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Mr David Walton
Woodham Ley Primary School
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Dear Mr Walton

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Woodham Ley Primary School

Following my visit to your school on Monday 17 May 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 January 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 Governors and the Director of Children's Services for Essex.

Yours sincerely



Mike Thompson
Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Woodham Ley Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on Monday 17 May 2010

Evidence

The monitoring inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and advisory deputy headteacher, the teaching staff, pupils, the Chair of Governors and a representative from the local authority. He observed 12 lessons and looked at a range of information, including data showing the progress made by pupils and samples of pupils' work.

Context

The acting headteacher, who had been at the school for one week at the time of the January inspection, was appointed to the permanent position of headteacher with effect from April 2010. The local authority has seconded an experienced deputy headteacher from a local school, on a full-time basis, to work alongside the new headteacher.

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

The new headteacher has ensured that the collation of data to produce tracking grids provides easily understood information about pupils' attainment and their progress in achieving the targets set for them. However, he acknowledges that some of the data in these grids may be inaccurate because of weaknesses in teachers' assessments of their pupils. Observations of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work in their books show that the progress of some pupils has improved, most notably in Year 5. However, progress remains inadequate overall in English, mathematics and science, as it has been for the past three years. This is because teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. Attainment remains below average in mathematics and science, and low in English. Writing skills remain weak. There are too many pupils working at levels below those expected for their age and far too few exceeding them. This is because standards of handwriting are inadequate, pupils lack confidence as writers and, in most classes, they do not have enough opportunities to practise their skills by writing at length. Some of the youngest pupils have poor diction and immature speech patterns which go uncorrected by adults. Pupils' mathematical skills are adversely affected by insecure knowledge of basic functions, such as multiplication tables.

Teachers' marking of pupils' work is not yet effective enough in helping pupils to make progress. This is because most teachers do not make clear to their pupils precisely what they have to do to improve. Where constructive comments are made, pupils do not always act on them and teachers do not follow this up. Corrections are generally not used as a tool for improvement. A new marking system has been introduced with the intention of improving the effectiveness of the dialogue between teacher and pupils, but not all teachers are implementing it as intended.



Other relevant pupil outcomes

When asked to comment on improvements since the last inspection, all of the pupils interviewed felt that behaviour is now much better than it was. There are many reasons for this, including better arrangements for managing any incidents that occur at lunchtime and the revised 'Woodham Way', which sets out very clear expectations for pupils' conduct and appearance. At play, pupils relate well to one another. They say that another of the reasons for the better behaviour is that the new playground markings provide a clear demarcation of space and stimulate imaginative play. In the 12 lessons observed, behaviour was never less than satisfactory and in five lessons it was good. In class, pupils generally pay attention and are keen to contribute to discussions. Pupils say that they feel well looked-after and safe at school.

For a number of years attendance has been satisfactory. However, the overall rate for the current academic year is inadequate. There is a close correlation between low attainment and poor attendance. School data show that there are 30 pupils, comprising about a fifth of the roll, whose attendance is below 90%; about a quarter of these are from Year 6. The attainment of all of these pupils is either below or well below average in writing and, for a large majority, it is below or well below average in mathematics. Many are identified in the tracking data as being targets for extra attention and accelerated progress.

The effectiveness of provision

The school's senior managers and the local authority are acutely aware that the weaknesses identified in teaching are not confined to English, which was the focus of the last report, but are widespread. The improvement of teaching has, rightly, been the highest priority. The wide range of measures put into place to improve teachers' skills is based securely on evidence gathered from careful analysis of information gathered. Observations of lessons showed that the programme of support and training is beginning to have a positive impact. For example, all teachers are now ensuring that their pupils know what they are to learn. Some consistently provide their pupils with well-paced and clear introductions to lessons, and there is evidence of all teachers using questioning well to develop pupils' learning.

