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Mrs June Willis
Headteacher
Ainslie Wood Primary School
140 Ainslie Wood Road
Waltham Forest
London
E4 9DD

Dear Mrs Willis

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Ainslie Wood Primary School

Following my visit with Stephen Parker, Additional Inspector, to your school on 26 and 27 February 2009, 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 October 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 be appointed subject to the following qualification: no more than one can be appointed from September 2009 until this condition is revised.

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 the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Waltham Forest.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Ainslie Wood Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 February 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior management team, groups of pupils and staff, the chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and a representative of the local authority (LA). Fifteen lessons or parts of lessons and two assemblies were inspected. Assessment and tracking data were scrutinised and inspectors looked at documents related to the LA's statement of action and the school improvement plan, as well as evidence of the school's audit of progress since it was inspected in October 2008.

Context

An interim headteacher, seconded from another school, was appointed at the start of this term on a temporary basis to replace the headteacher who left last term. The IEB replaced the governing body and established temporary governance of the school from the start of this term. Additional advisers and specialist teachers have joined the school to support the staff on a part-time basis, including specialist support for staff working in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Achievement and standards

There are inconsistencies across classes and subjects in the rate of progress pupils make. The most significant sources of underachievement remain in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in classes where the teaching is still inadequate. In addition, the school's assessments show that a significant proportion of boys across the school are underachieving in core areas such as reading, writing and mathematics. However, there are signs of improvement due to the robust evaluation and resulting intervention brought about by the interim headteacher, the IEB and the LA. Consequently, the pace of learning and pupils' progress have accelerated in most classes since the end of last term. In comparison to the assessments undertaken after the last inspection, more pupils are on course to reach the levels expected for their age in English and mathematics by the end of this academic year. The proportion of pupils making at least satisfactory rates of progress is edging upwards, but there is still some way to go to eradicate all underachievement.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the regular and systematic focus on teaching letters and sounds (phonics) is beginning to bear fruit. Consequently, children in both the Nursery and the Reception classes are getting better at identifying words and initial letter sounds. However, there remains some variation in the expectations set by the staff with the result that children do not always make enough progress in all areas of learning. In Years 1 to 6, the leadership team now undertakes a closer scrutiny of pupils' progress and standards, which is helping teachers to identify those

who are making slow progress. Teachers' planning reflects this identification so that pupils are targeted for support or special booster sessions. For example, extra sessions in mathematics are helping some pupils to catch up on lost ground. Teachers are setting targets that are more challenging but reviews of pupils' progress, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are not regular enough to ensure that they all reach their targets.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being remain satisfactory. Pupils behave well in lessons and behaviour is satisfactory at break-times. They are increasingly getting opportunities in lessons to share ideas and to reflect on their learning. For example, talk partners are used to help pupils discuss their thoughts with others, which improves their ability to listen and to respect other points of view. Pupils are enthusiastic learners who, given the opportunity, thrive on the challenges presented. In some lessons, pupils become restless or disengaged due to too much teacher-led discussion or work that does not hold their interest sufficiently. This is clear at times in the Early Years Foundation Stage where children, particularly boys, too often flit from one activity or area to another so that there is no sustained period of engagement or learning and this slows their progress and development. Attendance remains satisfactory and recent initiatives, such as the use of booster classes before the school day, are improving punctuality. Pupils are encouraged to adopt a healthy and active lifestyle and continue to enjoy their sporting and other activities. The school maintains its ethos of care and respect for all and this is reflected during break-times and lunchtimes, with more resources and activities provided for pupils. The introduction of 'playground buddies' has helped the pupils to support others, for example, when older pupils organise games for younger ones. The Key Stage 2 ball-play area is often too congested as staff have not yet devised an appropriate rota system to ensure that pupils can play safely and productively. The leadership team is aware of the problem and plans are in place to resolve this. The school council is very involved and thrives on opportunities to contribute to supporting other pupils as well as working with staff to improve the school further. Pupils say that they trust the staff to resolve any issues concerning bullying. A good start has been made in reducing the number of exclusions. There is now more robust monitoring of pupils' behaviour and opportunities for pupils to work with staff. The interim headteacher has introduced some good initiatives, for example, a confidential message box aimed at encouraging pupils to offer suggestions or to confide in staff on issues that concern them most.

Progress since the last inspection:

- provide more activities outside at lunchtime to channel the pupils' interest and energy – satisfactory
- give pupils greater responsibility in school life and for their learning – satisfactory

Quality of provision

In the lessons observed, the teaching ranged from inadequate to good. The school has made satisfactory progress towards minimising the number of inadequate lessons. There is greater consistency because of much improved planning which has been introduced to all year groups. Consequently, pupils are generally provided with the right level of challenge. However, there is still scope to improve further because the pace of learning and the expectations set by some staff remain inconsistent. In the most effective lessons, pupils are more involved and engaged because teachers and support staff listen to them and offer the right level of challenge. The work provided in some lessons is not tailored closely enough to the needs of all pupils, reflecting some lack of knowledge of subjects or of confidence among the staff team when using assessment to set the right learning targets for pupils.

