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12 February 2009

Mrs Lynda Carnes  
Headteacher  
Stockton Heath Primary School  
West Avenue  
Stockton Heath  
Warrington  
WA4 6HX

Dear Mrs Carnes

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Stockton Heath Primary School

Following my visit with Caroline Broomhead HMI and Eithne Proffitt, Additional Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 February 2009, 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 April 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Strategic Director of Children's Services for Warrington Borough Council.

Yours sincerely

Marguerite McCloy  
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Stockton Heath Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 February 2009

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, middle leaders, class teachers, groups of pupils, governors and representatives from the local authority (LA).

## Context

Since the first monitoring inspection in October 2008, the demolition of the old school building has been completed to provide a playground and a car park. The official opening ceremony for the new building is due to take place at the end of February.

## Achievement and standards

The school's assessments and national test results were reported in the October 2008 monitoring report. Inspection evidence confirms that standards at the end of each key stage are broadly average but not enough pupils are reaching the higher level in any subject. Girls performed better than boys overall at both key stages in 2008, and the school is aware of the need to monitor this more closely in its day-to-day assessments as the difference is more than that seen nationally.

The impact of the whole-school focus on improving pupils' writing can be seen in the better presentation and content of writing in pupils' books. This is developing well and enabling teachers to focus on 'plugging the gaps' in pupils' phonic skills, knowledge of punctuation and features of different writing genres. The much improved daily reading workshops make a valuable contribution to pupils' improving progress in literacy. Staff are more confident in planning and organising the workshops and are now thinking of flexible ways in which they may be used to meet pupils' specific needs across the curriculum.

In lessons observed during the visit, inspectors noted that pupils are making at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress, indicating a slight improvement since the last visit. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers as a result of differentiated work and appropriate adult support and intervention. In some classes, teachers are 'raising the bar' for more able pupils by setting more challenging tasks and raising their expectations. However, this is not consistent and indicates a weaker understanding by some teachers of what these pupils are capable of. Key Stage 1 teachers are not sufficiently clear about the proportion of pupils who are capable of achieving the higher Level 3. Similarly, the school's targets for 2009 are not challenging enough at the higher Level 5 in Key Stage 2. Across the school, targets are generally based on pupils making expected

progress rather than the good progress which is necessary for the school to make up some lost ground. Senior leaders are aware of this and are working with middle leaders and teachers to ensure that higher aspirations are more widely shared.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Raise achievement for all pupils, especially in English, for boys and those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities – satisfactory
- Raise standards in Key Stage 1– satisfactory

### Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development was not a focus for the monitoring inspection, as this continues to be a strength of the school. Pupils' attendance is above the national average. They enjoy their learning and behave well. Pupils particularly enjoy and benefit from specialist teaching in music, dance and drama, and art. Inspectors observed good teaching and learning in music and dance and saw examples of very good quality art work.

### Quality of provision

Since the last monitoring visit the school has continued to improve the quality of teaching and as a result more lessons are now good. Changes made to lesson planning have led to a greater focus on ability groupings within lessons, and teachers are now responsible for planning all lessons for their own classes. In the best practice, plans make clear the expected learning outcomes for different groups of pupils; activities and resources are then matched to these, enabling pupils to strive for the higher standards of which many are capable. This careful attention to detail also enables pupils to work independently and complete the tasks set without needing to seek teacher help. This contributes to creating a calm environment in which pupils can concentrate on their work. Skilful questioning deepens pupils' knowledge and understanding. As a result, the pupils have positive attitudes to learning and are well aware of what is expected of them.

Assessment is improving and pupils are becoming more involved in assessing their own learning. Teachers now have more detailed information about how well pupils are progressing towards their learning targets. However, not all teachers are making the best use of this information in planning lessons to ensure that all pupils are appropriately challenged. It is not clear in teachers' planning what levels or sub-levels pupils are expected to achieve or how pupils are to be stretched to reach higher levels. Marking has improved and is both positive and constructive. Pupils understand the school's marking system, often being able to give examples in their work of when they have achieved individual targets and they are pleased about this. Pupils are aware of their short-term targets, for example, in improving elements of punctuation, but they are not sure of exactly what they need to do to achieve the higher levels which they aspire to.

The school has introduced a commercial scheme to assess and track the small steps in the progress made by pupils with additional learning needs. This, along with specific individual intervention programmes, is providing a sharper focus on tackling potential underperformance at an earlier stage for these pupils. Teaching assistants are effective in supporting pupils' learning, particularly when they are clear about the expected learning outcomes for those pupils.

