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7 October 2011

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

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Combe Martin Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4 and 5 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 third 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 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 in 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 is accurate and analyzing it 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 third monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 October 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, observed lessons and looked at a range of the pupils' work and teachers' planning. HMI talked with pupils during the visit and met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body, members of staff and representatives from the local authority.

Context

The academic year has begun with all classes having a full-time teacher which creates a greater sense of stability. The newly appointed Early Years Foundation Stage leader is a member of the senior management team and is building on the changes introduced by her predecessor. Another member of the senior management team has taken on the role of special educational needs coordinator. The teacher seconded to the school for two terms during the last academic year has agreed to stay for a further year and retain her role as assistant headteacher.

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

The 2011 Year 6 statutory assessments showed a significant improvement in pupils' attainment in English. However, results in mathematics have fallen further behind the national average than was the case in 2010. These results were based on the secure data which the school is now able to draw on. Mathematics remains an area of concern, but there is a clear action plan to address this. Progress remains inconsistent between classes. Gaps in prior learning still need to be addressed to ensure pupils reach the expected attainment levels in all classes and there is not a need to 'catch up' in Years 5 and 6. Writing is also acknowledged by the school as being weaker, but masked in the overall English results by a relative strength in reading. Writing is weaker because pupils have not consistently been encouraged to write at length or for a specified purpose. The school is actively finding ways to address this, for example by making links to the local tourist organisation so pupils can produce advertising materials. Rapidly improving provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is establishing a firm basis for learning, but this must be consistently consolidated as pupils move through the school. Pupils continue to report that they enjoy their lessons and this is demonstrated in the enthusiasm with which they respond to questions and apply themselves to the tasks they are set.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The average attendance rate for the last academic year was above the national average at 95.1% and this trend has continued into the start of the autumn term. The administrator who monitors attendance does so assiduously; placing a reminder

to parents and carers about their responsibility in the newsletter and working with the school council to encourage good habits. There are no pupils who persistently fail to attend and the school's education welfare officer has been successful in supporting particular families where previously attendance has been a cause for concern.

Pupils like coming to school and one boy told the inspector how much he looks forward to school days because his teachers are so helpful. The atmosphere in the school is calm and welcoming. Pupils behave well and staff effectively support and manage those specific pupils whose behaviour can, at times, be challenging.

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

- improve pupils' attendance – good.

The effectiveness of provision

The teaching and learning policy, which was newly introduced at the time of the previous visit, is clearly having a positive effect. Teachers have moved forward in their understanding of what constitutes a good lesson. Although there is a core of teaching in the school which is consistently of the highest quality, in other classes there is still work to be done. The leadership team has taken a number of appropriate actions to improve teaching and continues to act upon weaknesses. In the weaker lessons teachers do not match tasks to pupils' needs nor provide clear instructions so that pupils understand what they need to do. In the best lessons teachers are highly skilled in using open-ended questioning to challenge pupils, assess their understanding and extend their use of language. Collaborative planning has been successfully introduced. By working together, plans clearly demonstrate that the teachers are building on pupils' skill levels and identifying gaps in pupils' previous learning. However, in some classes, planning and execution are not always in accord.

Teachers are becoming more adept and confident in using the school system for recording and interrogating assessment data at specified points in time. The bank of information on pupils' progress is growing and more rigorous moderation is ensuring that it is accurate and valid. As a result, there is greater evidence in teachers' medium-term plans of how the needs of individual pupils will be met. Within lessons teachers' skills in assessing pupils' responses through marking, questioning or observation are less consistent. The best practice can be seen in Years 4, 5, and 6 where pupils understand their targets, are absolutely clear about what they need to do to improve, make constant reference to the learning walls where the targets are displayed, and, use peer assessment with great maturity.

Improvements in the Early Years Foundation Stage, which were identified during the previous visit, have been consolidated and the provision further enhanced. Children are offered a range of interesting and purposeful activities across the six areas of learning and are supported towards making independent choices. The children have only been in full-time education for a very short period of time but already the

majority are confident and keen to talk about what they are doing. The outdoor area is still being developed but is vastly improved since the school was placed in special measures. The children now move freely between the classroom and the outdoor area where interesting activities and new equipment provide a stimulating environment. Assessment of children on entry to the school is secure; their physical development and knowledge and understanding of the world are strengths. Children's communication, language and literacy and calculation are less well developed.

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 – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher and assistant headteacher are having greater impact on the quality of pupils' experiences. The areas for development identified at the time of being placed in special measures are being systematically addressed, although there is recognition that the pace at which teaching is being improved must accelerate. The headteacher shows great resilience and has made some difficult, though necessary, decisions. Although there is still much to be achieved, she has brought a greater sense of purpose to the school and is raising expectations. She has secured full staffing for this term and has begun to plan for the future needs of the school. Key responsibilities have been strategically and appropriately reallocated to recognise individual strengths. Responsibility for numeracy and the wider curriculum rests with the assistant headteacher who has put in place effective action plans and a monitoring process. Despite last year's poor Year 6 mathematics results, the initial predictions for the year group were ten percentage points lower, so there is already evidence of the impact of her work. Literacy, and writing in particular, have now become a corporate responsibility with the headteacher retaining overall accountability. This has been agreed quite recently so has yet to demonstrate the efficacy of the strategy. It has also allowed the senior leader with previous responsibility for literacy to take over as special educational needs coordinator and raise the status of this important role.

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

- develop the effectiveness of middle leadership – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority monitors the implementation and impact of the school's and local authority's action plan regularly and effectively. It provides good support to the school, particularly with regard to personnel issues and in augmenting the school budget. There is ongoing work to support senior leaders and managers which has included an audit of the special educational needs provision and training for the new special educational needs coordinator.