In the Nursery and Reception classes, the improved organisation of resources and learning areas has helped to provide more choices for the children. Adults are good at encouraging the children to talk and listen to others. However, in some sessions, adults stifle the opportunities for the children to explore further. Adults tend to lead sessions without giving the children enough scope to explore and find out things for themselves through trial and error. Improvements to planning, including that seen in the Reception year, are helping the staff to organise a better balance of activities between those led by adults and those children choose for themselves. In the Nursery class, there are good opportunities for the children to engage in role play and to work cooperatively when, for example, writing and posting letters in the 'post office'. In the Reception classes, there have been satisfactory improvements to the use of outdoor areas, particularly when the staff engage the children in stimulating creative activities. This was seen to good effect when the children imagined they were on an island and, using chalk drawings and models, negotiated different ways to move about safely given that there were 'sharks' and other creatures lurking about in the surrounding waters. Despite these improvements in both Nursery and Reception years, the children are sometimes offered too many choices, with the result that resources are cluttered or there is too much for the children to handle. This has the effect of slowing down the children's progress and development. Children tend to move from one area to another without sustaining concentration on one activity for a sufficient period. In the Reception year, there are some areas where there are too many children which makes it difficult for individuals and groups to focus on what they are doing. In addition, throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage, the level of engagement with adults varies so there are inconsistencies in the quality of questioning and challenge.

In Years 1 to 6, the impact of improved leadership has streamlined teachers' planning and sharpened the use of assessment so that lessons increasingly focus on meeting pupils' different learning needs. Most lessons provide pupils with a broad range of activities that help them to share ideas and solve problems. This was seen to good effect in a Year 6 mathematics lesson where pupils explored different

methods of calculating averages. In Years 1 and 2, there are good opportunities for pupils to write independently and each lesson builds on the previous one, so the pupils can edit and improve their writing and story plans. Despite these improvements, there is still scope to develop the teaching further. One common weakness in lessons is the missed opportunity to provide the right level of challenge for more able pupils. In addition, the expectations set for boys are sometimes so low that many tend to underachieve or not reach the level expected for their age.

Assessment systems are now being used more efficiently to help teachers group pupils by ability. The staff have worked hard to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Consequently, teachers have a greater understanding of pupils' capabilities, what pupils need to learn next and, in some cases, the confidence to amend their planning.

Although pupils are given satisfactory guidance to help them improve, learning objectives in lessons are not always broken down into steps that will help all pupils reach their targets. In addition, the targets themselves are not reviewed regularly enough to ensure that they are sufficiently challenging. This is also the case for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities because reviews of their progress in their individual education plans are not regular enough. Pupils learning English as an additional language receive appropriate support and are fully involved in lessons. However, like other pupils, their rates of progress are irregular because of inconsistencies of expectation across classes. In the most effective lessons, these pupils are on course to reach the standards expected for their age.

The curriculum remains satisfactory. Teachers incorporate interesting visits and activities, such as music and drama, and use visiting specialists, for example peripatetic musicians, to make learning interesting and relevant to the pupils. The pastoral care provided for pupils remains satisfactory. The school is rigorous in ensuring that pupils are safeguarded and the school is a safe place.

Progress since the last inspection:

- urgently improve the quality of teaching throughout the school – satisfactory
- provide for more effective learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - ensuring that all adults demonstrate higher expectations through the activities they plan – inadequate
 - giving children the opportunity to develop their speaking skills through a better balance of instructions and open questions – satisfactory
 - improving provision for outdoor play in Reception – satisfactory

Leadership and management

Changes to planning and refinements to assessment have already had a positive effect on pupils' progress, though there is still scope for improvement in raising the expectations of all staff. The interim headteacher has already raised expectations as to what constitutes good teaching and, despite the difficulties faced since the school's last inspection, there is now a determination among staff to work as a team. Consequently, teachers and support staff plan lessons in teams and future plans are in place to provide more time for staff to see good practice.

Staff morale is high, as all priorities outlined in the school's improvement plan are effectively communicated, with the result that there is a shared determination to improve among the staff. Within a short time, the interim headteacher has effectively provided an accurate assessment of all the teaching across the school. Consequently, the inconsistencies of approach seen at the time of the school's last inspection are being improved. Leadership roles have been clarified and structures are now in place to ensure both day-to-day management and strategic leadership focus on improving the achievement of pupils. There is renewed confidence among teachers and support staff because they are working in teams rather than feeling isolated when they plan or share ideas. The interim headteacher has substantial experience and an excellent understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage, and plans are in place to deploy an advanced skills teacher to support and work alongside the staff there. Her substantial experience of headship has helped the senior leadership team form an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. There are robust plans for improvement that have been realigned with the LA's Raising Attainment Plan. This has led to a streamlining of priorities for improvement which provide more focused success criteria.

The IEB has already set out a timetable for improvement and review with clear checking systems in place to see how well pupils are doing and how well teachers are performing. Phase leaders and subject coordinators share their planning and are now using the core priorities in the school improvement plan to ensure that they are on course to raise achievement and sustain improvements to teaching. Staff welcome the new opportunities for wider communication and this has resulted in more open dialogue and sharing of good practice. These positive features and accurate evaluations of both the pupils' and staff's performance are contributing towards increasing the capacity for the school to sustain improvements in the future.

Progress since the last inspection:

- focus leaders' and managers' work at all levels to bring about sustained improvement in pupils' achievement throughout the school – satisfactory
- raise expectations of everyone through setting more challenging targets and checking that everyone is working to their potential – inadequate

External support

The chair of the IEB and representatives of the LA have set out a clear programme for improvement. The LA's statement of action is carefully tailored to ensure that progress towards improvement can be measured and support provided where it is most needed. The statement of action also includes good arrangements to keep parents and carers informed about the progress the school is making. The school improvement plan and the LA's analysis of progress carried out with the interim headteacher provide a clear programme of focused visits to the school. In addition, there are systematic arrangements in place for the headteacher to report on the progress made for each of the issues raised at the time of the school's inspection. The IEB, although recently formed, is in a secure position to start the process of holding the school to account more robustly. The LA has supported the school well by providing an effective interim headteacher. Advisers and subject specialists from the LA have been appointed to support the staff team and subject leaders to improve the teaching still further and eliminate underachievement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Accelerate the achievement of boys in all classes in reading, writing and mathematics.