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Mrs J Sharps
Headteacher
Landgate School
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Greater Manchester
WN4 0EP

Dear Mrs Sharps

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Landgate School

Following my visit with Rosemary Eaton, Additional Inspector, to your school on 05 and 06 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in December 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 – good

Newly qualified teachers may 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 Wigan.

Yours sincerely

Katharine Halifax
Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Landgate School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 05 – 06 November

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met the headteacher, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, and representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, there have been a number of staffing changes. The deputy headteacher returned to duty, and the second assistant head became full time. In addition, two teachers and four support staff have taken up post. In September, children were admitted to the Early Years Foundation Stage for the first time in two years.

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

Pupils' rate of progress is accelerating and this is boosting achievement. Greater levels of concentration and application to work were observed during this visit. Pupils make the most progress in communication, particularly when using signs, symbols and a picture exchange system. Pupils' progress in science has improved because of better resources and more secure teacher knowledge. The gap between reading and writing is narrowing. As a result of the introduction of a commercial programme, pupils are making better gains in linking sounds and letters, and in spelling. The school's in-depth analysis shows achievement in mathematics is also improving, but pupils are not doing as well in shape, space and measure, or in applying their mathematical knowledge as they do when recognising numbers and counting. Leaders have well-advanced plans to remedy this. Pupils enjoy learning and are proud of their achievements. This was clearly evident during discussions with inspectors, and in the delight on pupils' faces as they received their awards in assembly.

Pupils' achievement in information and communication technology (ICT) is not as strong as in most other subjects because the school was poorly resourced until very recently. While adults use interactive white boards imaginatively, many lack confidence in teaching specific ICT skills. The range of nationally recognised awards for students aged 14 to 19 has increased and is better matched to need, but opportunities to gain vocational qualifications are still at the planning stage. A detailed analysis of all pupils' progress towards their targets has enabled staff to monitor pupils' performance by gender, age and ethnicity. However, no analysis has been undertaken by pupils' needs. Inspection evidence showed the achievement of the most able pupils is not as advanced as that of those with more complex needs.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' attendance continues to improve, and the proportion of unauthorised absence decrease. As a result of improved behaviour management and reorganised pupil groupings, outbursts of inappropriate behaviour and disruption to learning have reduced considerably. Daily routines alongside work in personal, social, health and citizenship education have allowed pupils to meet their targets of listening, thinking and interacting with others. This has enabled those with the most complex needs to cope with being part of larger groups, for example assemblies.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching is showing considerable improvement and is accelerating pupils' progress. A real strength is adults' understanding of how difficulties such as communication needs, idiosyncratic behaviour, and fine motor problems can affect progress and the pace of learning. Teaching and support staff are now deployed more effectively to help pupils overcome these barriers to learning. All staff plan their lessons conscientiously, and as they are becoming more confident, tasks are more precise. Good steps are taken to ensure the activities presented in mixed age classes reflect age appropriate levels of study. An exact match of activities for most pupils speeds up progress, especially for those with the most complex needs, but this is not always the case for the most able. Sometimes, extension work is more of the same exercise, so while pupils rattle this off, it does not make them think or reason. Teachers' evaluations of planning are variable. While some record the knowledge and skills pupils have acquired, others note only the activities covered and the level of adult support. Nevertheless, assessment is now far more precise. An accurate assessment of pupils' achievements in all the all aspects of key subjects demonstrates progress. Individual education plans have been radically overhauled and are now of a high quality and meaningful to pupils. All adults endeavour to record day-to-day achievements, but opportunities to record small step progress during the introduction to lessons are sometimes missed. Teachers now mark pupils' written work consistently following school policy, and with clear indication of the next steps in learning.

The curriculum continues to improve. The recently re-opened Early Years Foundation Stage provision meets requirements, but it is too soon to see the impact. Although new and set up from scratch, routines have quickly been established enabling children to settle in well. Gaps in resources have already been identified, such as small world play equipment, and musical instruments and some of the second hand wheeled toys are of poor quality. Pupils say they like the renamed classes, with 16 year olds far preferring to be in 'College' as opposed to 'octopus group'. Topics are more age appropriate, for example, in Key Stage 3, 'the seaside' has become 'coastlines'. The themed curriculum is under review to ensure balance, and that no important topics have been overlooked. Pupils say how much they enjoyed the India

week, and were thrilled to show the inspectors photographs of themselves making Indian food, wearing saris and dancing. Visits out of school are linked to the topics being studied. The provision in 'College' is now more in line with that expected, but there is still a way to go particularly in work related learning. Work has been done to improve vocational education, for example the creation of a garden and vegetable beds, and through links with other schools, but it is still in its infancy. 'College' students say how their daily one mile walk after lunch is improving their fitness levels, as well as their understanding of road safety. A considerable investment has been made in resources for all age groups, but it is too soon to judge how effectively this is raising achievement. Leaders know more specialist equipment is needed, for example, to allow pupils with poor coordination to access computers. Where resources have been in place longer, these are contributing well to learning. For example, large colourful magnets made a difference to pupils' motivation, investigation and understanding in a Key Stage 3 science lesson. The provision of a food technology room has been delayed, but the local authority remains committed to providing this. Pastoral care continues to be a strong feature of the school. Links with other professionals continue to contribute well to pupils' achievements and well-being.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure all staff throughout the school use a common system, which includes individual learning targets, to assess pupils' attainment and track their progress – good
- Ensure teachers plan lessons which build on pupils' previous learning in order to raise achievement - good
- Provide all pupils and students with resources and materials appropriate to their ages - satisfactory
- Develop a curriculum to meet the needs and interests of all pupils – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has very successfully changed the culture of the school over a short time. Her enthusiasm and passion are infectious and this is reflected in the determination staff now show. She has appointed strong, knowledgeable staff to key posts and has redistributed responsibilities to reflect individual expertise and the needs of the school. Following the last inspection visit, the raising attainment plan was tightened enabling school improvement to accelerate. Leaders know the school in detail and are accurate in their self-evaluation. A rigorous ongoing programme of classroom observations, checking pupils' work and teachers' planning, and the ensuing professional training have improved the quality of teaching. Staff absence has reduced dramatically. Staff say they now enjoy coming to work, and comment 'it feels like a proper school now'. The robust systems to record and analyse pupils' achievements are now understood by staff and are being used by subject leaders and class teachers to raise achievement.

The arrangements to safeguard pupils meet requirements, and all new members of staff have been appropriately checked. The school now meets its legal requirement in its information for parents, and parents are appreciative of the reintroduced parents' and carers' evenings. Leaders recognise that while the plans for increasing pupils' awareness of community cohesion have been drawn up, they have yet to be fully implemented.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure all statutory requirements are met - satisfactory
- Establish systems so that leaders can monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning - good

External support

The local authority's actions continue to be of benefit to the school in the support and advice that has been given, particularly in science and in reintroducing the Early Years Foundation Stage. Mutually beneficial links with two partner schools continue to improve practice. Students in 'College' continue to benefit from the support of the Greater Manchester Challenge funding.

Priorities for further improvement

- The priorities for further improvement continue to be those identified at the school's inspection in December 2008.