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15 December 2008

Mrs L Willis
The Headteacher
Stoke Minster CE(A) Primary School
Boothem Old Road
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST4 4EE

Dear Mrs Willis

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Stoke Minster CE(A) Primary School

Following my visit with Rodney Braithwaite, Additional Inspector, to your school on 2 and 3 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 January 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

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 Director of Children and Young People's Services for Stoke-on-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Davinder Dosanjh
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Stoke Minster CE(A) Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 December 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, staff, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The current headteacher joined the school in January 2008, but the full leadership team was not in place until September 2008.

Achievement and standards

School assessment shows that by the end of July 2008, progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) remained good with children achieving well.

Results of national tests and evidence during this visit show that progress in Years 1 and 2 has accelerated. Standards at the end of Year 2 have risen, building upon the good start made in the EYFS. In the 2008 national tests pupils reached standards that were slightly above average in reading, writing and science, but were marginally below average in mathematics. The proportions of pupils reaching higher levels were above average in writing, but below average in reading and mathematics. The overall improvement is because of the determination of teachers to improve provision, especially for language development through pupils' better understanding of letters and sounds. There remains inconsistency, though, in the number of pupils achieving at higher levels in spite of some improvement in writing.

The unvalidated results for 2008 at the end of Year 6 indicate that standards overall remain below average, in spite of a slight improvement since 2007, especially in science. Attainment at higher levels was significantly below national expectations. Reading showed some improvement, but very few pupils reached higher levels in writing, and the number reaching average standards was low. There was more evidence on this visit that there is some improvement in the standards and progress being made by pupils in science because of actions taken by the school. Procedures for checking the progress of pupils are in place in all classes, and teachers have a better awareness of whether pupils are on track to achieve their targets. The school recognises that writing and the achievement of more able pupils remain urgent priorities for improvement.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- target support in Years 3 to 6 to those who are most in need, especially the higher and lower ability pupils identified as underachieving – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour is at least satisfactory and often good. However, a minority of pupils become bored and restless when teaching is less structured and lacks pace. Pupils work together co-operatively and are polite. Attendance is satisfactory and remains around the national average despite the decline in the summer term. The school has a small number of persistent absentees and this has led the school to take appropriate targeted action. Pupils enjoy lessons but they talk about the very small minority who can disrupt their learning. Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities, such as being prefects or members of the student council, and they make a good contribution to raising money for charities. The school is actively seeking the views of pupils to improve their learning in the classroom. Too much teacher-directed activity in lessons means that pupils have insufficient opportunities for sustained independent work. The school has put in place a number of increased opportunities to develop writing skills across the curriculum so pupils are better prepared for their next steps. Much of this work is too recent, as yet, to make a sufficient impact in improving the weak literacy skills of many pupils in Years 3 to 6.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning in the Nursery and Reception classes remains good. Children make good progress because of the stimulating learning atmosphere in their classrooms and the understanding and sensitive teaching by the EYFS team. Teaching in Key Stage 1 is satisfactory overall and sometimes good; pupils are making increasingly better progress in their learning.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and steadily improving in Years 3 to 6 because teachers have established more consistent planning structures and are making better use of assessment and tracking data. No inadequate teaching was seen during the visit. Planning shows different learning activities for pupils of different abilities. In practice, this works better for the less able and average ability pupils. More able pupils still frequently learn at a leisurely rate, have to do tasks which they easily manage, and are not set sufficiently rigorous time targets for completion of work. Teachers also spend insufficient time supporting these pupils when they are involved in group activities. When they do provide suitable support, better quality work is the result, as seen in the writing about the visit to the 'Think Tank' by Years 5 and 6. Teachers are also sometimes over directive and tend to do too much for their pupils. The deployment of learning support assistants has improved and they now make an effective contribution to learning, particularly for the less able and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Provision for a balanced curriculum is now satisfactory because the weaknesses in the science curriculum have been successfully addressed. Sufficient time is given to the subject on the timetable, and there is much better planning. Investigative work has increased considerably, enabling pupils to enjoy their learning much more. This

has led to a rise in standards and achievement. Writing opportunities are still limited across the curriculum, and there remain too many worksheets.

Information gained from assessment is being used more effectively in planning. Guidance to pupils on their learning targets is slowly improving. Most pupils can name broad targets for their learning, but these are not always specific enough for their individual needs. Teachers' marking is becoming more consistent, although it is sometimes rather sparse in suggesting what pupils need to do to improve. Pupils report favourably on the verbal feedback they sometimes receive from their teachers, which they say is helping them to improve.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve rates of progress in Years 3 to 6 by ensuring that work is matched fully to the needs of pupils – satisfactory
- devote enough time to science in Years 3 to 6 to ensure that the curriculum covers all that is should and progress is improved – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The headteacher sets a clear direction for the school and has established high expectations. She has improved the school development plan, which is now more focused and rigorous. All health and safety issues were addressed at the last visit. Since the last visit, the headteacher and senior staff have continued to work through the school's detailed development plan, with a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising pupils' achievement. Subject leaders in literacy, numeracy and science have clear action plans and have undertaken a range of monitoring activities that have started to influence the learning in the classroom. They are working alongside local authority consultants to improve and embed effective practice. They have taken a number of approaches from whole-school training to work with individual staff on such areas as guided mathematics. Subject leaders realise that many actions and training have yet to show full impact. There are more comprehensive monitoring procedures in place. As a result, the leadership team knows what areas are improving and what areas need further work, and is realistic about what it has achieved. The team recognises that further work on extended writing across the curriculum, challenge for more able pupils, and ensuring greater consistency across classes in terms of whole-school initiatives are still key priorities.

Governors are providing more challenge to the school and questioning the performance in writing and the progress made by more able pupils. The new chair of governors has worked hard to get himself familiar with aspects of the school's work. The monitoring sub committee has now met three times to review the school action plan and governors feel confident about the challenge they provide, making good use of local authority guidance. Link governors keep an overview of key areas of the school's work, including literacy, numeracy and science, whose subject leaders all provided detailed reports on progress at the last full governors' meeting. Governors have a clear grasp of the school's priorities and its strengths.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- carry out more rigorous monitoring of the school's work to identify the main priorities for improvement and ensure that all health and safety requirements are met – satisfactory.

External support

There has been continuing, effective support from the local authority since the last visit. A number of training sessions have taken place with consultants in science, literacy and mathematics. The local authority monitoring undertaken in November 2008 also incorporated joint lesson observations with senior leaders. This monitoring activity gave a useful review of the school's strengths but also guided the school with clear priorities for teaching and learning. The governors have received support in challenging and questioning the school from the local authority which they found very useful. The school is making appropriate use of local authority and external support to address the issues from the previous full inspection.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure teaching consistently provides the more able pupils with challenging work, so they learn at a faster pace.
- Monitor the quality of extended writing opportunities across the curriculum.