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11 December 2009

Mrs Ros Atkins
Acting Headteacher
Weston Primary School
Lamsickle Lane
Weston Village
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 4RA

Dear Mrs Atkins

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Weston Primary School

Following my visit with Eithne Proffitt, Additional Inspector, to your school on 9 and 10 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

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 Halton Council.

Yours sincerely

Eileen M Mulgrew
Her Majesty's Inspector



Report from the third monitoring inspection on 9 and 10 December 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, visited 11 lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, senior leaders and other members of staff, the operation director from the local authority, the chair of the interim executive board (IEB), groups of pupils and several parents.

Context

Since the monitoring visit in June 2009, the deputy headteacher, the temporary teacher and teaching assistant from the resource base have left the school. The headteacher is absent for the foreseeable future. The acting deputy headteacher is now acting headteacher. She retains her responsibility for the Early Years Foundation Stage and teaches the Reception class in the mornings. A visiting teacher has been appointed to teach the Reception class in the afternoons. This situation is set to remain at least until Easter 2010. Pupils are organised into mixed-age classes and have been joined by the pupils from the resource base. A higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) has been appointed to take classes when teachers receive their planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time. The Early Years Foundation Stage base has been relocated to a more appropriate room.

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

Results of the 2009 Key Stage 1 assessments show that attainment at the end of this stage overall remains low and progress has been inadequate. Scrutiny of the school's tracking information, supported by observation of teaching and scrutiny of pupils' books show that progress is now good in this stage. Pupils are on track to gain better results than those in 2009.

Provisional results at Key Stage 2 show a much improved and more positive picture than at the time of the inspection. Overall attainment has improved significantly from low in 2008 to broadly average in 2009. Results in English have improved; although the numbers of pupils gaining the expected Level 4 are still below the average, the numbers doing better for their age are catching up to the national average. In mathematics, the picture is reversed with the number of pupils gaining the expected Level 4 above the national average and those doing better still lagging behind the national picture. Science results show that 92% of the pupils reached the expected level for their age while there was a slight increase in the numbers reaching the higher Level 5. Progress for these pupils across Key Stage 2 was broadly satisfactory compared to similar pupils in similar schools.

The school's drive to improve attainment at age-related levels is starting to pay off. Leaders are aware that they need to include a focus on the pupils who are capable of working more quickly and achieving more, to enable them to reach the levels of which they are capable.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is strengthening. There is stability in the staffing complement and through welcome support, guidance and training from local authority consultants, teachers' confidence has improved. This is particularly noticeable in the quality of the teaching of reading. After receiving training in strategies and techniques from the local authority consultant, staff have incorporated the advice into their teaching. As a result, observations at the time of the visit showed teachers using precise teaching methods to support and guide pupils to an understanding of the text. Pupils were engaged, enjoying the activity and making good progress. Staff have successfully improved the quality of questioning; giving pupils more chance to explain their thinking and extending the learning of all pupils. For example, in a literacy lesson in Year 1/2 the teacher modelled a process for writing explanations to make a snowflake for younger children. Using photographs taken of the pupils making the snowflake the day before, the teacher asked a set of questions to stimulate speaking and listening skills. Pupils were asked a question and given chance to chat with their 'talking partner' before answering. In this way pupils were guided through the process of writing in a fun, practical and relevant way. Although there is evidence of improvements in teaching which is showing in the improved progress of the pupils, there is still scope to improve teachers' confidence especially in Key Stage 2 and in the teaching of mathematics.

All staff have received training on the assessment of pupils' learning during a lesson and there was some evidence of teachers using 'talking partners', 'show me' and 'peer assessment' strategies. However, this practice still needs more time to become established throughout the school. Teaching assistants are much more involved with supporting and guiding pupils in the whole of a lesson. This has helped to accelerate the progress pupils make in lessons. Assessment procedures are much more rigorous. Pupils are assessed each half term in reading, writing and mathematics and this information is evaluated by senior leaders. As a result, teachers know the levels at which pupils are working and support can be targeted at pupils falling behind. There is an opportunity for this information to be used to identify pupils who can make quicker progress and plan for their specific needs. The marking, feedback and presentation policy introduced just before the last visit has now been used by staff. However, it is not meeting the pupils' needs appropriately so the school are in the process of reviewing it.

