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Mrs Paula Moreton
Acting headteacher
Upton Heath CE Primary School
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Dear Mrs Moreton

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Upton Heath CE Primary School

Following my visit with Chris Griffin, Additional Inspector, to your school on 22 and 23 April 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in September 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection – satisfactory.
Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

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, the Director of Children and Young People's Services Cheshire West and Chester, and the diocese.

Yours sincerely

Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Upton Heath CE Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 April 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the curriculum leaders for English and mathematics, the acting deputy headteacher in her role as special educational needs coordinator, four innovation leaders, the learning mentor and the Assistant Director for Children's and Young People's Services Cheshire West and Chester.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection in January, the substantive headteacher has remained absent and the acting headteacher has continued in role. Two members of staff left the school during the spring term. The local authority has continued to second an experienced deputy headteacher to the school to strengthen senior leadership. A deputy headteacher from another school continues to mentor the two newly qualified teachers.

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

There are positive signs in lessons, in pupils' work and from school data that the pace of learning is accelerating for all pupils, including the more able. This is because of the tighter focus in lessons on what pupils need to know and do in order to progress, and because of an increasing emphasis on practical activities which ensure that pupils gain, apply and reinforce their knowledge and skills. For instance, several Reception children organised each other to hang numbers on the washing line with cards pegged underneath others or laid on the ground to keep the sequence going once the line was full. While some found the sequencing a challenge, for others it gave the opportunity to show a growing understanding of tens and units. Similarly, pupils in other year groups drew on their knowledge of factors and multiplication tables to solve problems related to fractions prompted by the use of spinners, cards or photographs. Pupils really enjoy such learning. They are keen to start, willing to persevere and generous with their help.

Current data indicate that the school is on track to meet its targets for attainment at the end of the Reception Year and Years 2 and 6. The school has invested much time and teaching support for Year 6 pupils to compensate for some poor learning in previous years. These pupils have benefited from one-to-one tuition, booster sessions and targeted revision. Their work shows accelerating progress, particularly in the use and application of mathematics. Many have also developed true skill in crafting language to engage the reader. They know well the conventions and



formats of different types of writing. In some cases, the quality of the content of pupils' writing, especially that of the more able, outstrips that of pupils many years older. However, a potentially high standard overall is thwarted by the legacy of untidy presentation and inaccuracy in spelling and in the use of punctuation. The school is starting to chip away at this legacy at Key Stage 2 with regular sessions on spelling rules, individual spelling tasks and reminders about the use of punctuation. A new handwriting scheme is being trialled.

Although teachers have raised their expectations of what pupils can do, there is headroom for more in every year group and for the school's targets to be more challenging. The analysis of school data from this school year has thrown up inconsistencies between year groups and subjects. Too many pupils are not making the progress they should. While many pupils have made good progress, this has brought them to where they ought to be for their age rather than drawing on their potential to excel. This is most apparent in writing.

The increased emphasis on reading has lifted standards. The purchase of texts that interest boys and girls, the refinement of adult-led group reading sessions with a particular focus and the use of drama to draw out characterisation have been three effective steps in developing pupils' skills in interpreting an author's intentions.

The school knows that the key to resolving the issue of underachievement lies in the regular, accurate assessment and analysis of pupils' progress to pinpoint where action and intervention are needed. The absence of accurate assessment hampers work to bring about improvement in several aspects of the school's work, including the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The process of establishing accurate assessment has begun but a major hurdle is the variability of expertise at classroom level. The data gathered this school year are not wholly reliable as the use of nationally agreed criteria to assess pupils' attainment and progress is a relatively new process for many. While those who have recently joined the school are well versed in this procedure, others have had limited introduction to it. As a result, when compared with other primary schools, Upton Heath has a considerable way to go in its competence to evaluate pupils' progress accurately and to set challenging targets. The decision to use validated tests this term for many year groups is prudent as this should provide a secure baseline to gauge pupils' progress from September 2010. It also gives key staff a basis to identify school, key stage, year group, class and individual strengths and areas for development in reading, writing and mathematics.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate their progress, particularly for the more able – satisfactory.



Other relevant outcomes for pupils

Pupils' readiness to learn and their wish to do well are strengthening further. During this inspection pupils in all year groups were settled and highly involved in activities in lessons and when outdoors at break times. They were happy, very amenable and openly interested in events and people. Their behaviour was impeccable.

