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09 July 2010

Mrs Carol Coleman
Headteacher
Mount Pleasant Primary School
Newton Lane
Darlington
County Durham
DL3 9HE

Dear Mrs Coleman

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Mount Pleasant Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 07 and 08 July 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 third 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 – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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 local authority.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Ripley
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Mount Pleasant Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 07 and 08 July 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, including 12 part-lessons and the learning support being provided in the 'rainbow' and 'gold' rooms for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities; scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, staff, governors, two groups of pupils and the local authority Early Years Advisory Teacher.

Context

At the time of the visit the new substantive headteacher had been in post for 10 weeks having joined the school at the start of the summer term. The assistant headteacher was on long-term leave as a result of ill health.

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

The significant improvements in pupils' achievements noted during the second monitoring visit have been sustained and built upon. The intensive actions implemented across the school since October 2009 have succeeded in raising standards and accelerating pupils' progress rapidly from a very low base. Unvalidated 2010 test results for the end of Key Stage 2 show that pupils' progress is now satisfactory because most pupils have made the expected two levels of progress in English, mathematics and science. This has resulted in a substantial increase in the proportion of pupils attaining the expected Level 4 in each of these subjects at the end of Year 6 when compared with the school's 2009 results. Consequently, the school has met or exceeded its challenging targets and the downward trend in attainment seen in the previous three years has been halted. Nonetheless, too few pupils achieved at the higher Level 5, because there is still work to do to build greater challenge for more-able pupils into lessons. However, the unvalidated results and lesson observations indicate there are promising green shoots for future improvement at Level 5, especially in mathematics. While the proportion of boys making two levels of progress increased at the same rate as the proportion of girls, their attainment lags behind that of the girls. The headteacher is already working with staff to develop appropriate strategies to address both these issues.

The most recent assessments by teachers show that at Key Stage 1 attainment is slowly improving but remains below average in reading and mathematics. Pupils' attainment in writing is broadly average at 61%, a rise of 27% when compared with the previous year. This increase typifies the good improvements that have been achieved as a result of the intensive actions taken to improve pupils' writing.



The proportion of children achieving the skills and knowledge typical for their age by the time they leave the Early Years Foundation Stage is very low, even taking into account their individual abilities on entry. Children's creative development, knowledge and understanding of the world and their social development are particularly low and have declined since the previous year. The introduction of the phonics programme about the sounds that letters make is beginning to have an impact and there are some early signs of improvement in children's reading and their ability to link sounds and letters.

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 pupils' writing throughout the school as a matter of urgency – good.

Other relevant outcomes for pupils

Pupils' self-confidence and attitudes to learning have changed beyond recognition. They are happy and productive learners who act purposefully in lessons and around the school. The relationships between pupils and between adults and pupils are warm and respectful. There is a strong sense of teamwork. In the vast majority of lessons visited, pupils were thoroughly engrossed in their learning, listened attentively and made mature contributions to the discussions taking place.

Pupils know they are listened to and their views are taken seriously. They are very well informed and speak confidently about all the improvements that have been achieved so far and what needs doing next; both in terms of their individual targets and the next steps the school is taking. For instance, they explained that their 'assertive mentoring' files currently record their achievements in writing, mathematics and behaviour but will include reading from the start of the new academic year.

Attendance remains broadly average. Exclusion rates have dropped considerably and are now low. This is because pupils' behaviour and the way that staff manage this has improved dramatically since the first visit. Pupils have a very clear understanding of the effects of any misbehaviour on others. They are developing a much better understanding of different faiths and cultures through lessons and whole-school activities such as 'fund-raising Fridays' where they 'all try to bring 5p' to help support a child in Africa.

Pupils are rightly very proud of what they have achieved over this past year and are very positive about the new headteacher reporting that she is 'taking the things the acting headteacher started and making them even better as well as bringing lots of really good ideas of her own'. Pupils particularly like the improvements made to the



system for sanctions and rewards and the changes to breaks and lunchtimes, explaining how they enjoy having more responsibility for serving themselves and clearing up. All these factors demonstrate that pupils take their individual and collective responsibilities very seriously and now thoroughly enjoy their time at school.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

The effectiveness of provision

The marked improvement in the quality of lessons seen at the last visit has been sustained. The majority observed were good. Classroom environments are rich in their support for pupils' progress, especially towards literacy and numeracy targets. The teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants has strengthened further. This ensures that teaching assistants are effectively deployed to work alongside targeted groups of pupils and prompt and appropriate individual support is provided when needed. The learning and care provided for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities through the 'rainbow' and 'gold' rooms is outstanding. As a result, pupils who need highly specialised support achieve well given their starting points and are helped to work alongside their classmates for as much of the time as possible.

Several observations were undertaken throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage during this visit. The teaching and curriculum observed in the Reception class shows good improvement. This is largely as a result of the staff's eagerness to improve their practice and their willingness to work in partnership with the Early Years Advisory Teacher to achieve this.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage as a whole, however, children are not being helped to develop their skills and knowledge as well as they should. A recent external moderation and the observations during this visit identified several areas for improvement. Planning is underdeveloped. There are not enough opportunities for child-initiated learning and this partly accounts for children's weak creative development. There are too few strategies in place to record children's development quickly and effectively as they go about their learning and play. This means that children's progress is not monitored on an ongoing basis to inform planning and tailor activities to their needs. It also results in very limited information being



available to include in children's 'learning journals' and share with parents and carers.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The transition from the acting headteacher to the substantive headteacher has been managed very effectively ensuring that the anxieties noted at the previous visit have proved to be unfounded. With calm and assured leadership, the new headteacher has got off to a flying start. Her ambition and drive are already making their mark; raising morale further and instilling a common sense of purpose throughout the school. The pace of change continues to accelerate.

Planning provides a firm basis for action, clear targets to aim for and incorporates the right strategies to improve the provision further. Staff are enthused by the agenda that has been set for the coming academic year to move the school forward, including the full implementation of the electronic system for tracking pupils. Staff's training and development this term have been extensive and carefully matched to priorities. This has included a range of activities for staff and governors on child protection and safeguarding issues, ensuring that safeguarding requirements are met. Classes for the coming academic year have been organised to create stable group sizes. Some classes will cater for mixed-age groups. Accurate assessments by teachers and information gained from tracking pupils have been used to plan which pupils are assigned to each class, so that pupils' ability levels are more closely matched than has been the case in previous years. Swift action has been taken to secure two year-long secondments of experienced teachers from other local schools to address the long-term absence of the assistant headteacher and cover for a teaching vacancy.

Governors have worked very closely with the headteacher who has swiftly established very productive and positive relationships with them. The membership of the governing body and the committee structure have been revised, resulting in more productive meetings and sharper focus. The headteacher is introducing good systems that are helping governors hold the school to account and engage with it more, for example through observations and links with specific aspects of school life.



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.
- Make sure that pupils are taught in stable groups of reasonable size – good.
- Ensure that 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.
- Formalise the handover arrangements for the transition period from acting headteacher to headteacher designate; communicate these to staff and pupils and ensure that the good gains achieved can be sustained and built upon – good.

External support

The local authority has brokered well-targeted support for the school through the two secondments of teachers and links with two local primary schools. The Early Years Advisory Teacher has provided good support for staff in the Reception class.

Priorities for further improvement

- Work with the local authority's Early Years team to:
 - improve outcomes and the quality of provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage
 - improve planning and the strategies to observe, record and report children's development in the Early Years Foundation Stage.