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Mr Mark Lunn
Headteacher
Wellsprings Primary School
Crowcombe Road
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Somerset
TA2 7NF

Dear Mr Lunn

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Wellsprings Primary School

Following my visit with Anne Wright, additional inspector, to your school on 5 and 6 October 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2011. 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

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 Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2011

- By Summer 2012 raise attainment and achievement of all pupils and especially in English and for more able pupils.
- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that teachers' assessments are used to set clear learning objectives which meet the needs of all pupils, especially the more able
 - monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning with much greater emphasis on the progress made by pupils in different year groups and of different abilities.
- Make effective use of the tracking data and assessments of pupils' progress to:
 - set challenging targets to increase pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics
 - set clear measurable success criteria for the school's development plans
 - close gaps in children's knowledge and understanding of communication, language and literacy in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Special measures: monitoring of Wellsprings Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 5–6 October 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, a Parents' Champion, a representative from the local authority, and the National Leader in Education who is coordinating external support for the school.

Context

There have been no significant changes to the school's leadership, personnel or context since the last section 5 inspection. The responsibilities of senior leaders have been reorganised to reduce the classroom teaching commitments of the headteacher and give assistant headteachers more direct line-management responsibilities for improving outcomes in English and mathematics.

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

The most recent, as yet unvalidated, national test results for Year 6 pupils showed a marked rise in pupils' overall attainment in English and mathematics. The proportion of pupils reaching the nationally expected Level 4 and above slightly exceeded the national averages in both subjects. The proportions reaching the higher Level 5 and above, however, was well below the national average, although the gap between school and national results narrowed from the previous year. While these results represent improved attainment, they still reflect some key weaknesses in pupils' progress given their prior attainment, particularly for higher attainers. Attainment at Key Stage 1 also improved overall in 2011 to move closer to the national average. However, in both writing and mathematics, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 3, while improved, remained low. Assessments for the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2011 showed that outcomes had moved close or closer to the national average in most areas of learning, including in communication, language and literacy.

In lessons, pupils mostly enjoy their work and have very positive attitudes to learning. Still, by Years 5 and 6, the quality of work for a significant minority is constrained by weaknesses in basic skills, for example of spelling, punctuation and grammar, but all show a determination to improve. Where pupils are clear about their objectives they move their learning forward well. However, occasionally, pupils spend too long working on low-level tasks where they are not sufficiently challenged to extend their thinking.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- By Summer 2012 raise attainment and achievement of all pupils and especially in English and for more able pupils – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The last inspection report found all aspects of pupils' personal development to be at least satisfactory, and there were no key areas for improvement in this regard. Pupils' good behaviour makes a very positive contribution to the quality of their learning in class, although a small minority can become restless or disengaged if they spend too long listening to the teacher or watching 'on the mat'. Pupils are very polite, courteous and keen to help.

The effectiveness of provision

In the majority of lessons seen on this inspection teaching was good, and this is a clear improvement on the position at the last inspection. Teachers have worked hard alongside external consultants to improve the learning and engagement of pupils in their classes. Clear strengths are emerging in a number of respects. Activities are often well planned and managed to incorporate a variety of enjoyable activities. Teachers use resources well, including the use of interactive whiteboards to display powerful images. In lessons in Years 5 and 6 classes, highly effective use was made of 'visualisers' to share pupils' work with the class. This enabled both helpful exemplification of good work and the development of pupils' evaluative skills by exploring the strengths and weaknesses of pieces of writing or drawing. Teachers' questioning of pupils in whole-class or small group discussions is generally very effective in drawing out extended answers, thereby developing pupils' confidence and speaking skills. As lessons proceed, teachers assess pupils' understanding well in identifying those who are having difficulties. They are, however, generally less effective in identifying where pupils are finding work too easy and need to be moved on to more challenging activities. There are still instances where pupils spend too long listening to large amounts of information being delivered by the teacher.

Teachers' use of assessment information to set clear learning objectives and to show pupils how to improve is strengthening. The use of the national Assessing Pupil Progress approach has become established in English since the last inspection, and as a result teachers are increasingly able to give pupils specific and helpful targets to raise their attainment in that subject. This is greatly valued by the pupils themselves, who are generally able to clearly identify what they need to do to improve and carry this through in their work. The school is now rightly rolling out a similar approach in mathematics. Teachers' marking of pupils' work is regular but variable in quality. In English across all years there are some examples of very effective marking, well linked to pupils' targets and the success criteria for individual pieces of work. In other subjects marking is generally much less precise and helpful.

The school's electronic pupil tracking system is now generating effective information to show which pupils are making expected progress and to identify those falling behind. This information is available to parents and carers through the school website, and will this year be used to generate half-termly reports, enabling parents and carers to become more involved in a dialogue about their children's progress. Where pupils are identified as not making the progress expected of them, the school has a wide range of interventions available to boost that progress. For example, the headteacher is providing additional support to a group of boys in Year 4 whose writing skills have not improved sufficiently. The success of these interventions has yet to be systematically measured to determine their relative impact.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching and learning – good

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the school went into special measures, its work has been subject to a high degree of scrutiny in order to identify what can be improved to raise standards. Staff have been involved in a significant amount of school improvement activities, including monitoring, training and development. There has been no staff turnover and little staff absence. The headteacher and other leaders have successfully ensured that the whole school community has remained highly cohesive and shown a real determination to improve. There is clear evidence of impact of the monitoring and development activities undertaken, in rising attainment and improved teaching. School improvement planning sets out clear strategies, detailed actions, and offers clear success criteria against which progress is systematically reviewed and evaluated.

At all levels in the school, however, there remains a lack of a clear understanding of the standard methods of comparing the school's performance with that of pupils in other schools nationally. This is a key shortcoming. As a result, targets for pupils' attainment and progress have often been set too low to help the school to quickly close gaps between its performance and the national averages. The school's new systems for assessment and tracking are beginning to address this problem, but not enough use is made of this data for comparative purposes. The governing body has significantly broadened the skills it can offer to support the school in many aspects of its leadership and development, including in financial controls. However, it recognises that it has lacked the skills and the quality of information to hold the school fully to account for its academic performance. The appointment of two parents' champions represents a positive step forward in promoting better engagement with parents and carers. The school is now in the process of ensuring that information about the role of the parents' champions and how to contact them is visible and accessible to all parents and carers.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Make effective use of the tracking data and assessments of pupils' progress to monitor and improve school effectiveness – satisfactory

External support

The National Leader in Education has successfully developed the skills of school leaders to use the results of monitoring activities to plan and carry out improvements. She has helped to coordinate support from the local authority which has been extensive and intensive. The local authority's Statement of Action meets requirements. It sets out clearly the range and purpose of its activities to support school improvement, although the targets it sets for the improvement of both teaching quality and pupils' attainment are, in places, too low to drive the rapid improvements necessary to move the school out of special measures. The support already provided, though, has been demonstrably effective in raising pupils' attainment and significantly improving the quality of teaching.