Inappropriate behaviour is rare. Apologies usually accompanied the occasional push and shove when pupils were lining up. In class, pupils' concentration was not affected by people moving around. There has been an uplift in the 'feel' to the school with a productive, welcoming buzz in and out of lessons. Changeovers from activities are smooth and speedy because pupils know what is expected and are eager to get lessons started.

In the warm weather, pupils were aware of the need to drink water and to protect themselves from too much sun. One boy broke off from an activity outside to go in and get his cap. Maturity, initiative and self-reliance typify pupils' conduct. School councillors know the acting headteacher takes their views seriously and they have raised valid queries about aspects of school hygiene and also suggested ideas for fundraising and for events at the summer fayre. They also came up with sensible questions to ask in the recent appointment of a new member of staff.

The effectiveness of provision

The overall quality of the teaching and curriculum has improved, although there are still inconsistencies. The school responded positively to the points for action raised in the first monitoring inspection and by consultants and advisers from the local authority, although action has been more effective in some areas than others. Nevertheless, much has been achieved in the last two months in placing pupils' learning at the heart of planning and in making learning more active and individually challenging. Pupils like the links between activities arising from a theme and some good-quality work is beginning to come from this approach. Underlying this move forward are the blossoming confidence and positive attitude of staff and the growing impact of guidance and mentoring tailored to the needs of individual members of staff. As one teacher said, 'It's not now a weakness to ask for help.'

Corridors and open spaces in school are being used well to showcase what pupils have achieved. A good example is the eye-catching display of younger children's versions of Vincent Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers'. Classrooms are now more geared to supporting pupils' current learning with prominent place given to key words, points to remember and work in progress. Where pupils know where to find what they need, they make few demands on adults and each other when working independently. The school has sought the views of some pupils in how they learn best. Interestingly, a plea for harder work was often voiced and some of the current activities are now truly engaging and stretching pupils. Effective use was made in many lessons of role play, partner work and thinking time, especially when pupils



were asked to solve problems and then to justify how they had arrived at an answer. The more frequent use of probing questions by adults has given pupils a chance to use their good facility with language and put forward views, opinions and explanations. This is still however, an aspect of teaching to develop further through identifying and sharing effective practice.

Teachers' planning shows closer attention to key learning points. The most effective lessons were those where teachers and teaching assistants worked together to ensure that pupils were clear about new learning and linked it to what they already knew. Staff are seeking and acting on advice from subject consultants in using national planning frameworks and in extending their own subject knowledge. Their growing confidence in using a range of different teaching and learning activities has removed the previous undue reliance on workbooks and repetitive exercises. They are starting to use what previously would have been seen as risky activities. A good example is the development of writing; pupils are being shown how to self-evaluate the quality of their work and how to edit and redraft it in the light of key success criteria. There is now scope to share with pupils the criteria to level their work, to identify clearly what counts as an effective piece of writing and to refer to this in marking. Senior leaders are aware that the quality and focus of teachers' marking of pupils' work is too variable. Too often it is overly complimentary and does not give pupils the sharply focused comments they need to make a difference. This was rightly picked up by several parents and carers at recent meetings with teachers.

The acting deputy headteacher has only recently completed her work to ensure appropriate provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. A radical overhaul has highlighted shortfalls in the amount of support available from adults for these pupils and in the evidence collected to allow well-informed reviews of how well pupils have met their targets. This is another aspect of the absence of established systems to track and evaluate pupils' progress. All required procedures are now in place and the acting deputy headteacher is working with class teachers and support assistants to ensure that targets in individual education plans are well founded and challenging, and that reviews are completed to time. The review has also shown that there is a small but significant number of pupils whose emotional and social needs place them at risk of not making the progress they should. The newly appointed learning mentor has already set up some activities to support and nurture these pupils.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise the expectations of staff – satisfactory.
- Broaden the range of teaching styles to stimulate pupils' greater involvement in learning – satisfactory.
- Improve the quality of the curriculum to encourage pupils' independent skills – satisfactory.
- Make better use of assessment information to track pupils' progress and ensure that lessons are more exciting and challenging – satisfactory.



