

Tribal Education
1–4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0845 123 6001
Direct F 0845 123 6002
Direct email: rebecca.jackson@tribalgroup.com

7 April 2011

Ms Andrea Rice
Acting Headteacher
The Chestnut Centre
Magnolia Avenue
Exeter
Devon
EX2 6DJ

Dear Ms Rice

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Chestnut Centre

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 April 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 May 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 – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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 Exeter.

Yours sincerely

Mike Burghart
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that senior managers and all staff are fully trained in the Early Years Foundation Stage by December 2010
 - ensuring that senior managers and all staff are sufficiently trained and able to use the school's assessment, monitoring, recording and tracking systems effectively by December 2010
 - improving systems for checking the quality of teaching and learning to ensure there is a clear identification of aspects that need to improve
 - improving systems for analysing data about children's progress to identify the areas for development for learning and ensure equality of opportunity
 - improving the effectiveness of the governing body in monitoring and challenging the school to improve.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and children's achievements by:
 - improving planning of activities to ensure that provision is tailored to meet the children's interests and needs and is clear about the skills and knowledge they will gain
 - improving assessment to more accurately record the skills and knowledge children have gained.
- Ensure that the progress and achievement of all children is at least satisfactory by December 2010.
- Raise the level of teaching and learning so they are at least consistently satisfactory by October 2010.

Special measures: monitoring of The Chestnut Centre

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 April 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher and the chair of governors and spoke on the phone with representatives of the local authority. He also met with the head of teaching and learning elect, who will be taking over day-to-day running of the school after Easter 2011, and with the soon-to-be executive headteacher.

Context

There have been some important changes since the last monitoring visit. Two classes were reduced to one from January 2011. One teacher relinquished her teaching role in favour of becoming an early years assistant. The school has entered into federation with a local primary school, whose headteacher is set to become the executive headteacher after Easter alongside a new head of teaching and learning, who will be responsible for day-to-day running. A new administrator was appointed at the start of term. Four nursery nurses have been made redundant with effect from the end of this term as a consequence of the falling roll.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning and other relevant pupil outcomes

Progress in terms of promoting children's achievement has built on the satisfactory situation noted in the last monitoring visit and is now good. Children make better progress in all areas of learning, but still fall short of attainment that is expected nationally by the time they leave, especially in communication, language and literacy. This weakness has a limiting impact on all learning, which staff are well aware of. There has been a determined effort to get children to make marks on paper to communicate meaning and there are reassuring signs of emergent writing, with children choosing the writing table unprompted at the start of the day. Recent improvements to planning which identifies vocabulary have created regular opportunities for children to speak and be listened to. This benefits all children but particularly those whose first language is not English and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The recent focus on traditional stories has had profound effects on sequencing, understanding characterisation and letter-to-sounds recognition. 'Chicken Licken' has helped develop basic literacy skills and enriched children's cultural awareness as well as making learning extremely enjoyable. Children were observed initiating conversations and carrying on role play even after adults had moved on to other groups. They showed real concern for missing characters from stories. Nobody caught the gingerbread man!

Much-improved identification of children's needs and better teaching now guarantee that learning is fun as well as being relevant. The enthusiastic way children come in in the morning is testament to their enjoyment and the quality of relationships. Progress in personal, social and emotional development is very good, with children showing consideration for others' points of view, behaving well and being prepared to share. Trike riding is a good example of children playing safely and socially together.

Staff's greater awareness of those children who are potentially more able has provided more opportunities to stretch and challenge these children and this is having a positive impact on their attainment. These children are beginning to use basic skills more systematically, for example in mathematics to solve simple problems. Better planning has made learning more relevant. Highlights such as visits to a local supermarket, where children focused on the number three to develop concepts such as smaller than and greater than, widen children's horizons. Such events complement the success of current work designed to encourage children's appreciation of difference and change. It has led to good progress in observation of plants and use of colour in painting, and enhanced children's spiritual development in an appreciation of the beauty of nature.

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

- Ensure that the progress and achievement of all children is at least satisfactory by December 2010 – good.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching has been improved as a result of incisive monitoring by the acting headteacher, representatives of the local authority and governors. Areas for development are accurately identified and modifications made. Planning is deep rooted in good Early Years Foundation Stage practice and provides an appropriate balance of children's choices and teacher-directed activities. Children respond well and, as a consequence, progress rates accelerate. Although learning is solidly satisfactory when children work with support staff, it is much better when children have direct contact with the teacher. Her perceptive questioning and good use of assessment ensure children's needs are well catered for. She effectively challenges more-able children to extend their communication skills. For example, pausing to prompt children to reflect and make predictions about what characters are feeling and what might happen next during story time results in children making better progress in early literacy skills.

The school's effective use of data to identify the next stages of learning has been well orchestrated by the acting headteacher. Well supported by advisers from the local authority, she has improved staff understanding of how young children learn and raised expectations of what children are capable of. Good systems for recording children's involvement and success are effective in making staff aware of the needs

and potential of individual children. This is particularly effective in supporting children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and making sure they make at least the same progress as everyone else.

There is plenty of evidence to confirm that good pastoral and physical care, which has long been central to the school's reputation, has been sustained. Parents and children continue to have justifiable confidence that someone will be able to help them if they have a problem.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and children's achievements – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Improvements throughout are the direct result of the outstanding vision, leadership and management of the acting headteacher. She has been prepared to act on advice, to take the initiative and to make some very difficult decisions. It is clear that she has children's academic as well as personal development as high priorities. She has set the school on the right path and is well supported by governors. Together with the class teacher, they have challenged everyone to evaluate the effect of decisions made on learning. The school has a clear and accurate view of strengths and weaknesses and has acted swiftly to address downfalls. Good examples of the success of this are in: the much-improved learning environment inside and out; effective use of assessment; work planned to account for children's varying skills, experience and ability; and confirming that children who attend for the afternoon session have the same curriculum opportunities as those who come in the morning. The full effect of such developments has yet to be seen but there are already positive signs, for instance, in the way that children who are prone to outbursts and unpredictable behaviour calm down much more quickly than they did even last term.

Much-improved liaison with the primary school in the evolving federation, links with outside agencies and the school's good partnership with parents underpin developments in learning. Good progress in the way support for special educational needs is managed is evident in very clear individual education plans with small step targets and distinct success criteria. These are well communicated and provision involving outside agencies, such as Nursery Plus and Portage workers, is very effectively coordinated. Re-introducing the key worker systems linking staff to named individual children in school and finding yet more efficient ways to share assessment information amongst staff already feature in forward planning. Such plans now transcend simply responding to the issues raised in the special measures report and concentrate on more recent self-evaluation.

As a result of strong leadership the overall profile of progress is good. However, the school and local authority appreciate that, with the significant changes in leadership

set for next term and the disbanding of the governing body, a period of consolidation is needed before the long-term positive impact on children's achievement can be said to be assured.

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

- Improve the quality of leadership and management – good.

External support

The school continues to be well supported by the local authority, not only in good-quality advice for developing learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage and over personnel issues, but in tangible financial support in providing for the secondment to the school of the acting headteacher. The assigned adviser regularly and effectively monitors and reports on the success of initiatives and this has helped raise expectations and increase staff accountability.