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27 January 2011

Miss Walkden  
Headteacher  
Combe Martin Primary School  
Hangman Path  
Combe Martin  
Ilfracombe  
Devon  
EX34 0DF

Dear Miss Walkden

### **Special measures: monitoring inspection of Combe Martin Primary School**

Following my visit with Ann Henderson HMI, to your school on 25–26 January 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 30 June – 1 July 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are 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 – inadequate.

Newly Qualified Teachers may not 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's Services for Devon.

Yours sincerely

Pauline Robins  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 30 June – 1 July 2010**

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
  - ensuring pupils' work is assessed regularly and accurately
  - ensuring that assessment is then used consistently to plan lessons at the appropriate level for pupils' age and ability, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities
  - improving the quality and frequency of marking so that pupils are clear about how well they are doing and how they can improve their work.
  
- Develop the effectiveness of middle leadership by:
  - ensuring they fully understand the accountability of their roles
  - ensuring data are accurate and analyzed more rigorously to track the progress of all groups of pupils within their area of responsibility
  - rigorously monitoring and driving improvement in the quality of teaching in their area of responsibility.
  
- Improve pupils' attendance by:
  - improving monitoring, and working with pupils and their families to encourage regular school attendance.
  
- Improve the provision in the Foundation Stage by:
  - ensuring that assessment information is accurate and used to plan activities that meet the learning needs of children.

## **Special measures: monitoring of Combe Martin Primary School**

### **Report from the first monitoring inspection on 25 and 26 January 2011**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, observed lessons and looked at a range of the pupils' work. HMI talked with pupils and parents and carers during the visit and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, members of staff and representatives from the local authority.

#### **Context**

At the time of the last inspection the headteacher had been in post for less than a year. Both she and the governing body recognised that the school's performance was in decline and they requested additional support from the local authority. The support came too late to prevent the school being placed in special measures. Since the inspection there has been a great deal of staff turbulence due to absence and resignations. Due to budget shortages there is currently no deputy headteacher. A new chair has been elected to lead the governing body. Two new teachers joined the school at the start of the spring term.

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

Standards of attainment remain low and generally below the levels expected for the pupils' ages, particularly in writing. At the end of the last academic year the attainment of pupils at the end of Year 2 showed some improvement on 2009. Writing remained below the national average, mathematics was broadly in line and reading was just above the national average. Results of the Year 6 national tests showed that English at Level 4 continued to decline but mathematics showed a significant improvement, although still below the national average. Results at the higher Level 5 in both subjects improved with a more significant improvement in mathematics.

There is still a degree of inaccuracy and inconsistency in the assessment of pupils' work. This makes it difficult for senior and middle leaders to have a true picture of rates of progress across the school. However, it is clear from looking at pupils' work and through lesson observations that progress is inconsistent between classes. Tracking systems which are in place are not easily workable or clearly understood by all staff. What is in place has enabled the headteacher to look in more detail at the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities so she has been able to monitor, re-evaluate and target intervention strategies to effectively meet their academic needs.

## **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

There is a calm, positive atmosphere within the school and pupils' enjoy being there. Relationships between staff and pupils and between the pupils themselves are warm and caring. Pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning are good; they work well together, are supportive of each other and cooperate well in lessons. They are enthusiastic, courteous and keen to engage inspectors in conversations about the school and their learning. There has been a significant improvement in pupils' attendance since last year. The school's attendance officer has played a crucial role in monitoring and providing support. Parents and carers have engaged with the process and through the school council pupils also play an active part in monitoring attendance rates. There is a focus on celebrating good attendance. The current attendance is above average.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve pupils' attendance – good.

## **The effectiveness of provision**

Two new teachers have joined the school this term and the quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. However, some weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection persist. Teaching in all the lessons observed was at least satisfactory and in some cases it was good. However, there are still too many gaps in the pupils' knowledge and too much teaching which is satisfactory for pupils to make up the ground lost during their earlier years in the school. Joint observations undertaken during this inspection confirmed the accuracy of the headteacher's judgement of the quality of teaching. There appears to be no whole school consensus as to what makes for good teaching and learning and there is no whole school policy to foster this understanding.

A marking policy is now in place and pupils' work is regularly marked. However, marking does not consistently provide pupils with sufficient information on how to improve their learning. Systems are in place to assess pupils at specific points in the year. There remains a weakness in the day-to-day assessment which teachers carry out as this is not always used to inform their planning. As a result, lessons are not consistently modified or sharply focused on each pupil's next steps in learning.

Strong support from the local authority has brought about improvements to provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. All areas of learning can now be accessed in the classroom, which successfully supports children in moving towards the next stage in their development. Children are beginning to select their own activities and this encourages them to greater independence. The outside learning environment requires further improvement. Since the last inspection the introduction of learning journals has meant that parents and carers have greater engagement with their children's learning. These journals promote good partnerships with parents

and carers and provide an improved picture of the total development of the child. Assessment on entry of the September 2010 intake is now accurate and shows that the children's development is in line with age-related expectations. Continuity in planning and day-to-day assessment remains a weakness due to inconsistencies in staffing and long-term absence of permanent staff.

Progress since the section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching – inadequate.
- Improve the provision in the Foundation Stage – inadequate.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

There is no doubt that the headteacher has brought a sense of educational direction and purpose to the school's work. She is working tirelessly and is prepared to rigorously tackle underperformance. However, she does not have the time or capacity to undertake all the management tasks that fall to her, including acting as SENCO, as she has too little support at a senior level. She has raised the expectations of staff but is finding it challenging to maintain a cohesive team given the staff turbulence. Not all of the staff recognise and understand the urgency of the situation and the pace of change required to move a school out of special measures. When deadlines are set they are there for a reason and should be met by everyone. The headteacher recognises that she needs to be able to move beyond the minutiae of systems and procedures and concentrate on the strategic development of teaching and learning. She agrees that this will present an ideal opportunity for pre-existing and new staff to work together on a whole school issue. The role of middle leaders in monitoring, evaluating and holding staff to account for progress in their subject area remains underdeveloped and inadequate.

The Chair of the Governing Body brings a wealth of first-hand educational experience, especially with schools in special measures. He is supporting members of the governing body in developing their understanding of the strategic nature of their role. He has also introduced policies and ways of working which increase efficiency and enable governors to challenge appropriately and effectively. The capacity of the governing body has been further strengthened by others who have relevant educational and business experience.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Develop the effectiveness of middle leadership – inadequate.

### **External support**

The local authority provided considerable support even before the school went into special measures. Their statement of action is fit for purpose and provides an appropriate framework for improvement. The actions identified in the statement of action have been carried out and have made a satisfactory contribution to school improvement overall. However, turbulence within the Combe Martin staff has

dissipated the impact of those working to support the school. A local authority consultant has been working in the school for two or three days each week and has been instrumental in bringing about improvement to the Early Years Foundation Stage. Without her support the school would not have been able to move forward in this area. The local authority acknowledges the need to support the headteacher at a strategic level to enable her to accelerate change.