

Serco
Inspections
2 Wythall Green
Way
Birmingham
B47 6LW

PROTECT-INSPECTION

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



4 December 2009

Ms P Smart
Federation Headteacher
Conway Primary School
Conway Road
Sparkbrook
Birmingham
West Midlands
B11 1NS

Dear Ms Smart

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Conway Primary School

Following my visit with Jill Bavin and Glynn Storer, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 2 and 3 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – broadly satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

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 the federation governing body and the Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Watters
Her Majesty's Inspector

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Special measures: monitoring of Conway Primary School

Report from the fifth monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 December 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised the school's documents. They met with the federation headteacher, senior leaders, middle managers, groups of pupils, the chair of the governing body, one of the vice chairs of governors and representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection there have been significant and substantial changes. The previous headteacher left the school at the end of August 2009. An assistant headteacher, who is currently working in another school, will be leaving at the end of December 2009. Five teachers left the school at the end of the summer term and 17 new teachers joined on 1 September 2009. Two of the new teachers have since resigned their posts and two are absent because of long term sickness. Three other teachers are also absent because of illness. The school is now federated with Greet Primary School, and shares the same governing body. The interim executive board at Conway was disbanded on 31 August 2009. The federation headteacher was appointed as a National Leader of Education in June 2009. There has been a complete overhaul of senior and middle management posts, with many staff new to their roles. Staff absence is high, and is currently running at 14%. Teaching groups have been reorganised and work has begun to improve the school grounds and internal environment.

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

The school's current assessment information shows that standards are rising and rates of progress are increasing more rapidly than in the past. For example, the proportion of pupils who are reaching the level expected for their age has risen from 49% to 60% in writing in Year 3 and from 57% to 70% in numeracy in Year 6. Similarly over 50% of pupils have made good progress in mathematics in Year 6 and 77% of the lower ability pupils in Year 5 have made good progress in reading. Nevertheless this pattern is not repeated consistently in all year groups and subjects. There is still much to be done to embed and sustain a consistent profile of higher standards and good rates of progress for all pupils. While the gap between what the pupils are expected to attain for their age and what they are currently achieving is narrowing, it is still too wide. The unvalidated results of the 2009 Key Stage 1 assessments and Key Stage 2 tests show that standards were below and sometimes well below the levels Year 2 and Year 6 pupils should have reached for their age. Similarly, the progress made by these pupils was too slow.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Raise standards and increase the rate of pupils' progress throughout the school, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics – broadly satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The pupils behave well and have positive attitudes to learning. They are particularly enthusiastic when lessons are challenging and interesting. Behaviour was satisfactory or better in all lessons and good or outstanding in almost a third. The pupils are good humoured, keen to do well and very welcoming to visitors. They cooperate well with each other and relationships are positive. The number of exclusions has fallen significantly in the past six months, and only one pupil has been excluded since the beginning of the autumn term 2009. Attendance rates are generally below the national average for primary schools, although the most recent attendance rate for the week prior to the inspection was nearly 94%.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved. The proportion of inadequate lessons has fallen from 19% to 8% and for the first time since the school was placed in special measures, some outstanding teaching was seen in Key Stage 2. Many of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been eliminated, for example, teachers' subject knowledge is stronger and the pace of lessons is faster. Nevertheless, the proportion of good lessons fell slightly from 47% to 42%, and four lessons judged satisfactory were fragile, having a fine balance of strengths and weaknesses.

The use of assessment to support learning and inform teachers' planning is shown best in the good and outstanding lessons. Here teachers make good use of what the pupils know, understand and can do to provide work that is challenging, motivating and interesting. As a result pupils' work is carefully matched to their different starting points and capabilities and they make good or outstanding progress. Similarly, the introduction of targeted teaching groups, based on pupils' prior attainment is having a positive impact on raising achievement. However, this is not a consistent picture across all targeted groups and subjects. In lessons that were inadequate or fragile, the pupils' work was not matched sufficiently accurately to their different learning needs. Consequently rates of progress slowed and weaknesses in key skills, such as in writing, were not addressed sufficiently and errors often went unchecked.

The quality of provision and outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage is broadly satisfactory. The learning environment has improved and adults' observations are used generally satisfactorily to inform their planning. However, the quality of adult interventions when children are working and playing independently is barely

adequate and there are too few opportunities for the children to make choices and explore their interests. Children's attainment remains low and the school recognises that achievement needs to be accelerated significantly to ensure that children are better prepared for their education in Key Stage 1.

The quality of provision and outcomes for pupils on the school's register of special educational needs is broadly satisfactory and is benefiting from recent improvements in leadership and management. The school has established links with external agencies to support the pupils' speech and language development and other specific needs for some individual pupils.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, including the use of assessment, to ensure that all teaching is good or better – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The federation headteacher has continued to build on the good foundations for further improvement reported at the last inspection. She is relentless in her pursuit of higher standards for all pupils and has introduced exceptionally rigorous arrangements for monitoring and evaluating teachers' and pupils' performance. This is reflected in the rise in standards and gains in pupils' progress. She leaves no stone unturned in her expectations that pupils should have the best opportunity for making a success of their lives and that the school has a duty to provide the best quality of education for all. She is inspiring and challenging all staff to do better and, in a relatively short period of time, has refocused the school towards achieving its core purpose that all pupils should achieve well and enjoy their school life. She recognises that while the significant decline in the school's effectiveness has been arrested, there remains much to do to ensure all weaknesses are eliminated and that actions are securely translated into sustained and sufficiently rapid improvement.

The federation arrangements have made a positive contribution to raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning. The success achieved at Greet primary school is having a clear and measurable impact at Conway. Leadership and management have been strengthened. A senior leader from Greet, along with the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher at Conway, are playing a significant role in leading improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and pupils' progress. They understand that all teachers are accountable for the standards attained by the pupils in their care, and they themselves have a direct responsibility for ensuring higher levels of achievement for all pupils. The role of middle managers is developing satisfactorily, as the school seeks to extend its capacity for further improvement.

There are rigorous arrangements to track pupils' progress and monitor the rate at which standards are rising. The information is used robustly to evaluate individual teachers' performance and drive improvements.

The single governing body for the federation has set about its work with high aspirations and expectations for both schools. This is reflected in the rigorous evaluation of effectiveness in all key areas of its work. Governors' committees are playing a strong part in monitoring progress against the key issues. The chair and other leading governors have a realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and provide good leadership. They are resolutely determined to secure more rapid improvements in the coming months, and to establish a culture of continuous improvement in the longer term. The chair of governors continues to provide strong support for the federation headteacher, for example, when resolving personnel issues. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils currently meet government requirements.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Improve leadership and management and ensure procedures for monitoring and self-evaluation are robust and rigorous in securing rapid improvements in pupils' progress – good to ensure robust and rigorous monitoring and self-evaluation and satisfactory to increase pupils' progress

External support

The local authority continues to provide a sound range of support, and this is sensibly reducing because of the strong federation arrangements. The school's progress is regularly reviewed and progress against the key issues is reported to governors at their regular meetings. A good level of support and challenge is provided by the School Improvement Partner. The local authority has committed £250,000 of additional funds to support the federation arrangements and because the school's budget has been severely stretched by the resolution of staffing issues and historical weaknesses in budget management. The local authority has agreed that the additional funding will be in the school's budget by 24 December 2009. The local authority has also agreed to work closely with the governing body to have a budget deficit recovery plan in place by 31 January 2010.