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Jane Harvey
Acting Headteacher
Barn Croft Primary School
2 Brunel Road
Walthamstow
E17 8SB

Dear Ms Harvey

Special measures: Monitoring inspection of Barn croft primary school

Following my visit to your school on 2 and 3 February 2010 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 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 – satisfactory

Additional newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Waltham Forest.

Yours sincerely

Robert Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 2 and 3 February 2010

Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, subject leaders for English and mathematics and the chair of governors. I observed learning in all classes and for some intervention groups, spoke to representatives of Year 6 and the school council, looked at pupils' work and met with the local authority lead advisor.

Context

Since the school was last inspected, the interim headteacher has left and the very capable deputy headteacher is back at the helm as acting headteacher. Three teachers have left, one has returned from leave and two new teachers have been appointed. Day-to-day support for school improvement continues to be delivered by VT Group (VT) through a strategic partnership with the local authority. The school continues to receive support from London Challenge intended to raise standards in English and mathematics.

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

Improvements in pupils' progress observed at the last monitoring inspection have continued. In all lessons observed the rate of progress was at least satisfactory, with an increasing proportion of pupils making good progress. In consequence, standards are beginning to rise but this is not consistent across all classes and subjects. In most classes pupils are doing best in reading and mathematics but much less well in writing. Over time, standards in English have been too low and recent improvements in teaching and learning have not yet had sufficient impact. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to engage in extended writing and to apply their literacy skills in other subjects. Early indications are that the school is well placed to meet its 2010 targets for the proportion of pupils reaching Level 4 by the end of Year 6. Meeting these targets will result in improved progress but standards which are still well below those found in most schools. Overall, in spite of the accelerating progress pupils are making, standards remain too low. At the time the school was made subject to require special measures the Early Years Foundation Stage was judged to be satisfactory. Provision has improved since. Children settle well and make progress across a number of areas of learning. Teaching is well focused on developing their early social and academic skills.

Pupils say they now enjoy lessons and speak enthusiastically about improvements in teaching and in their attitudes to learning. They say they particularly enjoy practical tasks and visits and would value more opportunities to work and learn outside of the classroom. They also recognise that the recent inclement weather makes this

difficult. Year 6 pupils are very much looking forward to their residential visit to Wiltshire and seeing Stonehenge. Those in Year 2 returned from their visit to the London Aquarium enthused if tired. Nemo the clown fish proved a particular favourite.

- Raise standards by improving the quality of teaching so that pupils make at least satisfactory progress. In particular, rectify weaknesses in pace, challenge, the use of assessment and the engagement of pupils.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Many pupils are mature, articulate and confident. Older pupils have an accurate picture of how well the school is doing. They recognise that while the school has improved significantly it 'still has a way to go'. Pupils have high expectations of themselves, other pupils and the school. They value honesty, tolerance and politeness and are very disappointed if others fall short of their high standards. They say they continue to feel safe and happy at school, although some younger pupils have concerns over the playground. The school council has suggested a 'zoning' system for activities and the school has already acted on a suggestion for the introduction of quieter (rather than quiet) areas on the playground. The effective work on encouraging good behaviour and eliminating bullying has continued. Most pupils are confident in the school's ability to resolve cases of bullying and say they would tell an adult they trusted.

Despite the apparent increase in pupils' enjoyment of school and the many positive comments they make, attendance has declined. Attendance was low in some weeks in December and early January. The school has responded by working more closely with the local authority and with families to encourage good attendance. There are early signs that this is proving effective and attendance has recently improved to broadly average.

- Ensure that all pupils are safe from bullying, with clear and effective procedures in place to resolve bullying incidents speedily.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

The effectiveness of provision

Observations carried out during the inspection, together with those carried out by the school and external consultants, confirm that the quality of teaching has continued to improve. Most teaching is now good. However, while no teaching is inadequate there is too little that is outstanding. Lessons are well planned and structured with learning which is generally well matched to pupils' learning needs so that they are appropriately challenged. The school has made additional provision for pupils identified as particularly able mathematicians through a project called 'Mathematicians at work'. There is good support for pupils who find learning difficult and for those in the early stages of learning English.

Pupils' personal development is well catered for. Teachers have high expectations and pupils behave well. The school's actions to develop pupils' moral and social awareness have been successful and it has an increasingly strong sense of community and shared commitment to improve. Pupils receive a great deal of encouragement and as a result are enthusiastic learners. Teachers and teaching assistants make very good use of a range of questioning to extend pupils' understanding and assess their learning when working with small groups. This good practice is less consistent in whole-class parts of lessons. The use of 'talk partners' where pupils discuss their thoughts and conclusions with their peers has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now more consistent across all classes.

The curriculum has had a clear focus on English and mathematics. As teaching and learning improve and standards begin to rise pupils and teachers are eager to embrace a more creative approach to the curriculum. This will provide opportunities to raise standards in English and mathematics through the application of key practical skills in other subjects. Pupils say this is an approach to learning they would enjoy. The range of clubs and activities available at lunchtime and after school has been increased since the last inspection. Pupils are really pleased about this and recognise the additional contribution these activities make to their enjoyment of learning.

- Improve the curriculum, so that it meets the needs of all pupils, including their personal development and spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting headteacher is providing good leadership and has been very effective in providing stability and continuity during recent changes in headship. The senior leadership team is becoming increasingly effective in providing vision for the school and monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. The analysis of data showing how well individual pupils are doing has improved. Subject leadership has been successful in providing coaching, support and advice to staff. However, subject action plans lack sufficient rigour. While a range of appropriate actions is identified,

action plans are unclear about the expected impact on outcomes. For example, the school is investing in additional support for pupils who are identified as being particularly able but the expected impact of this support on their attainment has not been considered. Subject leaders have begun to analyse progress data but they are not yet sufficiently focused on raising standards through careful tracking of how well classes and groups of pupils are doing. While the school's raising attainment plan has improved since the last monitoring inspection it continues to lack sufficient focus on the impact of proposed actions on standards. Governors are beginning to take a much more active role in finding out about the work and progress of the school and holding it to account for how well pupils are doing.

Communication with parents has improved significantly. A large majority of parents now believe the school seeks the views of parents and carers although this positive improvement masks significant differences across classes.

- Ensure that the school is well led and there is a cohesive approach to school improvement, so that all leaders share a common vision and are involved in rigorous monitoring and accurate evaluation.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

- Improve communication with parents, particularly ensuring that complaints and concerns are followed up effectively.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

External support

VT and London Challenge have continued to provide effective and well-focused support which is tailored to meet the changing needs of the school. There is a strong partnership between the school and its local authority advisors. Subject leaders and other staff say they value the support and advice they receive.

Priorities for further improvement

No further priorities for improvement have been identified.