identify possible trends, factors, links and implications for practice and provision; third, the development of school governance.

The school has acted on all three points and there is now clear evidence of a concerted drive from the headteacher and senior leaders to raise standards. For the first time, the school has a firm handle on the link between the analysis of performance data, the identification of priorities for improvement, the setting of targets and the organisation of resources to achieve them. The review of the effectiveness of support programmes has supported well the analysis of data from tests and assessments. As a consequence, senior leaders are able to talk confidently about why and where they need to focus to ensure that all groups of pupils do as well as they can. Written reports however, have not made the most of key information to give a balanced and well-justified commentary, particularly in relation to the impact of action taken. The moves to devolve aspects of strategic leadership to the deputy headteacher are boosting the school's capacity to improve further. Phase leadership has also moved up a gear with growing evidence of critical monitoring and action to lift the quality of provision. All this gives the school a sound platform to steer its own progress and to wind down the guidance from local authority consultants. Given the impending changes in accommodation and staffing, the school needs to show it can sustain the gains made and ensure that impetus is maintained.

The appointment of a governor to the Interim Executive Board is a positive step in raising awareness of the role as 'critical friend' and the evidence required to evaluate the school's effectiveness.



Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Ensure that leadership and management at all levels are strong enough to improve pupils' achievement – satisfactory

External support

The local authority consultants have continued to have a significant impact in steering the work of phase leaders and all staff, especially in the teaching of mathematics and writing. They have provided considerable practical help as well as helped to develop key skills of planning, levelling pupils' work and using assessment for learning. The report of the evaluation officer was thorough and detailed. The report from the School Improvement Partner highlighted how the school had performed in relation to other schools in the authority and, in picking out some aspects that the school had overlooked, helped to challenge thinking and to focus key priorities.

The involvement of Greater Manchester Challenge has not been as beneficial as it might. The school reports that the critical points raised in the adviser's visit this term heightened concern just at a time when the recognition of improvement was boosting confidence.

The Interim Executive Board has continued to challenge and call the headteacher and senior leaders to account on a monthly basis. It is also liaising with the local authority and other agencies to ensure that the headteacher has the resources needed to move forward.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that evaluations of the impact of action are supported by clear evidence from monitoring and the analysis of data.
- Iron out inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.
- Consider teachers' use of voice.
- Develop pupils' skills in explaining and evaluating their own learning.
- Ensure that pupils gain in confidence to apply their knowledge of number, and letters and sounds.