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Colin Ellyatt
Acting Headteacher
Sheepscombe Primary School
Far End
Stroud
GL6 7RL

Dear Mr Ellyatt

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Sheepscombe Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5–6 December 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2012. 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 – good

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 Gloucestershire.

Yours sincerely

Jane Neech

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2012

- Raise pupils' achievement in English and mathematics by:
 - ensuring that assessments of pupils' learning provide a reliable and accurate basis for measuring their progress and planning the next steps
 - making better use of learning time during the school day, ensuring that in afternoon sessions there is time to complete activities.

- Ensure that by January 2013 all teaching and learning are at least satisfactory and most is good by:
 - making sure that the work planned meets the needs of all pupils
 - raising teachers' expectations of the quality, quantity and presentation of pupils' work
 - monitoring pupils' progress in reading more closely
 - routinely providing pupils with feedback about their achievements and next steps during lessons and through marking in books
 - sharing the features of good teaching.

- Develop the capacity of staff and governors to understand and use information about pupils' progress and school performance to bring about improvements to teaching and achievement.

Special measures: monitoring of Sheepscombe Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 5–6 December 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, studied documents, including the raising achievement plan, and met with the acting headteacher, staff, parents and carers, the Chair of the Governing Body and governors. The inspector met with a representative from the local authority and talked to another representative over the phone. The inspector and the acting headteacher did five lesson observations together and talked to pupils about their work, as well as hearing some pupils read.

Context

The executive headteacher has left. Since October the school has been led by an acting headteacher who has been seconded from another school. One teacher is on long-term sick leave. A supply teacher is covering her teaching responsibilities. Pupils are now taught in two classes, one of which is for Reception and Key Stage 1 and the other is a Key Stage 2 class. There are no Year 3 pupils. A very small number of nursery-age children attend sessions on a few days a week.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The performance of pupils in Key Stage 2 is now more even in each year group. School tracking, which checks how well pupils are doing, shows that pupils' progress in Years 4 and 5 in reading and writing is now speeding up. This is because the teachers who share the mixed-age Key Stage 2 class are both persistent in their high expectations of what pupils can achieve, and so they are currently doing well, particularly in English. Better teaching and extra help is now helping to close the gaps in pupils' performance in mathematics. The school meets the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress.

Pupils in Key Stage 1 use their knowledge of the sounds letters make (phonics) when working out unfamiliar words in their reading books. Pupils continue to enjoy reading the new books purchased by the school. Staff check how well pupils are doing and this shows that most read fairly regularly. Nevertheless, the progress of pupils in reading is not yet accelerating quickly enough. The school agrees that more needs to be done, such as additional group sessions which teach pupils the skills of reading and more individual reading sessions for pupils to practise skills.

The checking of the nursery and reception children's progress is now accurate. The 'Magic Moments' journals contain observations of how well children are getting on. These are very well presented with written comments from staff, photographs and

contributions from parents and carers. The acting headteacher has quickly introduced a system for checking how well pupils progress. This has been welcomed by staff for planning next steps to move pupils on in English and mathematics. The assessment system is particularly successful in setting targets for pupils in lessons, including for those who need extra help or have special educational needs, by raising the expectations of what pupils can achieve.

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

- Raise pupils' achievement in English and mathematics – good

The quality of teaching

Since the last monitoring inspection the acting headteacher has successfully focused on building teachers' skills and confidence. These actions are improving the quality of teaching. Expectations of the amount of work pupils can do in lessons are higher and the presentation of their work has improved. Pupils say that teaching is much more exciting. In a Key Stage 2 English lesson the teacher set the scene for pupils to write a report, by involving them in a short piece of drama. Pupils threw themselves into the acting and everyone wanted to answer questions relating to the task. Pupils gave examples from their reports and explained the technical elements well, such as how they used embedded clauses in their sentences. The activities set in English and mathematics lessons are now better matched to the abilities of the pupils. Teachers now put National Curriculum levels for each pupil on their plans and these are linked to pupils' targets. Parents and carers say they have a much clearer understanding of their children's targets and appreciate the useful information the school gives them.

