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5 February 2010

Mrs E Ford
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Ford

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Bridgewater Primary School

Following my visit with Suzi Clipson-Boyle, Additional Inspector, to your school on 3 and 4 February 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 2010. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

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 the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Salford.

Yours sincerely

Angela Westington
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Bridgewater Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 3–4 February 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed 18 lessons or part lessons and 1 personal, social and health session; they scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, members of staff, a group of pupils, the chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the inspection in September 2009, the governing body has been replaced with an Interim Executive Board and a parents' champion has been appointed to represent the views of parents and carers. A new permanent deputy headteacher was appointed in October 2009 and took up post in January 2010. The appointment of the deputy headteacher brings the school's teaching staff complement to 9 full time staff, including the headteacher, plus one part time teacher covering Planning, Preparation and Administration time. At the time of this inspection, two of the substantive teachers were on sickness leave; one long term. Their posts are being covered by a supply teacher and a teacher seconded from elsewhere in the local authority.

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

Standards remain low overall although there are recent improvements especially in Year 1, Year 4 and Year 5. There are encouraging signs that pupils are enjoying their work more than at the time of the inspection in September 2009.

In the 2009 English tests for Key Stage 2, the proportions of pupils gaining the expected Level 4 and the higher Level 5 were in line with the national average. In mathematics and science the proportions gaining Level 4 were similar to the national figures but in both subjects significantly fewer pupils than expected gained the higher level. In the current Year 6, standards are faltering as a result of teacher absence. The headteacher and Interim Executive Board have taken the decision that the headteacher will teach this class part time until the national tests take place. The imposition of an outline curriculum plan for all subjects, including mathematics and science, means that now all areas of the programmes of study for the core subjects are identified on teachers' plans and the headteacher and deputy are able to monitor that specific elements are being taught. As the school leaders get to grips with the curriculum and the quality of teaching in lessons, the gaps in pupils' knowledge is becoming more evident. For example, in Years 4 and 5 where pupils are working for more sustained periods of time and producing longer pieces of written work, weaknesses in basic skills are clear. Spelling, handwriting, letter formation,

presentation and use of punctuation are all common weaknesses. The pupils themselves are capable and very willing to work but their progress is hampered by their weak grasp of skills that should have been mastered in Key Stage 1. In a mathematics lesson for Year 4 pupils which focused on place value and the introduction of vertical addition using hundreds, tens and units, too many pupils, who could cope intellectually with the new concepts being taught, were held back by their lack of the most basic number knowledge, such as knowing what 7 add 8 makes. A large number of pupils had to count on their fingers to find the answer.

Following an assessment and analysis of reading ages in December the new deputy headteacher has undertaken an audit of the teaching of reading. The results show that over a third of pupils have reading ages below their chronological ages, some significantly below. The largest number of deficits are in Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2, the result of a lack of a systematic programme for teaching young children how to read quickly and securely before moving them into weekly group reading activities.

The 2009 Key Stage 1 assessments were the lowest for a number of years with pupils performing significantly below the national average in all aspects. This is a major cause for concern as the majority of pupils in Year 3 have entered Key Stage 2 without the necessary basic skills to access the Key Stage 2 curriculum. Currently in Key Stage 1, standards remain low but they are improving due to the improvement in the quality of teaching there.

The school's 2009 data on children's outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage show that the children at Bridgewater attained less well than their peers nationally, than those in Salford and than those in their family group of schools. They attain particularly low in aspects related to early reading, writing and calculation. The gap between the attainment of boys and girls is even wider than is the gap nationally. The evidence from observations is that the Early Years curriculum, especially those elements related to early literacy and numeracy, have not been sufficiently well organised and managed and until recently have not been given a high enough priority. The teaching of early phonics takes place but not well enough and it is not part of a structured programme to develop pupils' all round literacy and oracy skills. Consequently, the children are not making the progress that they are capable of making.

Despite these weaknesses, across the school pupils are happy and hardworking. They are delightfully friendly and well mannered: on this visit, each inspector had occasion to thank individual children for their helpfulness and interest.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Ensure that pupils make much better progress and attain higher standards – inadequate.

