

Suite 22 West
Lancs
Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

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

Direct T 01695 566930
Direct F 01695 729320

02 December 2009

Mrs Lorraine Roll
Acting Headteacher
Highfields Primary School
Highfields
Market Street
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN6 7JE

Dear Mrs Roll

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Highfields Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 30 November 2009 and 01 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 November 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Assistant Director, Children and Young People's Services, Education and Inclusion, for Doncaster.

Yours sincerely

Christine Harrison
Lead Inspector



Special measures: monitoring inspection of Highfields Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 30 November 2009 and 01 December 2009

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, executive headteacher, deputy headteacher, other teachers, a group of pupils, the chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and a representative of the local authority. Several paired lesson observations were carried out with the executive headteacher and acting headteacher.

Context

Since the monitoring visit in July 2009 there have been several temporary changes of teaching staff. The headteacher has been absent since early November and the former associate deputy headteacher has taken on the role of acting headteacher, with the continuing support of the executive headteacher on two days each week. Two other teachers, one of them a member of the senior leadership team, are also absent and have been replaced by supply teachers. The newly qualified teacher who had, at the time of the previous visit, been temporarily replaced by a more experienced teacher from another school, is now replaced by a supply teacher. A new associate deputy headteacher provides additional full-time support.

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

The school's 2009 unvalidated test results for Year 6 showed that pupils' attainment was broadly average in English, mathematics and science and that those pupils made good progress overall and in mathematics. All groups of pupils made similar progress. These results represented a significant improvement compared with 2008 and were the product of some careful teaching in Year 6 and very effective preparation for the tests. That particular cohort of pupils was not, however, typical of year groups in this school. Some of those pupils moved into the school fairly late and the group was higher attaining than other cohorts when they started Key Stage 2.

The school's own assessment information shows that the good progress of last year's Year 6 was not reflected in the progress of other classes in the period up to July. Pupils from Year 4 to Year 6 generally met their targets in reading but not in writing or mathematics. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 suffered from the slow progress and underachievement that was identified in the previous monitoring letter. However, the tracking information for this term shows an improvement in pupils' progress. Assessments are formal and are carefully marked by the school's temporary leaders or a consultant from the local authority. Almost all pupils are making significant



progress in writing and mathematics and the rate of progress is more consistent than it was. This term's assessments of reading have not yet been conducted.

Pupils' learning in lessons depends strongly on the quality of teaching they receive. When teaching engages their interest they listen carefully, are keen to answer questions and remain focused on their work. When the pace of the lesson is slow or the instructions are unclear, their concentration lapses, though they maintain behaviour that is at least satisfactory. Assessment information shows that, in the mixed-age class for Years 3 and 4, both year groups are reaching similar levels in writing and mathematics. It is clear that the work provided for pupils in Year 4 is not sufficiently demanding to enable them to work at the expected higher levels.

Pupils' progress in writing is an acknowledged weakness for the school. In several lessons, pupils, particularly boys, were reluctant to write and began their writing tasks slowly. Hence the quantity of writing they produced was limited. They need tighter time allocations, together with more encouragement, so that they become accustomed to writing more quickly; the quality of their writing can be improved at a later stage. Pupils do not get enough opportunities to talk to each other in order to inform and enhance their writing.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Raise standards and improve achievement for all pupils in all subjects – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils generally behave satisfactorily in lessons and around school. They speak very appreciatively of the new behaviour policy which has reduced the frequency of interruptions in their lessons. Pupils' attendance improved between the inspection and the first monitoring visit but it has fallen again and is now low. Poor attendance is limiting progress for a significant number of pupils. The school's new temporary leaders have taken steps to involve the parent support adviser more closely in improving attendance but this move is very recent and has yet to show any impact.

The effectiveness of provision

The school has experienced problems with providing satisfactory supply teaching for two classes over the past month. Nevertheless, there has been some improvement in the teaching in Key Stage 1 and inspection evidence shows that pupils are now making better progress in this stage than they were. Skilled input from the new associate deputy headteacher, both in the actual teaching of key topics and in supporting the class teacher, has been crucial to this improvement. It is now important that this level of support is extended into lower Key Stage 2 where occasional inadequate lessons still occur.



