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18 December 2008

Ms Rose Ashton
Headteacher
Chalkhill Primary School
Barnhill Road
Wembley
HA9 9YP

Dear Ms Ashton

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Chalkhill Primary School

Following my visit with Sandra Teacher, Additional Inspector, to your school on 9 and 10 December 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in December 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the School Improvement Services for Brent.

Yours sincerely

Jane Wotherspoon
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Chalkhill Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 9 and 10 December 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, faculty leaders, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, the consultant headteacher from the soft federation and a representative from the local authority. They spoke informally with staff and pupils during the course of their work.

Context

The school continues to operate a soft federation with a local primary school. There have been significant staff changes this term. The newly appointed headteacher took up her post in September, along with nine teachers new to the school. This includes one teacher new to teaching and a member of staff on supply. In addition, two teachers work at the school on a part-time basis from the federation. Three new teaching assistants also joined the staff. Two teachers are leaving at the end of term, including the deputy headteacher. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed and will start in January as will a teacher in the role of Inclusion Coordinator.

Achievement and standards

Standards remain below age-related expectations throughout the school. The Foundation Stage Profile figures for children at the end of the Reception Year in summer 2008 were better than those of 2007 but are still below national and local figures. The national assessments in reading, writing and mathematics for pupils in Year 2 fell from the previous year and were very low. However, results for Year 6 pupils showed an improvement on figures for 2007, with English and mathematics at 67% and 70% respectively. Science is also below national figures, with 83% attaining Level 4, but the proportion attaining Level 5, 40%, was in line with the national figure. This is further evidence that pupils are capable of doing well with focused teaching.

In lessons, pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are below average. The wide range of abilities in each class is a challenge for teachers to manage. In particular, those at the early stages of English acquisition do not always have their needs met to enable them to make as much progress as they could. Nonetheless, the school's information from ongoing assessments of their work, the work in pupils' books and their enjoyment of learning observed in lessons show that they are beginning to make progress.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Pupils have good attitudes to learning, generally work hard and want to please their teachers. They are attentive and well behaved. Pupils are not always actively involved in their learning because teachers direct the work too much and offer little scope for pupils to show independence in learning. Pupils respond positively to practical activities. When given such opportunities, for example, giving instructions through making Christmas cards and chocolate rice krispies, or making and testing electrical circuits, they rise to the challenge and their learning is enhanced.

Attendance figures have fallen since last reported in May. Figures for the academic year 2007/08 were well below the national average and figures for similar schools. Figures for the term so far are similarly low. Punctuality is not good, particularly on Mondays and rainy days. The school is monitoring figures carefully, identifying persistent absence and lateness and working with families and the education welfare service to improve the situation.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is improving. Much of that observed during the visit was broadly satisfactory but the need to improve consistency and raise quality remains the school's main focus. Previous strengths have been sustained despite the high staff turnover. Behaviour management is consistent and the quality of relationships good. Aspects of lesson planning have improved. Staff are clear as to what they expect pupils to learn by the end of the lesson. More often than not, these expectations are shared with pupils and reviewed at the end of the lesson. Some teachers are making observations of pupils as they work and noting their achievements during lessons. This practice is not yet consistent and neither is the use of this information in planning. Teachers are working hard to plan modifications to activities so that they are appropriate for pupils of different abilities. However, such modifications are not as sharp or precise as they need to be to meet the wide range of pupils' needs. In particular, more challenge is needed for potentially higher attaining pupils.

The learning environment has improved significantly so that every room now contains an appropriate range of visual resources to aid pupils' learning. The school's investment in interactive whiteboards is paying dividends in some classes, but not all teachers use this valuable resource to best effect. The high adult to pupil ratio means that pupils always have someone to help them if they are unsure about their work. However, the effectiveness and efficiency of support staff varies. Some are clearly part of a teaching team in the classroom while others appear uncertain about tasks and what pupils should be learning. Some generic weaknesses in teaching are still evident in some classes. Lack of pace associated with long sessions and/or over-long introductions to lessons results in an imbalance between time spent on the teacher's instruction and pupils' activity. The quality of marking is still too variable and not always focused on how pupils can improve their work. A common weakness

is the lack of variety in the way that teachers ask questions of pupils. They do not always give pupils enough thinking time and are too accepting of simple answers.