Progress has continued to be made since the time of the last monitoring visit and there is a very clear focus on the requirements of the National Curriculum as a basis for planning. Teachers are more confident in using the whole-school curriculum plan as a basis for medium-term and weekly plans which include practical, fun activities.



Timing for subject teaching is now appropriate and coverage of the National Curriculum subjects is secure. However, provision for pupils to understand other faiths and cultures is limited. Planning now aims to address the needs of different ability groups. Audits on resources by each subject leader identified huge gaps in equipment needed to enable staff to deliver each subject well. Significant investment has now resulted in more resources for the majority of subjects. A major investment of £6000 has been used to restock the library including texts specifically chosen for boys and more able readers. The school has plans for an official opening of the library with visiting dignitaries. Pupils are thrilled with this improvement in their school and read the books regularly. Visits and visitors are used well to enhance pupils' understanding, creativity and links in learning. Many pupils talked excitedly of the visit to Chester to study The Romans. The wide range of out-of-school activities offered to the pupils on a regular basis has been further extended and contributes well to the pupils' good attitudes to learning. The school recently received Healthy School status which celebrated the school's contribution to pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles. The introduction of a French lesson to every class has been enthusiastically received by pupils. The Early Years Foundation Stage is settling well into the new base and all relevant areas of learning are established. Provision for opportunities for learning outside the classroom is limited but the acting headteacher has already taken steps to tackle this issue.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that staffing provision is of a sufficient standard to be able to deliver the improvements throughout the school – satisfactory.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that most lessons are good or better – satisfactory.
- Meet fully the requirements of the National Curriculum – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

There is a renewed sense of purpose about the school. The acting headteacher provides effective leadership for the rest of the staff and has successfully created a supportive team-working approach to raise achievement for all groups of pupils. This is exemplified in the challenging targets the school has set for future improvement. She has enthusiasm and energy which is well channelled into 'getting things done'. This drive for improvement is now shared by the staff who talk of recently 'feeling empowered'. They consider that their strengths are acknowledged and have opportunity to use their skills. For example, one teacher has trained a small group of parents in the 'successful reading partnership'. Once trained, parents support less able readers. Since the last visit middle leaders have developed skills in monitoring and evaluating their subjects through learning walks, work scrutiny, resource audits and an evaluation of action plans. Each activity has been focused and evaluations have led to the identification of next steps and been communicated to staff. Consequently, staff are developing the expertise to support each other in all subjects. Morale among all staff is high. Much work has been undertaken to organise an attractive, clean and well-organised learning environment with sufficient quality



resources to support learning. The meeting for parents held by the school and the views of parents canvassed during the visit reveal a renewed confidence in the school. Several spoke of the changes seen in the approach of staff, the improvement in reading skills of their children and the way the school keeps them informed.

Since the last visit the IEB has dealt effectively with some challenging issues and the appointment of the acting headteacher was made after much deliberation. Through fortnightly meetings with the acting headteacher, the interim executive board members hold the school rigorously to account for the pace of improvement within the school. Decisions are taken which will have the most impact on pupils' progress. The overall plan of action is used to evaluate success and point to further action. The plan is broken down each half term into measurable steps for success. Although attention must be given to the situation with the headteacher, there is a determination between the local authority and chair of the IEB to minimise any effect on the pupils and staff. Nevertheless, until the situation with the substantive headteacher is resolved, further improvement in the school remains uncertain.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Develop the roles of middle managers and coordinators in core and foundation subjects – good.

External support

The local authority continues to provide effective support to the school. Training in many aspects of classroom practice has been presented to the whole staff and to individual teachers. The impact of this training is now showing in the classrooms and in pupils' progress. Together with the school the IEB is determined to accelerate the progress of the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- The school should continue its work on the priorities identified in the October 2008 inspection.
- It should also raise pupils' knowledge and understanding of other cultures and other religious faiths.