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30 April 2010

Mrs Val Pilkington-Smith  
Larkholme Primary School  
Windermere Avenue  
Fleetwood  
Lancashire  
FY7 8QB

Dear Mrs Pilkington-Smith

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Larkholme Primary School

Following my visit with Eithne Proffitt, Additional Inspector, to your school on 28-29 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in December 2009. 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 governors and the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James  
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Larkholme Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 28-29 April 2010

## Evidence

Inspectors observed nine lessons and saw nine teachers. They also scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other staff, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, the School Improvement Partner and a representative from the local authority.

## Context

The school is largely unchanged since December 2009. During the spring term the Year 3 class was taught by a supply teacher for ten weeks as a result of a teacher absent on sick leave.

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

Teacher assessments at the end of Year 2 in 2009 showed pupils' attainment was below average. National tests at the end of Key Stage 2 showed that pupils' attainment in English was significantly below average, with attainment in mathematics and science about average. Progress was inadequate. For current pupils the picture is improving. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the precise levels and sub-levels of pupils' work was variable at the start of the academic year so that base levels from which the school has measured progress are not always totally reliable. With support and training, teachers' skill in assessing work has improved so there is greater confidence in more recent assessments. All the evidence, including school assessment data, lesson observations and scrutiny of work points to improving progress and rising standards, although this is uneven across the school. In the majority of lessons observed, pupils were making satisfactory progress. Occasionally, pupils were observed making better progress especially where work was well designed to meet their needs. Pupils know their individual targets which are recorded in their books. In some observed lessons where pupils were doing independent work, they tackled it confidently and with enthusiasm, gaining a real sense of achievement. This was not universal and on occasion pupils were very slow to tackle the set work, instead laboriously copying down the learning objective and date and repeating the examples already done by the teacher on the whiteboard. The volume of work in pupils' books varies and in some cases is insufficient to ensure that pupils make the progress of which they are capable.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards, improve achievement and accelerate pupils' progress throughout the school by improving the quality of teaching and learning and

the curriculum and by effectively monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's work – satisfactory progress

### Other relevant pupil outcomes

Most pupils display good attitudes to learning, especially where teaching engages their interest effectively. For example, in a Year 5 lesson pupils thoroughly enjoyed a role play activity, taking on the roles of different characters enthusiastically. The behaviour of the majority of pupils is good and in the main they are keen to do well, showing appropriate independent learning skills. However, where teaching fails to engage their interest pupils tend to be less productive and do not achieve enough in the time available.

### The effectiveness of provision

Teaching and learning are improving. There is now much less inadequate teaching than at the time of the inspection. Occasional instances of good teaching were observed. However, there is not enough good teaching to counter the legacy of underachievement. Teachers' skills in using techniques, such as question and answer, vary. Some good directed questioning was observed but this was not typical. In some lessons, there are overlong teacher-led whole-class sessions which do not meet all pupils' needs well. Examples of strategies such as talk partners are helping, but their use varies. Assessment is now being used more effectively. Teachers' accuracy in assessing pupils and in using assessment information is showing some improvement and teachers are having more meaningful conversations about pupils' attainment with senior staff. Teachers are becoming more aware of the levels at which pupils are learning. This is beginning to have some impact on lesson planning, which now includes a sharper focus on adapting work to meet pupils' needs, although this is not consistent. Generally, however, the needs of pupils who find learning more difficult are met better than those of more-able pupils. Opportunities to extend the learning of these pupils remain limited. The marking of pupils' work continues to be of variable quality. Not all classes have their work marked sufficiently regularly and marking generally relies too heavily on ticks or praise, although occasional examples of helpful feedback were seen. This is an area the school is working on at present. A recent training session has taken place and a new policy is to be developed.

