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5 December 2011

Mr C Brislen
Executive Headteacher
Oakefield Primary and Nursery School
Holland Street
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 3SL

Dear Mr Brislen

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Oakefield Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 1 and 2 December 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2011. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. 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 – good

Newly Qualified Teachers may be appointed.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children and Adult's Services for Cheshire East.

Yours sincerely

Marguerite Murphy
Her Majesty's Inspector

September 2011



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2011

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, at all levels, and increase their capacity to improve by:
 - ensuring leaders focus the attention of all staff on school priorities
 - ensuring senior leaders and the governing body recognise the urgency required in driving improvement, and setting a clear vision and high expectations
 - prioritising tasks for school improvement that have clear success criteria against which progress can be measured
 - developing skills in the accurate assessment and analysis of pupils' attainment by rigorously tracking the progress of all groups of pupils from their confirmed starting points
 - ensuring the monitoring of teaching is thorough, focusing on the impact of teaching on pupils' progress in lessons and over time
 - ensuring governors hold the school to account and are more rigorously involved in evaluation and challenge.

- Raise attainment and improve pupils' progress by:
 - ensuring that, in Key Stage 1, pupils' basic skills are fully embedded so that they are successfully prepared for their future education
 - ensuring that all teachers have a clear and accurate picture of pupils' attainment and progress in their classes and across the school.

- Raise the quality of teaching, including the use of assessment to support pupils' learning by:
 - improving teachers' knowledge and understanding of levels of attainment, in order to support the accuracy of their assessments of pupils' learning and progress
 - ensuring that this knowledge is used to plan and teach lessons that appropriately meet the individual needs of all pupils in order to close the attainment gaps between pupils in this school and those nationally
 - capitalising on opportunities in all lessons to assess pupils as they learn, so they can make the best possible progress.

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Oakefield Primary and Nursery School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 December 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team, and members of staff. The inspector observed nine lessons taught by nine teachers, most of which were observed jointly with the executive headteacher. The extended writing sessions that take place on Friday mornings were also observed across the school. The inspector reviewed action plans and documentation relating to the school's evaluations of its progress since the last monitoring visit. These included reports from visits conducted at the end of September 2011 by an external consultant and the School Improvement Partner.

Context

Significant staffing changes have taken place since the first monitoring inspection in June 2011. Four new teachers have been appointed, two in each of Key Stages 1 and 2. The headteacher has left the school and a National Leader in Education (NLE) was appointed in September on a three-year contract as executive headteacher. Together with the newly appointed head of school and the deputy headteacher, these form the core of the school's senior leadership team. Previous proposals to set up a hard federation arrangement with another local school have been shelved. Oakefield now has a National Support School partnership with the NLE's host school, a primary academy in Stoke-on-Trent.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Observations of pupils' learning and progress across the school during this monitoring inspection confirm that significant improvements have been made since the start of the autumn term. Pupils are more consistently well motivated and eager to learn, enjoying a good range of interesting tasks and challenges in lessons and other activities. For example, the lively and systematic teaching of phonics (learning about letters and the sounds that they make) is enthusing pupils in Key Stage 1 as they practise the correct pronunciation of sounds within words. Pupils are keen to show off their newly acquired skills and confidence in blending sounds to read unfamiliar words and segmenting sounds to work out how to spell words. They enjoy helping each other, recognising their own achievements and praising the successes achieved by their classmates. Pupils respond positively to the increased opportunities to apply their basic skills to solving problems, delighting in the praise they subsequently receive from teachers and support staff. For instance, pupils in a Year 1 mathematics lessons listened carefully to the teacher and knew how to 'write down the important numbers first' then explain what strategy they would use to find a solution. Pupils in a Year 2 lesson were engrossed in a range of practical problem-solving tasks to develop their understanding of how to divide a number of objects into equal groups. Some

pupils could then move quickly on to formulate their own more-challenging calculations using much larger numbers.

The extended writing sessions on Fridays allow pupils to develop and apply the skills they have been learning during that week. Observation of this across all classes in Key Stages 1 and 2 confirmed that pupils' progress in writing is beginning to accelerate as a result of this well-structured session. Teachers are consistent in their delivery of these sessions: they demonstrate improved skills in modelling and 'scaffolding' pupils' writing; they promote independent learning through setting pupils' targets, providing learning prompts and reviewing their progress in one-to-one discussions with pupils. This is having a positive impact on pupils' improving writing skills and pride in their work, as they also respond well to the higher expectations of the quality of their handwriting and general presentation of work in books.

