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18 June 2010

Mr Barry Cregeen  
Associate Headteacher  
Farnworth Church of England Controlled Primary School  
Pit Lane  
Widnes  
Cheshire  
WA8 9HS

Dear Mr Cregeen

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Farnworth CofE Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 16 and 17 June 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 June 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 the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Halton.

Yours sincerely

Gill Jones  
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Farnworth CofE Controlled Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 16 and 17 June 2010

## Evidence

The inspector observed 13 teachers, visited 14 lessons, two intervention sessions and looked at the work in children's exercise books. She met with pupils, parents, staff and the executive headteacher of Wade Deacon High School and scrutinised school documentation, including the minutes of the Interim Executive Board.

## Context

The substantive headteacher remains absent from school. The deputy headteacher from Wade Deacon High School is covering this position as an associate headteacher on a full-time basis. The deputy headteacher is absent on long term sick leave. A permanent teacher is taking her class. One temporary teacher is absent from school and this class is covered by a supply teacher. One teacher has returned to school following long term absence, she has also rejoined the senior leadership team. Two teaching assistants have returned to school following long term absence.

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

Standards in Key Stage 2 remain broadly as reported at the time of the last monitoring visit in February. The school's recent provisional assessment data for pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 demonstrate they continue to gain above average levels in reading, writing and mathematics.

Pupils' achievement in Key Stages 1 and 2 is improving. The school's data show the percentage of pupils making expected progress is increasing. Teachers are more secure in judging pupils' level of attainment. This means that the progress data held by the school are more accurate. The senior leadership team and staff are using the tracking system effectively to identify pupils who are not making the expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Identified pupils receive additional support which matches their learning needs well. These pupils are now making good progress.

The work in pupils' exercise books is demonstrating that standards are improving in most classes. The volume of work is now appropriate. Presentation is improving, though inconsistencies between classes remain. Handwriting, although showing signs of improvement, remains weak. This is partly because not all pupils are holding their pens and forming their letters correctly. Few pupils use cursive script. Pupils say they enjoy their lessons, particularly the practical activities. During the inspection, pupils worked well together to carry out investigations and worked tirelessly to find the solutions to problems. In one good lesson, the pupils

summarised their learning by providing 'top tips' for the next group. Pupils in this class were assessing their own progress in the activity well. However, on occasion, not all pupils contribute effectively because the task sometimes has too much challenge for pupils of lower ability.

Pupils report that lessons are more interesting and they appreciate the opportunity to learn outdoors in the new gazebo and from visits and visitors to school. Year 5 and 6 are particularly excited about the forthcoming residential visits.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that pupils in Key Stage 2 make much better progress and attain higher standards, especially in mathematics and writing – good

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour remains good. They are becoming increasingly proud of their school and are keen to share their successes with visitors. Activities such as growing vegetables and creating a woodland walk are providing good opportunities to work with the community. Links with the church are strengthening and through this, pupils are increasing their cultural awareness. Pupils contribute well to fund-raising activities, such as the 'Hats for Haiti'. They respond well to the associate headteacher and say they enjoy his Friday morning celebration assemblies, in particular. Pupils appreciate the extra-curricular activities provided both in school and those provided in collaboration with Wade Deacon High School.

The effectiveness of provision

The inspector observed teaching and learning in Key Stages 1 and 2. The proportion of good teaching has increased in both key stages since the last visit. Teachers are demonstrating higher expectations of pupils' achievement. In the best lessons, planning matched pupils' learning needs well, resources were appropriate and teachers demonstrated skilful time management, enabling pupils to make good progress. For example, in a good Year 3 lesson, the teacher provided five activities for pupils to weigh and estimate different objects. The pupils had seven minutes to complete each activity. By the end of the lesson, all pupils had made good progress in learning independently, as well as improving their skills in estimating and weighing. Improvements across the school since the last visit include: a greater focus on practical activities; a higher level of challenge for more able pupils; and more opportunities for pupils to learn independently. The quality of intervention work in mathematics and English is good.

Where lessons are satisfactory, it is because the work set does not always match pupils' different ability levels well enough and the teacher talks for more time than the pupils work. This slows the pace of the lesson. Although planning is now

consistent across year groups, the difference in the pace of lessons means that not all classes complete the same volume of work.

Most books are marked regularly and provide praise and encouragement for pupils. However, pupils' next steps for learning are not always clear and teachers' comments do not guide pupils sufficiently well about how to improve their work. Where marking is good or better, it informs teachers' planning for the next activity well.

Teachers' subject knowledge in English and mathematics is improving. However, weaknesses remain in humanities. Opportunities for pupils to practice key skills, such as enquiry and investigation in subjects like history, are limited. The school has not yet completed a long term curriculum plan. However, using current events, such as the World Cup, are increasing the level of pupils' interest and engagement in their work. This is beginning to improve the quality of the curriculum.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stage 2 – good
- Improve the quality of the curriculum by:
  - producing a whole-school curricular plan that identifies how pupils progressively acquire and apply key skills across different subjects
  - ensuring that planning fully matches pupils' needs making it much more relevant and exciting for pupils – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The partnership with Wade Deacon High School is continuing to drive improvement and is starting to secure better outcomes for pupils. Staff, parents and pupils testify to the positive impact of the associate headteacher in leading improvements to all aspects of the schools' work. They appreciate his well focused ambition and determination to improve outcomes for pupils and are supporting him effectively. Staff, parents and pupils say they feel 'valued' because he listens to their suggestions and acts upon them.

The senior leadership team is developing well. Leaders are taking more responsibility for securing better outcomes for pupils and know the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The team is leading training for staff, in particular, levelling and moderating pupils' work. This is securing more accurate pupil progress data. The team are increasing in confidence in analysing this data and are beginning to use it effectively to drive up staff and pupils' expectations. For example, they have identified weaknesses in mathematics and phonics as areas for improvement. Staff morale is high and they are working well as a team in support of the leadership.

The Interim Executive Board is providing a good level of challenge and support to the school. All statutory requirements, including safeguarding arrangements, are met. Some senior leadership issues remain unresolved. However, the board has the knowledge and capacity to tackle them.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of leadership and management – good

External support

The quality of advice and support from Wade Deacon High School, a National Support School, is outstanding. This includes the services of the executive headteacher, who is a National Leader for Education and the associate headteacher. The quality of external support from the local authority remains good.

Priorities for further improvement

The priorities remain the same as those identified at the time of the last inspection.