Where plenaries are used well, teachers use this time to check pupils' understanding and reinforce earlier teaching points. This enables pupils to reflect on what they have achieved. In the less effective plenaries, opportunities are missed to correct any mistakes or misunderstandings which may have been identified during lessons.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school – satisfactory

ESBD (Emotional, Social and Behavioural Difficulties) Resourced Provision:

Since the last inspection there has been a greater focus on planning for the different abilities within the class group in English, mathematics and science. However, this planning does not yet make clear the expected learning outcomes for individual pupils. There have been improvements to marking, in line with changes to the school's policy. Pupils' work is marked regularly and includes positive comments which enable pupils to see what they have achieved; this motivates them. Some pieces of work are helpfully annotated to show the relevant objectives and tasks set. The commercial assessment scheme, which was introduced in September, is beginning to show the small steps of progress which pupils are making in literacy, numeracy and science, as well as helping to identify gaps in their learning. Whilst there have been improvements to planning, assessment and marking, the school has yet to make clear links between these to track pupils' progress and ensure that all are being challenged to achieve their best.

Some pupils within the enhanced resourced provision are taking part in lessons within the main school. This is carefully monitored to ensure that these are positive and successful experiences.

There has been a greater focus on promoting positive behaviour. Pupils' behaviour plans have been improved to include more specific targets. These are shared with pupils and reviewed weekly. Opportunities are missed to verbally remind pupils of their individual targets, for example, at the start of each morning and afternoon.

There have been some improvements in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning. Pupils now have more regular access to the ICT suite and more recently laptops have been made available in the

classroom. Pupils are beginning to use these, for example, to produce writing and leaflets.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve provision and outcomes for pupils in the resourced unit – satisfactory

### Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage was not identified as an area for improvement in the school's previous inspection in April 2008. It was included in this monitoring visit to check on the school's progress in meeting the new Early Years Foundation Stage requirements which came into effect from September 2008. This also provided an opportunity to test the accuracy of senior leaders' evaluation of some aspects of the provision.

Children enter Reception class from an increasingly wide range of pre-school settings, but the majority have attended the Little Lot Nursery, situated within the main school building, but managed by private providers. Links between all pre-schools and Reception are strong and support the transition of children into school very well. The school's data shows that when the children join Reception, they typically have skills and understanding above those expected for their age. The overall provision, teaching and the curriculum for Reception children are satisfactory. Children make satisfactory progress and by the time they enter Year 1, the majority have well-developed skills in early reading, writing and using numbers.

The Early Years Foundation Stage staff have successfully established a very caring and safe environment in which children learn to mix well and cooperate with each other. Effective use is made of all adults to support small focus groups for literacy and numeracy. Although children's progress is promoted well in these sessions, other areas of the curriculum are not as effective in developing key skills. The children are encouraged to choose from a range of activities, but these are not sufficiently planned to entice or engage their curiosity or interest. As a result, valuable learning opportunities are missed. The outdoor curriculum is successful in developing children's physical skills, but there are insufficient experiences available to promote and extend the children's creative and imaginative learning. This further limits accurate assessment of children's progress across all areas of learning.

### Leadership and management

The school has recently completed the planned review of its leadership structure, roles and responsibilities. Senior leaders and governors have given careful consideration to this review in order to best meet the developmental needs of the school. Amendments were made due to financial limitations, as the school is still managing a deficit budget in consultation with the LA.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher are highly committed to bringing about clear improvements to the school's provision. They have invested considerable time and energy in putting robust systems into place to raise whole staff awareness and accountability for improving pupils' achievement. Middle leaders have begun to monitor and evaluate their areas of responsibility through scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning and by observing some teaching. Opportunities to share best practice are being explored, for example, in planning for middle leaders and teachers to visit other schools. However, some variability remains, as not all middle leaders have the necessary skills to maintain a clear and analytical understanding of their role in whole-school leadership and holding others to account.

Senior leaders' self-evaluation is accurate and their view of the school's current strengths and areas for improvement matches closely with that of the inspection team. Lesson observations by the leadership team focus appropriately on checking the quality of pupils' learning. Senior leaders use assessment information to identify pupils at risk of underachieving. Support and intervention programmes are put in place for these pupils and their progress is closely tracked against learning objectives.

Staff say they are working well together and that teamwork has improved. Despite the understandable pressures placed upon them at this time, many teachers are able to see the benefits of this work. These teachers have a better knowledge and understanding of individual pupils' rates of progress and how this can be increased by raising their own expectations.

Governors continue to be closely involved in checking the work of the school and provided the inspection team with useful progress reports from their curriculum and finance committees. Several governors are developing links with particular classes, enabling them to take an active role in the day-to-day life of the school.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve leadership and management across the school, especially the school's self-evaluation – good

External support

LA staff, including advanced skills teachers, provide a good range of well focused training, coaching and other professional development activities. This is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching, the effectiveness of leadership and management and the school's capacity to improve. Where teachers have also wholly embraced these opportunities to improve their skills, this is reflected in the higher proportion of good lessons where pupils' rates of learning are beginning to accelerate. The recent involvement of a new school improvement partner (SIP) is contributing a useful external view of the school's short and long term targets and areas for development.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Raise achievement for all pupils in English and mathematics, particularly for more able pupils.
- Improve provision and outcomes for pupils in the resourced unit.
- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in teachers' expectations and use of targets at individual and class level to inform planning and enable all pupils to reach their full potential.
- Develop leadership and management across the school so that the impact and effectiveness of middle leaders is more consistent.