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17 December 2008

Ms Joyce Moore
Interim Headteacher
Smallwood Primary School and Language Unit
Smallwood Road
Garratt Lane
London
SW17 0TW

Dear Ms Moore

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Smallwood Primary School and Language Unit

Following my visit with Michael Lafford, Additional Inspector, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in June 2008. 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. 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 the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Wandsworth.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline White
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Smallwood Primary School and Language Unit

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

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and pupils' written work and met with the interim headteacher, other staff, pupils, the chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority.

Context

There have been significant changes in the senior leadership of the school. The headteacher has retired. A full-time interim headteacher, an additional deputy headteacher for three days a week, and an assistant headteacher for two and a half days a week have been appointed on short-term contracts. The substantive deputy headteacher has had two sustained periods of absence due to ill health. This has impacted on the school's progress in the area for improvement related to the curriculum. An Interim Executive Board has been appointed to replace the governing body. Members met for the first time in early December. The board will hold its first formal meeting in January.

Achievement and standards

In 2008, at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, standards were well below average, particularly in communication, language and literacy, and mathematical development. There was some improvement in results at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2008. The gap with the national average was closed in reading, writing and mathematics. Results in Key Stage 2 were mixed, with good improvement in science, mathematics remaining broadly the same and a disappointing dip in English. Standards were well below average in both key stages and pupils' progress across the school was inadequate.

Challenging targets, based on reliable assessment information, have been set for pupils' performance in 2009. The school has now established a system for tracking pupils' progress and a review of achievement has been undertaken this term. Pupils at risk of underachievement have been identified and appropriate support strategies are being implemented. Lesson observations indicate most pupils are now making satisfactory progress, with some classes making good progress, but it is too early to see any impact on standards of attainment.

Personal development and well-being

Since the inspection in June 2008, there have been a number of initiatives to reduce unacceptable behaviour in lessons by a small minority of pupils. Such incidents are now rare and the behaviour policy is clear and well understood by adults and pupils.

Pupils' safety and learning are no longer impaired. In the lessons observed, including those seen in the language unit, pupils' attitudes to their learning were at least satisfactory, and in most they were good. In classes and around the school, pupils are consistently polite, and they have positive relationships with each other and with adults.

The staff are very committed to the welfare of pupils. The school complies with the latest government requirements for child protection. Health and safety concerns reported in the last inspection have been adequately addressed. Pupils say they feel safe and can go to staff if they have concerns. The school has worked hard and successfully to develop partnership with parents. Parents and carers are both more engaged in the school community and more active in supporting their children's learning. The school's work with the families of persistent absentees is ongoing but attendance figures remain well below the national average.

Pupils contribute to the life of the school and the wider community in a number of ways. They take an increasingly active part in school assemblies and the school council has been instrumental in a number of improvements to the environment. Procedures have been refined to ensure that pupils' views are heard and acted upon.

Progress on the area for improvement:

Raise standards to at least average levels and improve pupils' achievement by:

- improving behaviour and ensuring that all pupils are safe and well cared for – good

Quality of provision

Improvements in teaching and learning are being secured. The parts of lessons observed were at least satisfactory. A whole-school approach to planning is helping to develop consistency and give coherence to pupils' learning experiences. As result of training, teachers have a better understanding of what constitutes effective learning and are much more focused on how well pupils are learning. Learning objectives are clearer and success criteria more explicit. Assessment information is used to plan lessons so that they meet pupils' needs. However, this expertise is developing, best practice is yet to be shared, and some lessons still lack challenge. Consequently, some pupils, especially the more able, are not making as much progress as they should.

Lessons are sometimes over-directed by teachers. There is a lack of variety in activities and opportunities for pupils to learn independently are missed. The pace of learning varies from class to class and on occasion is too slow. The most successful of the lessons observed included a range of well-designed activities that both engaged and challenged pupils. Questioning was used well to fix key learning points and deepen understanding. Teachers clarified and modelled what pupils needed to do to succeed and were developing pupils' ability to evaluate their own work. Support staff were well deployed and their interventions took learning forward.

There has been some improvement in academic guidance. However, most pupils still have little understanding of their individual learning targets. While marking is of variable quality, a good start has been made in developing a common approach. The best marking identifies strengths and the next learning steps for pupils.

Two of the three parts of lessons observed in the language unit were judged to be good. Notable strengths were a tireless commitment to high expectations; effective planning leading to well-structured learning at a snappy pace; and a good emphasis on developing speaking, listening and social skills. The school has sound provision for pupils who have particular needs and makes effective use of outside agencies to support them.

The school has only just made a start on monitoring and evaluating the curriculum. Learning activities in English and mathematics are better matched to pupils' different abilities, and weaknesses in science are being addressed. However, there is much more to do to ensure the curriculum meets pupils' needs, develops their learning skills and promotes enjoyment and creativity. Improvements in provision for information and communication technology (ICT), reported in the inspection, have continued. The programme and timetable for physical education have been reviewed and now provide better balance. The school is aware that provision for music and religious education do not meet statutory requirements.

Progress on the areas for improvement:

Raise standards to at least average levels and improve pupils' achievement by:

- ensuring that teachers provide consistently good levels of challenge and clear academic guidance for their pupils – satisfactory
- ensuring that the curriculum is well matched to pupils' needs and provides enjoyable activities that capture the interest of the pupils – inadequate

Leadership and management

The interim headteacher and additional deputy headteacher have quickly gained an understanding of the context of the school and have set about tackling the widespread weaknesses robustly. They share a clear vision of improved outcomes for pupils and have won the confidence and commitment of staff. Together with the assistant headteacher, they are giving clear direction to the work of the school and the pace of improvement is gathering momentum. Appropriate systems for monitoring and evaluation, the use of assessment information, and the management of pupils' behaviour are now in place and becoming embedded in practice. Their impact can be seen in improved teaching and learning, a calm and orderly atmosphere and pupils' positive attitudes. The environment for learning has also been improved significantly. Redecorated classrooms are bright, mostly well organised, and equipped with better resources. Displays celebrate and support pupils' learning.

Pupils' achievement and well-being are now central to school improvement planning. The current format sets out appropriate strategies, monitoring activities, clear

success criteria and lines of accountability. Detailed, step-by-step evaluation informs strategic decisions. The self-evaluation undertaken by senior leaders is robust and accurate; middle leaders are still developing these skills. Arrangements for performance management have been reviewed. Teachers have been set targets for pupils' achievement and have a much better understanding of their accountability. The Interim Executive Board is in place but is not yet fully operational. It is critical that the board establishes itself quickly and works cohesively with senior leaders to monitor the work of the school and enhance capacity for improvement.

Progress on the area for improvement:

Raise standards to at least average levels and improve pupils' achievement by:

- improving the ability of leaders, including the governors, to evaluate accurately the work of the school and to pursue improvement rigorously – satisfactory

External support

The local authority and the School Improvement Partner are providing good support to the school. The impact of the local authority's statement of action is evident in the strengthening of the senior leadership team. However, it is imperative the transition to a substantive senior leadership team is clarified and secured so that the school can see a future in which it has the capacity to drive and sustain improvement independently.