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12 March 2010

Mr Peter Boddy  
Acting Headteacher  
Mount Pleasant Primary School  
Newton Lane  
Darlington  
County Durham  
DL3 9HE

Dear Mr Boddy

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Mount Pleasant Primary School

Following my visit with Maggi Shepherd, additional inspector, to your school on 9–10 March 2010, 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 February 2009. 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 – good

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 Darlington.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Ripley  
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Mount Pleasant Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 9-10 March 2010

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work including nine lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, staff, pupils, governors and representatives of the local authority. The provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage which had not been a focus of the first visit was included in the inspection activities.

## Context

The headteacher resigned immediately after the first monitoring visit. An acting headteacher has led the school since 5 October 2009. A new substantive headteacher has been appointed and will join the school at the start of the summer term 2010.

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

The implementation of a reliable and consistently applied classroom-based assessment system has underpinned impressive improvements in pupils' achievements across both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, and transformed pupils' attitudes to learning and their life in school in the process. This system, known to staff, pupils and parents alike as 'assertive mentoring' currently measures and monitors pupils' progress in writing and mathematics and their behaviour and attendance. The acting headteacher rightly focused attention on these aspects in order to maximise progress against the areas for improvement as swiftly as possible.

Local authority and the school's own assessments indicate that rates of progress have accelerated rapidly since the last monitoring visit. While there is some variation in progress across the year groups and in different classes, data indicate that overall, the vast majority of pupils are now set to make at least the two levels of progress expected across Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in writing and mathematics. Pupils' attainment in these subjects has risen from a very low base and is currently much closer to nationally expected levels. Improvement is most marked in writing. The most recent school assessment indicates good progress throughout the school overall and outstanding progress in Key Stage 2. Here, 77% of Year 6 pupils are currently on track to achieve the nationally expected Level 4 at the end of the academic year compared to 39% in November 2009. This suggests the school is likely to exceed its 2009/2010 target for writing.

The improvement in pupils' writing as a result of intensive intervention is evident immediately on entering the school through the attention to detail and presentation seen in pupils' work in the high-quality displays in the foyer and in every area of the



school. These displays give the pupils an enormous sense of achievement and pride and make a significant contribution to their improved self-esteem and confidence as learners. Reliably assessed pieces of work clearly demonstrate a significant rise in standards and achievement and reflect the impact of the increased emphasis on punctuation, spelling and handwriting. Improvement is not limited to presentation alone. Pupils' ability to express their thoughts and feelings in written form through prose and poetry has developed beyond recognition since the last visit, especially in Key Stage 2. Inspectors were impressed by some very sensitive and creative writing about the life of Anne Frank and the story of Ali Baba, for instance.

As a result of the assessment information generated through assertive mentoring, teachers have a clearer picture of the pupils' individual abilities. This knowledge and understanding are increasingly being used to plan lessons and activities to cater for different needs and abilities. While this has contributed to the accelerated rate of progress overall, this ability to differentiate work to meet specific needs is not yet consistently applied or precise enough in all classes. As a result, despite some improvement, the most able pupils are not always set suitably challenging work that extends their thinking.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Raise standards and improve progress in Key Stage 2 – good
- Set work that is more challenging for the most able pupils – satisfactory
- Intensify actions to improve pupil's writing throughout the school as a matter of urgency – good.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

While attendance remains broadly average, there has been a marked improvement in pupils' behaviour and this is now good. This has had a dramatic impact on the climate of the school; resulting in a warm, calm and productive atmosphere where pupils have been effectively tuned back in to learning and accept more responsibility for their actions. A clear system of sanctions and rewards is being consistently applied by all staff. Each classroom displays the same rules and a code of conduct and contains a 'time-out' desk. Any instances of poor behaviour are now managed effectively and calmly within the classroom. One recent, and fully-justified permanent exclusion in Key Stage 2, alongside clear messages about high expectations through assemblies and other personal development activities, has ensured pupils are fully aware of the consequences of any misbehaviour for themselves and others. Pupils report that the behaviour system is fair; they know 'exactly where they stand...want to do really well and don't want to let themselves and each other down by getting their school a bad name', in the local community.

Assertive mentoring has played a key role in the achievement of these positive changes in attitude. Every pupil has an individual mentoring file that contains their assessed work, records their progress towards individual targets and clocks up their



rewards. Pupils thoroughly enjoy collecting 'smiles' for their work and conduct in order to achieve their individual and class bronze, silver and gold awards. Staff go to great lengths to make sure that every file is produced and stored in each classroom in exactly the same way and presented to a very high standard using a range of whole-school documents. This encourages pupils to feel proud of their work and to perceive the scheme as fair. Every pupil inspectors talked to, spoke enthusiastically about their work and was very clear about their personal targets for writing and mathematics and what they had to do next to achieve them.

Notices throughout the school and discussions with pupils indicate an increasing emphasis on strengthening the role of the school council and reporting back to classmates on the actions that have been taken on their behalf. Similarly, there is a clearer emphasis on promoting an understanding of different faiths and cultures; through work in geography and religious education, for example.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Make sure pupils are taught in stable groups of reasonable size – satisfactory.
- Ensure pupils accept greater responsibility by:
  - creating more positions for them to take on
  - strengthening the role of the school council
  - making sure pupils understand how their misbehaviour affects others
  - teaching them to understand more about the different faiths and ethnic groups that make up our society – good.

