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23 June 2011

Mrs H Thompson
Locum Headteacher
Shepton Mallet Infants' School
Waterloo Road
Shepton Mallet
BA4 5HE

Dear Mrs Thompson

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Shepton Mallet Infants' School

Following my visit to your school on 21–22 June 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 fourth 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 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 – satisfactory.

One Newly Qualified Teacher may 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 Infants' School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 21 – 22 June 2011

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with staff, pupils, members of the governing body and the National Leader for Education (NLE) who is supporting the school. He had telephone conversations with representatives of the local authority.

Context

The substantive headteacher is no longer working at the school and her contract will terminate at the end of August 2011. The locum headteacher continues to lead the school and has been appointed to the permanent position from September 2011. There is a new Chair of the Governing Body. One teacher has resigned. Another teacher is currently working at another school, preparing to return to Shepton Mallett. Two classes are taught by supply teachers. During this inspection one of the permanent members of the teaching staff was absent.

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

Pupils are making improved progress and the school's assessment information shows that the attainment of Year 2 pupils is in line with national expectations. While there are variations in the attainment between cohorts, due to the particular starting points of individual pupils, assessment evidence suggests that this pattern of improvement is continuing throughout the school.

Previously the learning of pupils in the mixed-aged class was of particular concern. Due to the changes the school has made this is improving. The youngest pupils are now spending longer in the Reception class where the environment and provision have been significantly altered. Observations showed that these pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are now excited and more confidently engaging in learning. They are making progress in their personal development and in acquiring language, communication and early mathematical skills. The oldest pupils are now being taught in a much smaller group. They are now concentrating better and applying themselves to tasks more successfully. The gaps in their knowledge are being more systematically addressed and they are starting to make better progress in acquiring literacy and numeracy skills. In light of the unsettled time these pupils have experienced, they need now to make accelerated progress if they are to reach national expectations.

Learning in lessons or in small groups remains closely matched to the quality of teaching. The most successful learning is when the objective is very carefully

matched to the needs of the pupils and challenges them, and the delivery is exciting and engaging. Pupils make best progress when a variety of models, images or equipment is used to help pupils effectively understand concepts. Pupils are most successful when they are encouraged to respond readily, and then have any misconceptions clarified or new connections explained to them. These elements are not yet consistent which means pupils can spend too long rehearsing, recording or consolidating concepts when they could be challenged more.

Evidence in pupils' work shows the strongest progress in writing. Pupils in all year groups are writing at greater length with developing language and structure. Clearer links between assessment pieces and topics in the classroom are being made so assessment is more relevant and accurate. Specific interventions for pupils who have English as an additional language or more-able pupils have resulted in accelerated progress for these pupils, which is evident, for example, in their poetry writing after a visit to the Somerset Levels.

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 continue to behave well and are polite and welcoming. They are very clear how they must behave and what are the rewards and consequences related to this. They play well together in the playground and cooperate successfully in the classroom. Those spoken to say they feel that they are cared for well by adults who are 'nice and kind'. The improvement in the attendance of pupils has been maintained. Pupils are clear that they should come to school every day and like winning the school teddy bear for a week if their class has the highest attendance. The school is working effectively with other agencies to support the families of pupils who are persistently absent.

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

No teaching seen in this monitoring inspection was inadequate. The school's own monitoring, as well as that by the local authority, confirms that this is now more consistently the case. Pupils are diligent. Relationships between adults and pupils

remain good. Strategies to improve pupils' engagement, for example, encouraging talking with partners, are more consistent. Additional adults support individual pupils effectively to remain on task. Since the last visit all teachers have adopted personal targets to improve their teaching further. In some cases these have had significant impact and their teaching is improving quickly and pupils' learning is better. In other cases progress is less secure and issues remain. The school and local authority recognise that the priority now must be to secure more good teaching so that in every lesson pupils are always learning as much as they can.

A recent scrutiny of books across the school shows that the marking is now consistent in those classes where there has been a stability of staff. The school has correctly identified that the priorities are to ensure consistency in all classes and pupils are responding to this marking so that it is improving learning.

The new curriculum is more coherent and offers more opportunities for pupils to make links in their learning, for example using coordinates in mathematics and geography in their topic on pirates. A focus on the development of handwriting, new resources to support the effective assessment and teaching of guided reading and joint planning by teachers are examples of the improvements made to the provision which is ensuring more continuity and uniformity of practice in the school.

Adults care for pupils well. Small group interventions in reading and writing are still key to the progress of many of the pupils. Staff are currently ensuring that good transition arrangements are in place, pupils are effectively prepared for their next school and new parents and carers of next year's Reception class are welcomed.

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 – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the last visit the morale of staff has recovered and there is a feeling of renewed ownership and energy for improvement.

The complex personnel and performance issues that were holding back the school's progress are now well on the way to resolution. In dealing with these the school governing body has demonstrated its growing confidence and resolve in improving the school. Governors have had to address issues of their own capacity, leadership and organisation and have found effective solutions. They have challenged and worked effectively alongside the local authority so that very difficult decisions could be taken and appropriate processes followed. They took swift action to ensure the continuity of leadership. They are highly visible around the school, much more informed and asking more searching questions to hold the school to account. They

are determined that the remaining personnel issues will be resolved effectively. Since the last visit the locum headteacher, ably assisted by the new deputy headteacher and the growing confidence of staff, has been resolute and continued to steer improvements in provision and the environment. Targets and actions for improvements are set, for example, in teaching. As yet these are not precise enough or not pursued rigorously enough to make sure that they are making a difference quickly and consistently to learning. Monitoring is regular and improvements to systems are clearly evident, however the evaluation of the impact of these actions on pupils' learning is not yet sharp enough.

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

- Enable the senior leadership team to fulfil its roles and responsibilities in monitoring and evaluating the whole school – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has provided effective support to resolve personnel issues. A new adviser is getting to know the school and is supporting the school's monitoring and evaluation of progress as well as brokering support from literacy and numeracy consultants. These consultants have been particularly effective in supporting subject leaders in evaluating standards and progress and setting priorities for further development.

The locum headteacher speaks very highly of the support she receives from the NLE. Appropriately this relationship is developing so that the locum headteacher is taking more and more responsibility for suggesting and initiating actions. Teachers from the NLE's school have been very effective in supporting teachers with their planning and delivery of lessons. Visits to their classrooms have been very helpful for staff to share and develop practice.