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18 February 2011

Mrs H Thompson
The Locum Headteacher
Shepton Mallet Infant School
Waterloo Road
Shepton Mallet
Somerset
BA4 5HE

Dear Mrs Thompson

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Shepton Mallet Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 16 and 17 February 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2009. 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.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – 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 Somerset.

Yours sincerely

Stephen McShane
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2009

- Enable the senior leadership team to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in monitoring and evaluating whole-school performance through additional training and coaching.
- Ensure that all teaching is at least satisfactory, with a significant proportion that is good, by:
 - ensuring that teachers' planning meets the needs of all pupils
 - ensuring that pupils know what they are expected to achieve by the end of lessons
 - ensuring that day-to-day assessment and marking give pupils a clear understanding of their next steps in learning.
- Ensure that pupils' attendance is above 94% by raising pupils' and parents' understanding of the importance of regular attendance to support good learning and progress.
- Improve pupils' learning and progress so that all groups of pupils achieve as well as similar groups nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.

Special measures: monitoring of Shepton Mallet Infant School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 16 and 17 February 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the locum headteacher, the substantive headteacher, staff, pupils, members of the governing body and the National Leader for Education who is supporting the school. He had telephone conversations with the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority.

Context

The locum headteacher continues to lead the school. The substantive headteacher is on a phased return to work and is currently leading on a project related to the Early Years Foundation Stage. A new deputy headteacher took up post in January 2011. The temporary nursery teacher has been made permanent. One teacher has been absent from school since before the last monitoring visit. During this inspection visit, one long-term supply teacher was absent and the class was taken by another supply teacher.

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

The school's assessments in December 2010, and more recent evidence, show that pupils are making better progress and, if this is maintained, Year 2 pupils are likely to achieve in line with national expectations by the end of this academic year. There remains some variation between subjects. In Year 2, progress in writing is stronger than progress in reading and mathematics. In Year 1, progress in writing is weaker. Pupils who are more able do not have the skills and knowledge to ensure that they achieve at the higher levels.

The school uses its data effectively and provides a wide variety of small-group sessions for pupils. These make a strong contribution to progress and remain effective in tackling any particular special or language need or identified underachievement. Such sessions ensure pupils develop a sufficient grasp of letters and sounds and a sound knowledge of more complex language structures, such as similes and metaphors, so that they can use these to extend their writing. Learning in whole-class sessions during the monitoring visit was uneven and is closely matched to the quality of teaching. The school's own monitoring confirms inconsistencies in the school. However, there is a purposeful atmosphere and pupils are eager to learn. They settle well and follow instructions and routines.

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

- improve pupils' learning and progress so that all groups of pupils achieve as well as similar groups nationally in reading, writing and mathematics – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils are polite and engaging. They are welcoming to a visitor and happy to talk about their work or their play. The high expectations of staff have been maintained so that even the youngest pupils move around the school calmly, ready to begin activities and any minor disruptions are quickly sorted out. Pupils play actively and safely at playtimes. The school reports that any bullying behaviour is very rare and that in a recent pupils' questionnaire the overwhelming majority said that they feel safe at school. There is clear photographic evidence of the enjoyment of pupils on special days and events, such as 'Messy Play Day' and the sell-out Christmas concert. Attendance in this academic year is average, an improvement on previous years. It is still affected adversely by families taking holidays in term time.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that pupils' attendance is above 94% by raising pupils' and parents' understanding of the importance of regular attendance to support good learning and progress – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching has not improved enough since the last inspection visit. The school's evidence shows that issues remain in the mixed Reception Year and Year 1 class, partly due to the disruptions caused by long-term absence but also due to inconsistent application of agreed whole-school initiatives. This was the case at the last visit and is recorded in the minutes of at least two of the regular meetings to monitor the school's progress. Action is being taken but it has not had enough impact. In the rest of the school, consistent practice, for example in sharing learning objectives and success criteria, is now well embedded. However, there remains too much time when pupils, or groups of pupils, are not challenged enough. Questioning and activities in whole-class sessions are not targeted sufficiently well. Too often, pupils with their hands up are asked for a reply and others become disengaged. Pupils make better progress when they work with the teacher, but the activities planned for others do not extend their learning enough. The pace of lessons is often too slow to lead to good learning. Assessment in writing and reading is thorough. The school is currently implementing a new mathematics assessment scheme. A new approach to marking has now been agreed. It is evident in the majority of classes and is well targeted and encouraging, but not yet leading to improvements in pupils' work as comments are not sufficiently followed up.

The newly-adopted curriculum gives an appropriate structure to the whole-school topics and ensures appropriate breadth and coverage by promoting interesting activities. The school has rightly identified that pupils need further opportunities to develop reading comprehension and apply their skills in writing. So, it is gradually adapting its approach to teaching literacy and reducing the time spent using a commercial scheme. It is early days and there is evidence of some good work being produced. However, it has also highlighted teachers' need for additional support in

planning these new opportunities so that literacy skills are covered coherently and rigorously. A new approach to teaching handwriting is being introduced.

Pupils continue to be cared for well. The school has continued its focus on improving attendance through targeted interventions with parents and carers and incentives for the pupils.

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

- ensure that all teaching is at least satisfactory, with a significant proportion that is good – inadequate.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim headteacher continues to lead and manage an orderly, calm and purposeful school. She has a clear grasp of what needs to be done. Staff are willing to improve and are committed to the children and work hard. However, progress since the last visit has stalled, particularly the impact of senior leaders in improving teaching. Complex personnel and performance issues, still unresolved, have demanded a great deal of energy and resources. Among these, the initial return-to-work plans for the substantive headteacher caused confusion and insecurity among staff. Appropriate steps were taken to remedy this. However, there is now considerable uncertainty and disagreement about the way forward and how the long-term senior leadership of the school is going to be made secure. Members of the governing body are more knowledgeable, visible and supportive, but still not influencing the direction of the school sufficiently. They develop their own opinions about what needs to be done but are unsure how to proceed. Due to a combination of lack of experience and knowledge, and ongoing issues regarding the capacity of key individuals, they do not take a full and active part in decision making. They are not acting in a joined-up or coherent manner.

The new deputy headteacher has made a good start. She has led training and supported teachers with their planning. The numeracy coordinator has grown in confidence and has a secure grasp of future actions to improve mathematics in the school.

The parents and friends association has recently been re-established. There have been a number of successful events involving parents and carers. One parent felt this demonstrated a growing commitment from parents and carers to the school and a confidence in the changes that have been made.

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

- enable the senior leadership team to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in monitoring and evaluating whole-school performance through additional training and coaching – inadequate.

External support

The National Leader in Education continues to give effective support to the headteacher on a range of issues, including the analysis of data and the management of interventions. Local authority governor support and human resources departments, working with advisers, provide advice quickly. However, while the school receives a great deal of support on a wide range of matters, too many significant issues impede progress and, even though they have been known about for some time, remain unresolved. As they are not resolved, they put additional stress and uncertainty on the school. Not enough attention has been given to the impact of all these issues together on a small school and their impact on the work required to improve teaching and outcomes.

Since the last visit, the school support from education advisers has been interrupted due to changes in personnel arrangements in the local authority. There remains some uncertainty in the school about the ongoing roles of different professionals and entitlement to their support.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that teaching in the mixed-aged class is satisfactory or better and put plans in place to improve quickly all other teaching in the school.
- Secure the senior leadership of the school, including the effectiveness of the governing body.