In the best lessons the teacher moves quickly and effectively through a series of linked activities that engage pupils' interest, reinforce what they need to remember and lead them quickly through the stages of learning. Where teaching has weaknesses it is often the result of a lack of clarity in the teacher's explanations and instructions. The other common weakness is a slow pace where activities, whether pupils are listening to the teacher or working independently, go on for too long with only limited new learning. The contribution that learning support assistants make to lessons varies in its effectiveness. They generally communicate with pupils clearly and question them satisfactorily to check and extend understanding. However, sometimes they do not move around the class as much as they might in order to support the range of pupils who need help.

The school has made satisfactory progress in its use of assessment information. Target setting for individual pupils is now based on a clearer system with built-in additional challenge to compensate for previous underachievement. Pupils are then assessed towards the end of each term. Assessments were unreliable until last summer term when they were properly checked and moderated. It is now possible to see more precisely how well pupils are doing. In Key Stage 2 pupils are well aware of their targets and their current progress. Teachers have only just begun to trust the assessments and so are not yet using them fully in planning lessons to meet the needs of all pupils. Nevertheless, pupils are becoming more knowledgeable about what they need to do to improve and are more often involved in assessing their own progress. In the Early Years Foundation Stage the use of assessment to plan future work for children has made a strong contribution to the recent improvements in provision for the youngest children in school.

Pupils' progress has been boosted in all year groups by carefully targeted extra help for those who have difficulties. The planning and evaluation of these interventions is an area in which the acting headteacher had a strongly positive impact in her previous role. Nevertheless, leaders and managers are aware that more effective whole-class teaching is the most efficient way to accelerate progress.

A new curriculum, that fully meets the requirements of the National Curriculum, has been introduced this term. Long-term planning indicates that the curriculum now provides satisfactory opportunities for pupils to make progress, though the school is still in the early stages of implementing a cross-curricular approach. The school is aware that some activities still lack challenge, particularly for higher attainers. Leaders agree that the mathematics curriculum would benefit from more opportunities for pupils to practise their skills in mental calculation. Few extra-curricular activities are currently available for pupils and those that do exist are not well attended.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and ensure that assessment information is used to match work to pupils' needs more closely to enable them to learn more effectively – satisfactory.



- Ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils, through improving the range, challenge and variety of learning activities – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school has faced huge challenges since the beginning of this term, largely because of the high level of staff absence. The IEB has been fully involved in trying to overcome the difficulties and has worked closely with the local authority to find the best solutions. The executive headteacher, acting headteacher and the new associate deputy headteacher have worked very hard and been successful in moving the school forward in a short time. Staff's morale and confidence in the school's leadership have improved, the permanent deputy headteacher has taken on a more active leadership role and several areas of the school's work, including recent completion of teachers' performance management, introduction of a new behaviour policy and the setting of new and better targets for pupils, indicate a strong commitment to improvement.

The IEB and the school's temporary leaders are accurate in their assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses. For example, the IEB rightly identifies the need to review the school's staffing structure, particularly as the number of pupils has fallen. The temporary leaders are well aware that there are still weaknesses in teaching, though they have not yet had time to solve all the problems.

The school's situation is insecure. The acting headteacher, executive headteacher, and associate deputy headteacher only hold their posts on a temporary basis. Nevertheless, the improvements made by this team so far, together with the strong support and challenge provided by the IEB, indicate that the school's capacity for further improvement is starting to get better.

This monitoring visit included a check on the school's safeguarding procedures and found them to be secure and meeting current requirements.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that leaders, managers and governors rigorously monitor all aspects of the school's work and take effective and swift action to remove weaknesses – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has continued its efforts to provide more focused and longer-term support for the school, as it agreed to do at the time of the first monitoring visit. However, it has faced problems, particularly in trying to maintain satisfactory staffing. It is not possible at the present time, and within the regulations, to find a long-term solution to many of the current staffing issues. In these circumstances,



the appointment of the acting headteacher was a particularly important move and the best solution possible under the circumstances. The level of support provided for the school is impressive and involves a significant commitment of finance and resources by the local authority. Nevertheless, it is essential that this level of support is maintained until suitable longer-term arrangements can be made for the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the efforts to improve attendance.

