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Miss Walkden
Headteacher
Combe Martin Primary School
Hangman Path
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Ilfracombe
Devon
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Dear Miss Walkden

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Combe Martin Primary School

Following my visit with Karl Sampson HMI, to your school on 25 and 26 May 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 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 – satisfactory

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

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 analysed 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 Early Years 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 second monitoring inspection on 25 and 26 May 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, observed lessons and conducted learning walks. HMI met with the headteacher, members of staff, a group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. The lead inspector also held a telephone conversation with the assigned headteacher who is providing senior management mentoring and support.

Context

Despite the school being placed in special measures the number of pupils on roll has remained steady. Stability of staffing was an issue at the last visit and is still a concern, but one which the senior staff and governors are addressing in the longer term. An experienced teacher was appointed for the summer term to teach full time in the Early Years Foundation Stage. An experienced, permanent Early Years Foundation Stage teacher has been appointed for September and the teacher currently teaching in Year 1 has accepted a permanent post. The secondment of the Years 4/5 teacher has been extended for the next academic year and she will take on the role of assistant headteacher. The senior administrator is to retire at the end of the summer term and measures are already in place to cover her financial and personnel work.

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

School data confirm that in terms of the attainment expected of pupils by the end of Key Stage 1 there has been some improvement since the spring term; this data has yet to be verified. However, the progress that pupils make, between year groups in Key Stage 1 and across subject areas, is variable and has yet to reach a consistently satisfactory level. Progress in the first two years of Key Stage 2 is also inconsistent and is weakest in Year 3, particularly in English. The progress made in Years 5 and 6 is consistently good and the majority of pupils are working at or above levels expected for their age. However, the good teaching in these year groups has come too late to address historical weaknesses and so the school is unlikely to reach the attainment targets that have been set for the national tests this year.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour and attitudes towards learning are at least good in all classes. Even in those lessons which are less engaging, pupils are compliant and still keen to learn. They enjoy being challenged and at the upper end of the school they are being

encouraged to develop strong independent learning skills. They are tremendously supportive of each other, work well together in small groups and remain on task without the need for close supervision.

Despite earlier poor weather and the recent spell of extended holidays the school has maintained pupils' level of attendance at a little over 95%. It has sustained the good systems for taking action, supporting and monitoring pupils whose attendance is poor. There are a small minority of pupils whose persistent poor attendance is being diligently tackled by the school and the educational welfare officer. However, the vast majority of parents and carers recognise the importance of good attendance and even when a pupil has a medical or dental appointment only take them out of school for that specific period of time.

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

- Improve pupils' attendance – good

The effectiveness of provision

Weaknesses in teaching persist in some year groups. Although inadequate teaching has not been fully eradicated there are clear signs that the school has acted upon the comments made at the last monitoring visit. Teaching and learning are now at the heart of the school's drive for improvement. A clear, workable policy has been collaboratively developed and staff have reached a consensus on the principles of teaching and learning and what a good lesson should look like. There are regular opportunities for teachers to share good practice and discuss generic teaching strategies. However, it is too early for the impact of this work to be consistently demonstrated at all times.

Plans to develop the teaching of mathematics are clear and well focused on the areas of greatest concern. However, given that writing throughout the school remains a key weakness the plans to move this forward are not yet sharp enough or sufficiently clearly defined. There has been a noticeable improvement in the learning environment and the pupils identified how learning walls are helping to support their learning and extend their understanding. However, given the weakness in writing, teachers need to create more opportunities to display examples of pupils' extended writing.

The overly complex assessment and tracking systems which were in place at the last visit have been significantly improved. The new system is less complicated and staff are now engaged in recording the data for their own pupils. As a result, senior managers have a clearer picture of pupils' progress, are able to predict outcomes more accurately and hold staff to account. Staff at all levels will need to take every opportunity to rehearse the explanation and justification of their data so they gain confidence and understand how to use this information to plan and evaluate. The

marking policy has been revisited and criteria have been agreed which have rationalised the system so marking is purposeful and informs planning. Pupils value the evaluative marking particularly in Year 6 where they commented on how it helps them to improve their work. However, the system has yet to be fully embedded so that all teachers use marking as part of a dialogue with pupils to give them clear points on how to improve.