The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good progress overall has been made in strengthening the effectiveness of leadership and management. The acting headteacher has been astute in pacing the introduction of new aspects, in recognising what staff have to offer and in facilitating opportunities for them to work together and to put their ideas into operation. She is well aware of how far behind the school is in its practice and of the need to ensure that some procedures and expectations are firmly embedded before the next phase of development can begin. She has rightly waited until staff had undertaken some guided assessment of pupils' progress before sharing with them relevant data. This proved to be a turning point – staff now realise the extent of underachievement and their own accountability.

All who work in the school have taken on the acting headteacher's positive approach to dealing with issues and are working together to make the school one of the best. Administrative staff have contacted other schools to find out about their systems and the midday assistants have contributed to the steps to improve lunchtime procedures. The enthusiasm of the five innovation leaders continues; aspects of their work overlap and there has been effective teamwork and sharing of ideas to make things happen. Good examples are the development of the school entrance area and the work with families and other agencies to reduce absence and improve punctuality. One leader referred to how achievements this term had proved the value of 'many heads are better than one' in dealing with issues. Subject leaders, working with consultants from the local authority, have led training for others and carried out essential evaluation procedures, such as a scrutiny of pupils' work. Although they still rely heavily on the consultants to steer their work, they now show a deeper appreciation of their role in raising standards throughout the school.

The school has kept apace with statutory requirements. The local authority's full review of safeguarding confirmed that the school has now all the required systems and procedures, and that they are integral to its working. The administrative staff, acting headteacher and deputy headteacher are assiduous in ensuring that everyone knows the procedures and what is expected of them.

Much time has been given to ensuring that parents and carers are kept informed of school events and management decisions through weekly newsletters, updates, website content and meetings. The high level of appreciative comments following the new-style parents' evening was rewarding for teaching, support, administrative and catering staff who put much time and effort into the event. Although the volume of positive comment is increasing, it is being undermined by negative correspondence from a small number of people whose comments are often unfounded. Dealing with resultant issues has at times deflected the attention of the acting headteacher and the Chair of the Interim Executive Board from planned improvement actions. Both have shown remarkable resilience and a constant, strong commitment to moving the school forward. The Chair has been highly supportive;



made himself known to pupils, staff, and parents and carers; and has rightly challenged decisions and action taken within school and by the local authority, especially in relation to staffing and finances. The minutes of meetings record well the extent of the board's work but do not indicate explicitly how well it is evaluating the effect of action in relation to intended outcomes.

The acting headteacher has been highly effective in getting the school to a position of steady state. As the deputy headteacher put it, 'We are no longer fire fighting but at last able to think and plan ahead.' The school has all necessary administrative, management and curricular systems and procedures. Morale is high and staff, and parents and carers, see how changes in provision are benefiting pupils. As a result, the school is well poised to accelerate the pace of improvement.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that all safeguarding requirements are met – good.
- Establish clear procedures that are regularly reviewed and understood by staff – good.
- Ensure that the school's central record of checks on the suitability of adults to work with children is up to date – good.
- Ensure that all staff and governors receive appropriate training – satisfactory.
- Ensure that leadership is effective in driving improvement and establishing clear procedures to check on the quality of the school's performance – good.

External support

The quality of support from the local authority has been good. Amendments to the planned programme of support have proved effective. Staff have welcomed the chance to identify where they need individual support and to work with consultants on specific aspects. This has gone alongside training for all from specialists in key areas, such as the teaching of spelling and progression in mathematics. The impact is visible in improving practice in the classroom and in the teachers' growing self-confidence. Discussions with the Early Years Foundation Stage consultant, with visits to see practice elsewhere, have motivated the Reception teachers to look at how they could improve further the use of space indoors and out, and also make the most of the team's expertise. The continued link with the deputy headteacher of another primary school has ensured high-quality support for the two newly qualified teachers. The local authority has come to an agreement with the school to facilitate the updating of information and communication technology.

Priorities for further improvement

In addition to the areas for improvement, the following remain:

- Precise marking to ensure that it makes clear to pupils how to improve the quality of their work.



- Teachers' knowledge and use of the levels and sub-levels of attainment in reading, writing and different aspects of mathematics to track pupils' progress and to set new challenges for individuals, groups and year groups.

