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Miss J 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 to your school on 13 and 14 March 2012, 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 June 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 – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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 June/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 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

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 13 and 14 March 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. All teachers were observed on at least one occasion and these observations were carried out alongside the headteacher. A learning walk to observe the teaching pupils receive when their class teacher has time for planning and strategic management duties was also undertaken. The inspector looked at reports from the local authority, the governing body minutes and the schools data about pupils' progress.

Context

Staffing has remained stable since the beginning of the academic year; this is a significant step forward and has contributed to high staff morale. However, senior staff and the governing body recognise that the staffing capacity will be difficult to sustain in such a small school. As a result, the governing body are actively exploring partnership opportunities with local high-performing schools. A programme of refurbishment is under way which is having a positive impact in the school corridors and on the wider learning environment.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are progressing well and demonstrate positive attitudes towards their learning; a good starting point for their future education has been established. The children are particularly confident at counting and thrive on physical activities.

Rates of progress throughout the school are accelerating and standards are rising. Historically, pupils' weaker achievement has been in mathematics and writing, both becoming stronger as the result of more focused teaching. The quality of pupils' written work has improved considerably as they are writing for purpose and activities are engaging. This was particularly noticeable in the Early Years Foundation Class where they were labelling a dinosaur model and writing about their first-hand experience on a recent trip. In Key Stage 2, the posting of pupils' written work onto a blog site, shared with similar schools throughout the world, has proved inspirational and has greatly increased pupils' confidence and the amount they write, particularly for boys.

An analysis of the school's assessment information, pupils' work books and lesson observations demonstrate that the majority of pupils make at least satisfactory

progress in English and mathematics. There is also evidence that the percentage of pupils making accelerated progress in these subjects is increasing so the gap between the levels they should be reaching for their age and what they are currently attaining is narrowing at an increasingly fast rate.

The quality of teaching

The school makes effective use of its own good and outstanding practitioners to improve the consistency of teaching. Over 50% of the teaching in the school is typically good or better and, in some classes, it is consistently of the highest calibre. Although there have been significant improvements since the previous monitoring visit, there remains some inconsistency and school leaders and managers are taking determined and considered action to address this. In two of the outstanding lessons, teachers demonstrated their expertise in asking probing questions which moved pupils' learning forward, assessed their understanding and required the pupils to develop their own thinking and problem-solving skills. Pupils found the work challenging but achievable and everyone remained engaged and able to participate. Where teaching is less effective, it is because continuous assessment is not being used to modify teachers' daily planning, so tasks are not matched to pupils' differing needs and abilities. Pupils are not sufficiently challenged by the tasks they are given and are more likely to become restless and unsettled.

Support staff are dedicated, hard working and integral to supporting learning in all classes. Where pupils have the most extreme level of need, support staff are especially skilful in facilitating pupils' learning, monitoring progress and challenging pupils to achieve alongside their peers.

Marking is consistent throughout the school and the policy for highlighting and annotating work is understood by staff and pupils. As a result of this effective marking, a dialogue has opened up both written and face to face between teachers, pupils and their peers. Pupils assess and positively criticise their own and each other's work so they clearly understand next steps and how they can make improvements.

Since the school was placed in special measures, good progress has been made to improve all aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage and this pace of change has continued. Systems for assessing the children's progress in the six areas of learning are secure and well documented. 'Learning Journals' are used well to help the children reflect on their own learning and actively engage parents in the process. Resources and activities in both the classroom and outdoor area are carefully planned and inviting and guide the children towards increasing independence.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching – good.
- Improve the provision in the Foundation Stage – good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils continue to enjoy coming to school and they are keen to talk about their experiences, which they find fun and exciting. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good and pupils are extremely friendly and supportive of each other. Having made significant strides to raise attendance to above the national average last year, there was a slight fall towards the end of the autumn term following a spate of illness. Attendance is now back on track and during the inspection stood at 94.5%. There are no pupils who persistently fail to attend. A small number of pupils who are sometimes late in the morning are being carefully monitored and the school works closely with the educational welfare officer to address this.

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

- Improve pupils' attendance – good.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

There have been further advances in the capacity of the leadership team to improve provision and raise standards. The headteacher, assistant headteacher and Early Years Foundation Stage leader have a clear vision for the future which is evident in their strategic planning. The headteacher is able to see beyond the immediate future of the school and is thinking and planning positively for the long term. Leaders and managers have made effective decisions based on accurate monitoring and evaluation and taking full account of inspection evidence. This has led to improvements in teaching, an audit of special educational needs provision and reorganisation of resources. There is a clear focus on raising attainment and accelerating pupils' progress.

Senior leaders are now confident to delegate to middle managers, who are making a more positive contribution as they gain confidence and understand their role. They are beginning to take greater responsibility for their subject areas, starting to analyse data and use this to engage teachers in a conversation about individual pupils and teaching strategies. They have produced action plans and are preparing to report to the governing body.

The Chair of the Governing Body has played a significant role in the school's development. He has brought rigour to the monitoring of the school's action plan and developed the understanding of the Governing Body so that they know the questions which need to be asked to hold leaders and middle leaders to account.

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

- Develop the effectiveness of middle leadership – good.

External support

The local authority has been consistent in providing good monitoring, challenge and support, which has placed the school in a much stronger position. While all staff are appreciative of the advice and support they have received, they no longer need nor feel reliant on this coming from an external source. Leaders and managers are now able to be selective when choosing the package of support they require; this is now more likely to be of an administrative nature from human resources or finance.