The effectiveness of provision

During this visit, one third of the lessons observed were good, one third satisfactory and the rest were inadequate. This is a better profile of teaching than that observed at the previous inspection, there being more good lessons. However, there is still too much variability and too much teaching that is inadequate. There is now in place a uniform planning system which the headteacher and deputy monitor weekly and the beginnings of a tracking system to monitor progress made by pupils. Clear and unequivocal messages have been relayed to staff about the rates of progress that are to be expected from pupils. This has not been well received in all quarters. A more rigorous focus on the marking of pupils' work; the introduction of regular assessment; regular scrutiny of pupils' books; and clearer guidance about classroom practice are responsible for the improvement in the profile of teaching. The major obstacle remains the lack of wider experience amongst the teachers, most of whom are not clear what high quality teaching and learning looks like. The assessment of pupils' work and understanding remains weak, especially assessment against National Curriculum levels in order to move pupils on to the next stage. There are strengths in the teaching. These include: the use of the interactive whiteboards which engage pupils, especially boys; the good relationships between pupils and staff; and the pupils' own very positive approaches to work and school. In addition, the overwhelming majority of staff are enormously keen to do well and to get things right for the pupils.

A start has been made on the curriculum. There is now in place a curriculum map for all subjects across each year group with the National Curriculum programmes of study allocated appropriately. For the medium term plans, the school is using a combination of QCA schemes of work and skills based plans as an interim measure.

The school environment is grubby. Too many of the classrooms are in need of a deep clean, particularly the floors and carpets. The Early Years Foundation Stage rooms, especially, do not meet the welfare requirements in aspects of cleanliness, orderliness and health and hygiene.

Resources are poor. The supply of reading books for the school is woefully inadequate. The school knows this and the deputy headteacher has recently purchased a substantial amount of reading stock to enable teachers to teach reading effectively. Classrooms lack basic equipment that is now common place elsewhere such as materials to support mathematics lessons. The Early Years Foundation Stage is in need of the most basic of materials to support early literacy and numeracy, such as thick crayons, pens, chubby pencils and small black boards. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are trying to write in books using pencils more suited to upper Key Stage 2 pupils.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning – satisfactory.
- Improve the quality of the curriculum – inadequate.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher and deputy make a good team and have achieved a lot in a short space of time. They are working well together to secure improvement as quickly as possible. Attention is paid to prioritising actions and coordinating outside support. Initiatives are reviewed and followed through to ensure that they are becoming embedded. All staff are significantly more accountable as a result of the tighter systems and the monitoring procedures that they have put in place. However, leadership and management are not sufficiently distributed beyond these two key members of staff and needs to be widened to middle levels. Assessment information is now analysed to set challenging targets. The use of data to monitor pupils' progress, however, is still unfamiliar to some teachers and there is resistance from some staff to the new expectations. The headteacher has established good administrative systems to free up some of her time to enable her to focus on the quality of teaching and learning. For example, the monitoring of attendance and some aspects of financial administration have been delegated to a new administrative support assistant.

The Interim Executive Board has replaced the governing body and is operating effectively. Members of the board provide strong support and challenge to the school and bring valuable skills to their work. A parents' champion has been appointed to represent the views of parents. Plans are in place to start training a new shadow governing body – although the timeline has not yet started – to equip them for their role when the governing body is restored. Statutory requirements are now met for safeguarding, equal opportunities and community cohesion. The community cohesion action plan is underway but not complete. The audit undertaken to assess the school's community requirements was very thorough.

Judgement

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Strengthen the quality of leadership and management – good.

External support

The local authority is providing good, practical support and challenge to the school. Representatives from the Human Resources and the Finance Department have been appointed to the Interim Executive Board and are able to provide well coordinated and robust support for staffing and finance issues. The local authority's statement of action was clear and has been implemented well with additional funds and resources allocated to the school to enable the plan to be carried out. The headteacher values highly the guidance and support received from the School Improvement Partner.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise the Early Years Foundation Stage provision and outcomes to good.
- As a matter of urgency, ensure that there is a systematic and secure programme for teaching reading across the school.