The school is without a substantive leader and manager for provision for pupils learning English as an additional language. Nonetheless, systems are being put in place to assess pupils' levels of language, to identify their needs and to track the progress they are making. Training from the local authority is beginning to have a positive impact on the way that staff are reinforcing specific technical vocabulary in lessons. Talk partners continue to be used widely. Specific support for groups of pupils in Key Stage 1 takes place within their classroom and makes better links with their class work. However, support for pupils in Key Stage 2 is more variable and relies on what can be provided by class teachers. Good progress has been made in putting in place systems and structures to target support for pupils with learning difficulties. Links with external agencies are established to enable appropriate referrals to take place.

Major staff changes have destabilised the previously solid provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Weaknesses are emerging that need to be remedied quickly, particularly in the Nursery where support staff have worked hard to keep routines in place for the children. The quality and range of activities provided is not broad enough and planning is not clear enough about what children are expected to learn. Staff observe and assess children's learning but evaluations are too descriptive. Staff are not using that information well enough to plan the next steps in children's learning. Records of children's 'learning journeys' are not up to date. There is some variability in the quality of adults' interactions with children to extend their learning as they play.

The headteacher has made some helpful modifications to the system for tracking pupils' progress over time. Half-termly meetings with staff to discuss the progress of each child ensure that targeted support can be planned where appropriate. Training for staff on making assessments is helping to improve the accuracy of the information on which target setting is based. All pupils have targets for literacy and numeracy, although not all are familiar with them or are sure of how they will know when they have achieved them.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that teachers use assessment to plan work in lessons that is pitched at the right level for all pupils – satisfactory
- provide the pupils with challenging targets that will help them understand the next steps in their learning – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The new headteacher has made a good start to rebuilding the team. She is ensuring a careful balance between tackling areas of weakness and providing support for improvement. Morale is good and teachers have confidence in her leadership. Staff are committed and hardworking. They are pulling together in the right direction. The

school's action plan focuses on the right priorities in the short term and is based on the headteacher's accurate evaluation of what needs to improve. The headteacher's general monitoring of teaching has given her a broad overview of its quality. Monitoring would benefit now from a more targeted approach to individuals and to specific aspects of provision that need improving. Training for staff has been well targeted. It is meeting their needs and drawing on a range of expertise from the local authority and federation.

The lengthy absence of the deputy headteacher has been covered by enhancing the roles of the remaining members of the senior leadership team. This workload is not sustainable and has been relieved to some extent by additional consultant support from the local authority. The team will be at full strength from January. Faculty leaders are new to their role and are still auditing their subject areas. Although it is too early for this work to have an impact on provision, they are enthusiastic and have plenty of ideas for developing their areas of responsibility.

Governors are led well. They are knowledgeable people, with experience and expertise in key areas such as in finance. They have benefited from focused training by the local authority on personnel issues. Governors are supportive of the school and beginning to ask more focused questions about the quality of provision. However, not enough governors visit the school to gain their own perspective on its strengths and the challenges it faces. At present they are too reliant on information from the headteacher, the local authority and the small number of governors who do visit the school.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve the effectiveness of leadership and monitoring so that the most important priorities are focused on eliminating weak teaching and underachievement – satisfactory

External support

The school has an appropriately high level of support for this stage of its journey through special measures. A range of local authority consultants support developments in literacy, early years and the English as an additional language (EAL) project. The soft federation is working well to give teachers opportunities to work with and learn from teachers who are good role models. This is beginning to have an impact on improving teaching. Importantly, the clear distinction between the nature of the support from the local authority and that from the soft federation ensures that staff receive consistent guidance. The mentoring for the new headteacher from the consultant headteacher in the federation is proving valuable.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality and consistency of provision in the EYFS.
- Improve the management of and provision for pupils in the early stages of learning English as an additional language.