In all lessons, all teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to act as 'talk partners' to help clarify their thinking and understanding. Nonetheless, teaching remains inadequate. This is because most teachers' expectations of the higher attaining pupils are too low. In many cases, all pupils are given the same or very similar tasks, and work is generally pitched at pupils in the middle ability groups, while those in the lower ability groups generally have extra help to complete their tasks. Data from the annual national tests in Year 6 and assessments in Year 2 clearly demonstrate the impact of this weakness, particularly in English, with far too



few pupils attaining the higher levels. In instances where the provision of similar tasks for all is appropriate, teachers do not always ensure different levels of challenge by setting separate success criteria for each ability group. In subjects other than English, mathematics and science, teachers have no assessment framework to guide their planning. This means that they have no guidance about what level of skills should be expected of pupils in each year group.

Good progress has been made in providing clear targets for pupils to work towards. A crucial factor in the success of this initiative is that pupils clearly understand how the target-setting system works and what their role is. In Years 5 and 6, for example, individual targets in English and mathematics are clearly displayed in the front of exercise books. Pupils' own assessments of their progress in meeting these targets, which are verified by the teachers, are generally accurate. A further innovation, which helps underpin this initiative and which teachers manage well, is the 'early morning work' which pupils begin as soon as they arrive at school during the time before registration. This session, which is focused on pupils' targets, provides a calm start to the day and a good climate for learning, and sets the tone for the rest of the day.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

In the very short period since their partnership began, the headteacher and consultant deputy headteacher have provided rigorous monitoring of all aspects of the school's performance. Through careful evaluation, they have developed a realistic view of the quality of teaching and learning, as well as a clear plan of action of what needs to be done to improve provision. Most of their efforts have been focused on improving teaching and learning, and the initiatives introduced are beginning to have a beneficial effect. These include 'pupil progress meetings' between senior managers and class teachers. The first of these has now taken place. The headteacher and deputy are acutely aware that developing the capacity of leadership at other levels in order to sustain improvement needs to be the next priority. However, work to develop teachers as leaders and managers needs to start from a low baseline. Although all teachers have responsibility for one or more subjects or aspects of the school's work, such as special educational needs, they have carried out very little monitoring in previous years and lack the skills required to do this. With the exception of provision for special educational needs, teachers have no clear plans for the development of their areas of responsibility. Work is underway to restructure the leadership and management of the school and new job descriptions are being drafted. Governance also requires significant improvement. There are currently vacancies for three governors and some governors have yet to complete their induction training. Some governors visit the school and report on what they have seen, but the majority do not. Plans are now in place for some of the governors to receive training in understanding and using data about the performance of the school.



Progress since the last inspection on the single area for improvement:

- Raise attainment and increase rates of learning and progress in English, by:
 - making sure that teachers understand the pace, challenge and expectation required to ensure that all pupils make swift gains in their learning
 - using information gained from tracking pupils' progress and from marking to match work consistently to pupils' needs
 - ensuring pupils know their targets and how to improve their work
 - sharpening the skills of leaders and managers at all levels in identifying priorities for development
 - increasing the rigour with which leaders and managers monitor the school's performance in order to take action that will bring about sustainable improvements to the quality of provision – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority (LA) is providing satisfactory support for the school. This is largely achieved through the work of the advisory deputy headteacher, the support provided by consultants and on-going monitoring through fortnightly visits from the school improvement adviser (SIA) and half-termly visits from the school improvement partner. In some instances, the reports provided following work to help develop the teaching of English are not particularly useful. The school reports positively on LA support to help integrate provision in the nursery and reception classes.

There are clear plans for termly reports from the SIA to be presented at steering group meetings. There is a schedule of dates set for reviews of progress, with the first of these in June 2010. This supportive framework is crucial, given the wide-ranging weaknesses in teaching and the leadership provided by teaching staff, and the consequent training needs. The local authority's statement of action had some weaknesses. They related to the lack of clear separation of the roles of those who are carrying out monitoring and evaluation functions, and particularly in relation to the part being played by the area improvement manager. These have now been addressed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure a significant reduction in pupils' rates of absence, particularly in relation to pupils with below or well below average attainment.