In lessons, the way in which teachers question pupils is helping them to make better progress. The most skilful teachers keep probing pupils' answers, such as in mathematics, which means pupils go back and check their calculations or improve their work. In these lessons no time is wasted and pupils are keen to do well. Sometimes questions are still too general in the mixed-age Key Stage 1 class and so some pupils are woolly about what they are learning.

During lessons teachers routinely stop everyone to find out how well pupils are getting along. Teachers show the class, or talk about examples of work, which helps others to improve theirs. At the end of lessons teachers give pupils the chance to say how well they think they have understood what they have learnt. This is now a regular feature of English and mathematics lessons. There are more opportunities for pupils to respond to teachers' marking in their English and mathematics books, such as writing comments about how well they have done.

In the mixed Key Stage 1 and Early Years Foundation Stage class some activities excite the children to have a go at early writing and counting skills. In Santa's Grotto, reception-age children wrote lists for Father Christmas and added up the number of items on the list, correctly adding a few more to make a total.

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

- Ensure that by January 2013 all teaching and learning are at least satisfactory and most good – good

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour in most lessons is exemplary and this is helping pupils to achieve better results. Relationships in lessons are very good and pupils enjoy working together. The acting headteacher has quickly got to know all the pupils in a very short time. Older pupils like the way he talks to them about their favourite football teams or their activities outside school. Year 5 and Year 6 pupils were particularly impressed by the way in which the headteacher dressed up in spotty pyjamas, along with pupils, as part of a charity day. He has continued to focus on rewards for kindness and has high expectations of how pupils should behave at all times. As a result, he has won the respect of all the pupils.

Parents and carers say the headteacher is always 'out and about' at the start of each day, encouraging their children to do well. This, together with the teachers' newly found confidence and enthusiasm for teaching, has rubbed off on the pupils. Parents and carers say their children are really enjoying their learning and more pupils are now regularly on time for school.

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

- Raise pupils' achievement – good
- Improve teaching – good

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting headteacher has very quickly got to grips with what needs to improve and has transformed the way in which the school works. He has made the performance of teachers and their training a high priority. The English subject leader has received training on the sounds letters make and so is better placed to support the teaching of phonics and reading in Key Stage 1. Staff report that they have learnt so much more in staff meetings over the last term and so their confidence in teaching has grown. Parents and carers are extremely impressed and say leadership is now 'fantastic'. Teachers have target areas to improve in their teaching and are clearly accountable for the progress of pupils in their classes. Those earning higher salaries are now expected to shoulder more of the responsibility for school improvement.

The community is fully behind the high aspirations of the headteacher in wanting the best of each pupil. Members of the village community along with parents and carers help with a range of activities, such as hearing pupils read. Parents and carers say

the community spirit has been strengthened by the headteacher and they feel very comfortable about talking to staff.

The governors continue to grow in strength. New governors have brought different skills to the governing body and have quickly begun to use these to support school improvement, for example linking with staff to look at how mathematics is taught in Key Stage 1. The governors have attended training. They have a clearer understanding of how to use information about pupils' progress as a tool to raise the standard of education in the school. Consequently, the governors have challenged the acting headteacher to continue to raise school performance. The headteacher has not taken his eye off the task for a second. He has written a new action plan for school improvement, which has a sharper focus on raising pupils' performance through improving the quality of teaching. Where pupils need extra help to catch up in their work, governors have considered how to support this, such as using the small amounts of extra government funding available to the school. Governors and staff are fully involved in promoting equal chances for all pupils to do well, by reviewing and acting on what needs to be better. They now need to tweak the improvement plan to include more precise evaluations of whether actions taken have been successful in improving the quality of teaching and raising attainment.

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

- Develop the capacity of staff and governors – good

External support

The local authority has made sure no time has been lost in improving the standard of education at Sheepscombe, by arranging for the acting headteacher to lead the school. It has put finances in place to support his leadership and the training for staff and governors. Representatives from the local authority regularly meet with the headteacher to see if teaching and pupils' achievement are improving quickly enough. They have encouraged and supported staff in visiting other schools to learn new ways of working.