The temporary teacher has drawn up a clear action plan to review provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. She has brought consistency and clarity to the assessment and forward planning for this class. As a result, the provision has been strengthened and is already having a positive impact on children's progress. The teacher has made changes to the classroom which have improved the learning environment. The layout is more open, inviting and less confusing which creates better observational opportunities for staff and enables children to work and play more independently. In keeping with the school's drive towards high standards and quality, new learning journals have been issued. The new journals place more emphasis on the careful selection of evidence to inform accurate assessment, give value to the books through good presentation and ask parents and carers to be more engaged in the selection and assessment process. Although the outdoor environment remains a weakness, improvements are beginning to happen. The six areas of learning are now reflected outside and children are engaged in more purposeful activity. The teacher has established a good working relationship with the on-site pre-school and this has resulted in regular sharing of large play equipment such as trikes which will support the children in developing their gross motor skills.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching – satisfactory
- Improve the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher, supported by the seconded assistant headteacher, is providing clearer direction and demonstrating better capacity to bring about the required improvement. The school is now beginning to make progress out of special measures, basics are in place and the necessary focus on teaching and learning has been established. With the exception of leadership and management, where significant changes have taken place and the impact is already demonstrable, new policies and ways of working have yet to become embedded and it is clearly too early to be able to demonstrate impact. The headteacher is now able to give an appropriate amount of time to strategic planning. She has a vision for the future which was previously lacking when justifiably caught up in much that was peripheral to the development of her school. Communication at all levels has been greatly improved. Even the simple measure of introducing a shared online calendar for all staff is beginning to have an impact on efficiency and clarity. Parents and carers have been consulted and are invited into classrooms every Tuesday morning to

share in their children's learning. There is a weekly whole school newsletter and a fortnightly newsletter for each class which includes information about the homework being set; curricular targets in 'user friendly language', which are supported by activities which parents and carers can follow up at home; and a website where children's learning is shared.

The key driver for change has been the introduction of the teaching and learning policy. Senior staff recognise that this is not an end in itself but provides a map which needs to be constantly revisited along the journey. This has also been a catalyst to demonstrate how well the staff work together, and that sustained improvement can only be achieved through a collaborative approach where everyone understands the immediate priorities and their contribution. Lesson observations are accurate, triangulated using additional evidence and used to provide increasingly useful feedback to staff which is followed through with areas for development.

A teacher has been appointed to take over the post of special educational needs coordinator (SENCO). As yet he lacks experience in this role but is already coming to terms with the statutory work and will be supported by an experienced learning mentor. The assistant headteacher is to lead on curriculum development and planning which the school acknowledges has, up until now, been somewhat haphazard. This has resulted in gaps in pupils' knowledge and some aspects being repeated or taught in the wrong key stage.

Governors are keen to further improve the learning environment and the presentation of pupils' work; they have identified this aspect as a focus for their guided learning walks. A draft policy has been written to clarify the rationale and their role when visiting the school for monitoring purposes. They continue to be very supportive of the school and are gaining in strength and expertise while keeping a careful watch on the implementation of the school's action plan.

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

- Develop the effectiveness of middle leadership – satisfactory

External support

The local authority acted quickly and effectively following the last visit and put in place appropriate support for the school. The funding to second an assistant headteacher for the next academic year and the mentoring from an assigned experienced headteacher have had a significant impact. The assistant headteacher has a very clear view of her responsibilities for the coming year and the role of the assigned headteacher continues to be an essential part of the school's continuing improvement. By increasing the capacity of the senior management team time has been created for strategic thinking and development to take place, essential if the

school is to move forward. The local authority is due to conduct a review of special educational needs within the school and this will come at an opportune time. The local authority is aware of the willingness, though inexperience, of the new SENCO. It recognises that he will require further advice and support to meet this challenge in terms of understanding the statutory requirements, but also on how to lead within the school on differentiation in the classroom and to hold staff to account for the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.