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Mrs M Rowland
Headteacher
Dymchurch Primary School
New Hall Close
Dymchurch
Romney Marsh
Kent
TN29 0LE

Dear Mrs Rowland

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Dymchurch Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22–23 March 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 February 2010. 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 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 Kent.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Browning

Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2010

- Raise attainment in English, mathematics and science:
 - by extending pupils' use of vocabulary in their writing across the curriculum
 - increasing opportunities for pupils' to use calculations to solve mathematical problems in real-life situations
 - strengthening the depth of pupils' knowledge across the science curriculum and ensuring that they use this knowledge to help explain the conclusions they have made during investigations.

- Improve teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring teachers take more responsibility for checking how well pupils are learning and use this information more rigorously to plan work that meets pupils' differing needs
 - making sure that pupils are consistently challenged throughout lessons so that learning moves forward swiftly.

- Increase the impact of subject leaders and governors on pupils' learning by ensuring that leaders have a sharper understanding of provision and progress across the school and greater involvement in driving improvement.

Special measures: monitoring of Dymchurch Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 22–23 March 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, visited lessons in all seven classes and an assembly, scrutinised pupils' books and school documents and met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, staff, pupils, the chair of the governing body and members of the strategy group.

Context

An additional deputy headteacher joined the school in January 2011, seconded from another school for a period of two years. One new teacher also joined the school in January. The roles and responsibilities of senior leaders have been reviewed. A new business manager has been appointed. Just over half of the members of the governing body are newly appointed since the last visit. Several pupils have joined and left since September 2010. The school continues to have ongoing major building work.

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

Information from the most recent teacher assessments indicate that pupils' progress, although uneven, is improving at a satisfactory rate overall. Pupils' better progress in reading and writing is largely due to the sharper focus on learning letter sounds and specific guided reading sessions where pupils are helped to decode the meaning in texts. The school has recently purchased more exciting reading books and levels of enjoyment and confidence in reading are improving as a result. As one teacher said, 'You can see children smelling the new books.' Pupils' use of punctuation, their spelling and limited vocabulary in their writing across the curriculum remain areas of concern. Progress in mathematics is improving because problem-solving activities are increasingly based on real-life situations and this holds the pupils' interest in learning. For example, Year 1 pupils began to estimate, calculate and measure the height, length and width of different objects in their classroom. Year 6 pupils used computers to consolidate and explore what they had learned about axes and coordinates. In preparation for writing, Year 2 pupils enjoyed through drama imagining tumbling down a hole, shrinking and growing after taking an imaginary potion just like Alice in Wonderland, and were able to talk about the differences between the book and the film. Year 3 pupils strengthened their knowledge of science when they planted violas in pots for Mothering Sunday and carefully explained and recorded the process. Despite much encouragement by adults, many pupils lack the skills and confidence to enable them to learn independently or have the stamina to write or concentrate at length.

The newly created outdoor area helps Reception children to enjoy the new resources and develop their physical and creative skills. Children were observed working under the cardboard car to fix its wheels and enjoyed a visit from the lollipop lady teaching them about crossing the road safely. Pupils in Years 1 to 6 are making improved progress because lessons are more carefully planned to meet individual needs, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Good use is made of assessment activities which check what the pupils have understood and how they can be supported in their next learning step. Pupils assess each other's work and respond well to the helpful comments made by their teachers. As one pupil explained, 'We know our targets and what we need to do to improve.'

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

- Raise attainment in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The atmosphere in the school is calm and purposeful and this is a major improvement. In class, behaviour management by teachers is more consistent, and because pupils are more enthusiastic about their work and involved in the activities, they behave well. Pupils also like the incentives to help them to be kind and behave well and say, 'Behaviour is so much better and we lose less learning time now.' Significant improvement to resources and the school building helps ensure pupils feel valued and enjoy attending. They are consulted through the school council and business assemblies where they can air any concerns. Pupils like the improvements, especially the new books, large play equipment, laptops and the automatic doors. The school is working hard with families to improve attendance which, although rising steadily, remains below average.

The effectiveness of provision

A higher proportion of teaching is good, with none that is inadequate. Regular monitoring of teaching and well-focused school based training and support from the local authority have strengthened teaching quality. As a result, teachers have a better understanding of what pupils should achieve and their expectations are rising. Teachers know that they are all responsible for the progress that pupils make. Lesson plans take greater account of pupils' differing needs. Marking has improved and pupils are set targets that are regularly reviewed, although these are not consistently followed up in marking. Teaching is more focused on developing pupils' use and understanding of basic grammar and spellings. These two areas continue to be a key focus. Most noticeable improvements in teaching and learning are the increased involvement of pupils in lessons, use of questioning, technology and improved resources. At times, work is insufficiently challenging for the more able and the pace of lessons is not brisk enough. Those whose circumstances make them

vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported through interventions, specialist support and closer links with external agencies. Teaching assistants provide good quality help for individuals and small groups. The needs of the youngest children are fully met through the improved secure outdoor area. Visitors, special events such as a performance of *Oliver Twist* and circus takeaway-workshops about healthy foods and celebrating Chinese New Year, enrich the curriculum and help to make learning real. Pupils say lessons are more interesting. Those who have a special gift and/or talent can attend specially organised sessions which focus on literacy, numeracy and design and technology. Breakfast club, arts, sports and Spanish clubs are popular.

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

- Improve teaching and learning – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher's ambition and drive have led the culture of change. The shared commitment and determination of the recently established senior leaders are helping to accelerate school improvement. Changes in subject leaders' roles and responsibilities have re-established a sharper focus on improvement and action planning. Evidence from monitoring activities is used effectively to measure the success of the changes introduced, from guided reading, to mathematics catch-up activities, and a new science curriculum. Full pupil progress reports and the outcomes of testing are used regularly to check pupils' progress. Senior leaders and key staff analyse this information to improve provision, identify the progress made by different groups, including those who are vulnerable to underachievement, and to check equality of opportunity. Accurate self-evaluation and good systems ensure that teaching, learning and curriculum quality are carefully monitored. Professional development is used to improve teachers' skills, and this is impacting positively on improved pupil progress. Staff and governors are more directly involved in school policy reviews. Governors are better informed as a result of bespoke training which is enabling them to make key decisions based on first-hand knowledge and understanding of school life. The governor strategy group is leading the enthusiasm for change. As the chair of governors said, 'A lot has been done.'

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

- Increase the impact of subject leaders and governors on pupils' learning – good.

External support

The local authority has provided a good level of support and guidance for the school in a number of key areas. The support has been targeted appropriately at specific

areas of the school's work and/or to individuals needing support for their role. Individual teachers have also improved their practice as a result of training and school-based support.