Work on reviewing and improving the curriculum is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' attitudes and interest in learning. There is a better balance in curricular provision to give pupils increased opportunities to practise basic skills and develop interests across other subjects. Information and communication technology (ICT) is planned for and pupils enjoy opportunities to work on computers during their weekly timetabled sessions. However, the use of ICT as an effective learning tool in lessons is underdeveloped. For example, interactive features of electronic whiteboards were rarely used in the lessons observed.

Early Years Foundation Stage provision is now better organised with new furniture and the room is split up into more clearly defined areas. Curricular planning now reflects Early Years Foundation Stage guidance and all areas of learning are addressed. Focus group teaching is helping to ensure that individual needs are better met. There are signs that this is starting to improve outcomes for children, for example, in communication and language skills, so that they are better prepared for Year 1. However, the emphasis on the use of specific themes in planning for all areas limits children's opportunities to follow their own interests. Planning for activities outdoors remains weak and is insufficient to meet children's needs or to enhance provision. The outdoor area is very small and the activities offered do not engage interest sufficiently for sustained activity and children tend to flit from one to another. Resources are lacklustre and there is no large-scale equipment to promote gross motor skills and physical development.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching so that learning is good, by:
  - matching work more effectively to pupils' needs
  - improving teachers' understanding of and the use of assessment to identify precisely pupils' next steps in learning
  - eradicating inadequate teaching – satisfactory progress
- ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils in developing their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills – satisfactory progress
- improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the transition into Year 1 by providing a stimulating learning environment and teaching programme so that all children achieve well in their learning and development – satisfactory progress

The effectiveness of leadership and management

A clear agenda for improvement has been set out in the school action plan which addresses the areas for improvement identified at the inspection. It is suitably detailed and identifies responsibilities, timescales and success criteria. The effectiveness of leaders and managers in monitoring and evaluation are improving. The assistant headteacher, who at present has a non-teaching role, is becoming more directly involved in monitoring and evaluation after receiving training. Senior staff roles and responsibilities are clear but some staff with significant management responsibilities have substantial teaching commitments. The numeracy coordinator, with external consultant support, has begun to tackle some issues in mathematics. A calculations policy has been agreed. Staff have had training on the numeracy framework and are applying it in their planning. The absence of the literacy coordinator for a period left a gap in leadership of this area temporarily. The headteacher has made her expectations of senior staff and coordinators clear, and the local authority has provided training and support to enable them to quickly

develop the necessary skills. Staff are strongly committed to improvement. The headteacher has a good understanding of data and is taking a lead on strengthening the tracking and progress monitoring system. More frequent assessments are recorded and there are regular review meetings with class teachers. This is helping teachers to develop a better understanding of assessment data and how it can be used in planning. Governors have sought training to improve their understanding of their roles. They take an active interest in the school and are beginning to be better placed to provide a strategic oversight.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that all those who lead and manage the school evaluate and monitor pupils' progress, putting in place effective targets and procedures to enable all pupils to achieve as well as they can – satisfactory progress

External support

The headteacher sought local authority support prior to the inspection in December 2009. The local authority monitoring and intervention team visited the school in November 2009 to analyse the data and the quality of teaching and learning. A programme of support for the school was arranged and this began shortly after the inspection. The formal statement of action meets requirements. The school is now benefiting from a substantial array of valuable support measures. The School Improvement Partner, an adviser from the monitoring and intervention team, and primary strategy consultants are all providing advice and guidance. There have been a number of training sessions for staff on a range of topics focused particularly around improving the quality of teaching and learning. Individual coaching and support has been provided to individual teachers. This is showing benefits in the significant reduction in inadequate teaching. The response of teachers and other staff has been positive and there is a genuine commitment to improvement. The Early Years Foundation Stage has benefited from advice from an early years adviser and an advanced skills teacher from another school. Advisers have also worked with the headteacher and other senior leaders to help develop leadership capacity, for example, by providing training in monitoring and evaluation. The statement of action is clearly focused on the areas for improvement. The local authority is also providing support to the governing body in the form of training sessions to improve their understanding of the issues and their capacity to play a strategic role.