### The effectiveness of provision

There has been an improvement in the quality of lessons since the last visit. Staff have responded well to the clear direction the acting headteacher has provided for them and worked tirelessly to implement the robust procedures he has introduced. In Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, the majority of lessons observed were good because strategies for effective teaching are beginning to be embedded as both teachers and teaching assistants work more closely together and implement new ideas. Their enthusiasm, teamwork and increased willingness to reflect on their own skills and practice are communicated to the pupils. In turn, pupils are keen to do better and now collaborate well in lessons. Since the last inspection the focus of the school's actions has been on securing rapid improvement in the main school. As a result, the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has not improved at the same rate. While the Early Years Foundation Stage is generally well organised and has an appropriate range of resources, the quality and effectiveness of provision is too variable. This is because children in the Reception Year are not always provided with the right opportunities to apply and develop their skills and abilities through the range of adult-led and child-initiated activities provided.

A whole-school electronic tracking system has yet to be developed, but half-termly assessment points have been implemented and responsibility for recording and



tracking pupils' progress are rightly placed with class teachers. Staff are rising to this challenge with its increased levels of accountability, and the current position of every pupil, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities with regard to writing and mathematics is now known. Teachers' weekly one-to-one discussions with each pupil about their progress and targets are proving particularly valuable in establishing a very clear picture of what each pupil can do and in strengthening the relationships between the teacher and the pupil. Regular tracking of pupils' progress means teachers are taking more account of the different stages pupils have reached when they plan activities. Consequently, the best lessons are being structured to help pupils take small steps in learning, maintain a good pace and provide an interesting variety of activities tailored more closely to different levels of ability. Increasingly, both teachers and teaching assistants keep a close eye on pupils' responses to questioning and problem-solving tasks. They are becoming more adept at adjusting the lesson to recap on areas pupils find difficult or to provide timely assistance for individuals.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that more of it is good – good.
- Make better use of pupils' targets for learning – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting headteacher has made an outstanding contribution to the life of this school in a very short period of time. His drive, ambition to make things better for the pupils and the staff, and his acute insight enabled him to perceive the key issues lying at the heart of the school's poor performance quickly. He has tackled these decisively and effectively. Plans and strategies are targeted at the right priorities; they are working extremely well because they are succinct, straightforward and readily understood. Rigorous evaluation ensures that plans and actions are being applied consistently and revised if need be. The introduction of assertive mentoring has streamlined tracking and put reliable assessment systems in place in the classroom. This system lies at the heart of the vast majority of the improvement outcomes for pupils seen during this visit and has proved a powerful tool in the classroom; driving up standards, accelerating progress; improving behaviour and motivating and empowering pupils and staff. The school recognises that this system will need to be extended to reading, science and other subjects as soon as the early, but nonetheless significant, gains in writing and mathematics have been consolidated.

Changes to the start of the school day and to the times when school lunch is served have maximised learning and facilitated smoother transitions between lessons. Meticulous attention to detail and a focus on the importance of high-quality resources that stimulate pupils' self-esteem and foster respect for others has resulted in an environment that is rich in the support it provides for pupils' learning



and progress. Considerable time and effort have gone into tidying up and reorganising. So far, this has resulted in a quiet play courtyard, two open plan areas equipped with new computers, freshly painted corridors, more books and better storage.

The acting headteacher has worked closely with governors during the time he has been at the school. They are now much better informed about all aspects of the school's work and are holding the school to account to good effect. They have asked the right questions about the acting headteacher's intended actions and sought clarification and further evidence when needed.

Staff have been well supported to introduce the new strategies through appropriate training and development. Change, while urgent, has not been driven through at the expense of consultation. Staff report very effective meetings where the acting headteacher outlined the options available to them and then withdrew to give them time to reflect on them. In this way, the headteacher has gained commitment and staff feel that their views have been sought. Staff have formed an effective and willing team under the direction of the acting headteacher as a result. The views of parents and pupils have been sought and taken on board through questionnaires and discussions. Questionnaires show that all members of the school community are unanimous in reporting significant improvements. Parents are increasingly coming into the school to celebrate success rather than address problems. Needless to say, pupils and staff feel some anxiety about the departure of the acting headteacher at the end of the spring term and expressed some uncertainty about how the transition to the substantive headteacher will be managed so that the substantial and impressive gains made since the last visit can be sustained and built upon further in the future.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Make leadership and management more effective – good.
- Enable governors to hold the school to account more – good.
- Streamline the tracking system so that it is readily understood and used by staff for core subjects in the first instance – good.
- Ensure reliable assessment methods are in place to monitor pupils' progress accurately and target interventions effectively – good.
- Simplify the action plans and devise effective methods for evaluating and reporting on the school's progress – good.

External support

The local authority moved rapidly to seek an acting headteacher. They made a shrewd appointment and ensured that the necessary arrangements were in place so there were no gaps in leadership at Mount Pleasant. The revised local authority action plan is robust and well targeted yet flexible enough to ensure the school can



access good quality support matched to specific needs as they develop and change. Considerable resources have been allocated to the school since the last visit to support improvement; including, for example, a recent 'outcomes for children review' that involved eight local authority officers and the headteacher designate.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Improve teaching and the curriculum in the Reception Year.
- Formalise the handover arrangements for the transition period from acting headteacher to headteacher designate and communicate these to staff and pupils so as to ease the anxieties they currently feel. And ensure the good gains achieved in recent months can be sustained and built upon.