Assessments at the end of Year 2 in 2011 confirmed that pupils' attainment in reading, mathematics and particularly writing remains low compared to national averages, despite a small improvement on the previous year. Results in the Key Stage 2 national tests in 2011 also improved slightly, although the proportion of pupils reaching expected levels in both English and mathematics is still well-below average. Although there is still some way to go to demonstrate that pupils' attainment is rising sufficiently rapidly and securely over time, evidence seen during this monitoring inspection indicates that the school is on the right track to improvement.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise attainment and improve pupils' progress – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' positive attitudes and good behaviour are increasingly evident as they are enjoying their lessons more due to better teaching and the school's much improved environment for learning. Attendance is average and rising as pupils' attendance in the autumn term so far shows a good increase on the same period last year. Punctuality has improved significantly as class registers are completed promptly to enable a brisk start to each day. Pupils arriving after the register deadline are required to sign in at the school office. This is reducing lateness as pupils want to be in their classes on time. As pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills and levels of confidence are growing, so are their independence and ability to collaborate with others to solve problems. Each of these factors is supporting improvements in the skills that contribute to pupils' future economic well-being.

The effectiveness of provision

Significant improvements in the quality of provision since the first monitoring inspection are resulting in the good and occasionally outstanding teaching observed in lessons during this visit, thereby beginning to accelerate the rate of pupils' progress. The curriculum is improving and is more appropriate to pupils' needs and interests. The drive to improve

English is now being matched by a renewed drive to raise attainment and plug gaps in pupils' knowledge in mathematics. Teachers are making better use of information from their more-accurate assessments of pupils' previous learning. Lesson planning follows a common format that is understood by all staff and used effectively to plan activities that focus on the expected learning outcomes for pupils. Tasks are more closely matched to the needs of pupils of all abilities and relate to specific targets for their attainment levels. Attractive classroom displays and 'working walls' help to extend pupils' knowledge and promote independent learning. Teachers are improving their questioning skills to challenge pupils to think and explain their responses more clearly. They use a good range of resources well to enhance learning, for example, interactive whiteboards, pictures, flashcards, mathematical equipment, carefully chosen books and artefacts. More lessons are now characterised by a brisk pace, high expectations and challenge. Teaching assistants are well briefed on lesson plans so that they can make a more-positive contribution to pupils' learning and progress. No time is wasted as they work more effectively alongside the teachers in well-planned classroom activities, helping to assess and review pupils' learning. This also leads to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities being more fully involved in activities alongside their peers rather than in smaller groups or individual support outside the classroom. Teachers' marking in pupils' books is detailed and focused on key elements of their learning. It is more consistent in providing appropriate feedback to pupils about what they need to do to improve their work.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise the quality of teaching, including the use of assessment to support pupils' learning – good

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Significant changes to the strategic leadership of the school have led to rapid progress since the first monitoring inspection, when progress had been inadequate. A review of the roles and structure of the extended leadership team is promoting a more-determined and rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluation. There is now a strong focus on checking for evidence to demonstrate the impact of the school's actions on driving improvement. All staff are held to account for their role in raising attainment and accelerating pupils' rates of progress. There is a more-accurate and shared view of where the school is now and an understanding of what needs to be done to bring about improvement. Action plans are regularly reviewed against clear criteria by which their effectiveness can be measured so that all staff are well informed about the progress being made in the key priorities for improvement. The governing body is also better informed and, therefore, more knowledgeable and confident in its ability to hold the school to account.

The monitoring and leadership of teaching and learning ensure that this key aspect is at the forefront of the school's work and its increasingly well-focused professional development activities. Most of these are now conducted in partnership with Belgrave St. Bartholemew's Academy, where strong collaborative arrangements and shared leadership are having a very positive impact on the skills of senior and middle leaders at Oakefield. The improvements in

teaching and in the accuracy of assessment information are evidence of successful actions taken by leaders and the increased confidence of staff.

The school has rightly recognised the need to improve provision and outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children leaving this stage to enter Key Stage 1 have not been sufficiently equipped with the skills they need in order to make good progress. Rapid improvements have already been made and were evident during this monitoring inspection. Staff express overwhelmingly positive views of the changes that have taken place this term and say they feel revitalised despite all the hard work that is required. Staff who spoke with the inspector were keen to pay tribute to the inspirational leadership of the executive headteacher and the vital contribution of skilled leaders from Belgrave Academy. The school's recent survey of the views of parents and carers also confirms strong support for the new leadership and improved teaching and learning at Oakefield. Most are responding well to the stricter expectations of punctuality and appreciate the corporate and smart identity of the new school uniforms. Although a very small minority feel that bullying still takes place, the inspector found that pupils behave well as a result of a more-consistent application of the school's behaviour policies and higher expectations.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on areas for improvement:

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, at all levels – outstanding.

External support

The school is making very good use of the significant benefits to be gained from the 'National Leaders in Education' initiative, with part funding also provided by the local authority. This secured the appointment of the executive headteacher and other financial commitments arising from staffing changes. The quality of these key measures, brokered with the National College by the local authority and governing body, is having a strong and positive impact on the school and its growing capacity to sustain improvement in the future.