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7 March 2013

Elsbeth Murano
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Murano

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Sheepscombe Primary School

Following my visit to your school on Tuesday 5 to Wednesday 6 March 2013, 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 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 – 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 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 third monitoring inspection on 5–6 March 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, staff, parents and carers, and the Chair of the Governing Body and governors. The inspector met with a representative from the local authority. The inspectors carried out three lesson observations, two of which were joint observations with the acting headteacher. The team talked to pupils about their work and carried out a scrutiny of pupils' English and mathematics books.

Context

At the end of December the temporary acting headteacher left. Since January the school has been led by a new acting headteacher. One teacher has returned from a period of sick leave. Four pupils have joined the school, increasing the number on roll to 37. Pupils are taught in two classes, one of which is a Reception and Key Stage 1 class, and the other is a Key Stage 2 class. A very small number of nursery-age children attend sessions run during the week. A new governor has joined the governing body.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Since the last monitoring inspection the steps forward in pupils' performance have been uneven. Pupils across the school are not yet catching up to where they need to be, at the same rate. The strongest performance is in Key Stage 2 in reading and writing. School information shows that, from Year 5 onwards, boys and girls are on track to catch up in mathematics and exceed expectations in English. This is because teaching and assessment are generally robust. While some better teaching in mathematics is helping to close the gaps in pupils' performance, pupils' progress in the subject has yet to speed as rapidly as in English. The school meets the government's floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

In Key Stage 1, pupils' progress in reading and writing is being maintained. Since the last monitoring inspection the school has put additional sessions in place for group and individual reading. However, school tracking information shows that standards in reading are not yet rising rapidly enough. Year 2 pupils write confidently and use their knowledge of the sounds letters make (phonics) to attempt to spell new words, but expectations in lessons are not always high enough for these pupils to achieve as well as they can.

At the time of the last monitoring inspection a new assessment system was introduced. This is working successfully in Key Stage 2 and contributing to the better progress pupils are making. In Key Stage 1 assessments and targets do not always match well enough to the levels pupils are working at. Pupils are sometimes not clear about what they need to include in their writing to move to the next level, such as adding in adjectives and adverbs, or correctly punctuating sentences. Less progress has been made in the presentation and content of pupils' writing in Year 1. Added to this, the advice pupils receive does not always help them to improve their work, because sometimes it is not matched well enough to pupils' abilities.

The new system for checking how well pupils are doing and improved teaching is having a positive impact on raising standards in Key Stage 2, including for those who need extra help or have special educational needs. While progress has been maintained there has not been the same impact on raising standards in Key Stage 1.

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

- Raise pupils' achievement in English and mathematics – satisfactory

The quality of teaching

Since the last monitoring inspection the acting headteacher has continued to focus on building teachers' expertise. The impact of training and measures in place to improve teaching is, however, now unequal across the school. The quality of teaching in Key Stage 1 is not improving quickly enough. The acting headteacher has invested time in training and refining resources for teaching phonics and this supports pupils' spelling and reading. In a literacy lesson for Year 1 and Year 2, pupils were provided with word banks and picture clues related to their writing topic. This encouraged them to use appropriate vocabulary, for example, when writing about how milk is transported from the farm to the shops. Pupils who are new to the school and are at the early stages of learning to speak English are provided with pictures and words to help them and so make progress in constructing simple sentences. However, work in books over time shows that marking does not always help pupils improve their work. Expectations of what pupils can achieve in lessons have not risen quickly enough to raise standards. While resources have improved the impact on pupils' learning and progress over time have been slow and so gaps in attainment are also slow to narrow.

The consistency in the quality of teaching of literacy in Key Stage 2 is having the most effect on improving pupils' learning and progress. The work in pupils' books demonstrates their increasing competence in writing for different purposes and for different audiences. Marking is detailed and gives pupils advice about improving their work. There are routine opportunities in lessons for pupils to go over or improve a previous piece of work. Teachers who share the Key Stage 2 class check how well pupils are doing in lessons and the quality of their questioning generally deepens pupils' understanding. However, in some lessons, for example mathematics,

teachers' questions are not challenging enough for pupils of different abilities to do as well as they can.

Interventions for pupils who need extra help are better matched to their needs than previously. This is because systems for assessing the levels pupils are working at are now accurate. The information is used to provide extra help in reading, writing and mathematics. There is a sharper link between the support provided by teaching assistants to individuals or small groups and the work planned by class teachers. This means that the interventions are beginning to be more effective in helping pupils catch up or fill in the missing gaps in their understanding, such as in Key Stage 2 skills in mathematics.

Activities planned for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage continue to excite children to have a go at writing. During the monitoring inspection children were keen to take clipboards outside to record what they could see. There is a greater link between activities planned for the reception and nursery children. Improvements to the learning environment mean that children can work and play on their own and choose what to do. Nursery-age children confidently join in with the reception children when playing inside and outside.

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 – satisfactory

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents and carers say the community feel of the school is strong and they are right. The importance of the community extends into the village and beyond so that the school has a central role in the locality. In school, relationships in lessons continue to be positive. This supports pupils' attitudes to learning. In lessons, pupils discuss their ideas with a learning partner, for example in preparation for writing. However, the impact of pupils' positive attitudes has yet to raise achievement consistently across the school.

Where pupils need extra help in knowing how to behave appropriately in lessons this is well supported by teaching assistants and so pupils are able to participate fully in lessons. Pupils play well together at break times. At lunchtimes pupils play sensibly with a range of equipment and demonstrate that they know how to keep themselves and others safe. Parents and carers say that their children are happy at school and those who have recently joined settle quickly and make new friends.

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

- Raise pupils' achievement – satisfactory

- Improve teaching – satisfactory

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The school has undergone three changes in leadership in a relatively short period of time. In taking over the school the acting headteacher has been mindful to obtain a comprehensive view of the school and its community. One member of staff commented that the new headteacher has 'honoured' all the systems and procedures that had been put in place by the previous temporary headteacher. In this way the transition from one leadership to another has been 'thought out' and planned. Consequently, the headteacher has gained the confidence of staff and parents and carers. However, the change of leadership has meant that there has been less impact on improving the weaker areas of teaching and learning.

The headteacher has carried out a review of school performance. She has used this as a baseline for assessing what needs to be done to improve teaching and learning. As yet regular monitoring activities to support and help teachers improve are to be established. From her evaluation, the headteacher has refined systems for school improvement further, such as a calendar of monitoring and professional development activities for staff. Teachers like the systems for information so they are fully informed of what is coming up and the focus for school improvement. They continue to feel involved in school self-evaluation and raising standards.

The headteacher expects teachers who are earning higher salaries to take on responsibilities commensurate with their remuneration. Through her raised expectation and the systems of checking how well teachers are performing this is now happening. Subject leaders are taking more responsibility for their area of work. The English subject leader is making a better contribution to school improvement by leading other staff and developing their understanding of assessment and checking how well pupils are doing in reading and writing. The most impact on raising achievement so far has been in Key Stage 2. The inclusion leader has recently got to grips with making sure that pupils who need extra help are receiving the correct interventions to support them with English and mathematics. She has a better handle on the progress information for these pupils than previously but it is too early to assess the impact on raising pupils' achievement.

Governors are regularly involved in monitoring how well the school is doing since the last monitoring inspection against the areas for improvement from the previous section 5 inspection. They have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses. Governors have considered how to support pupils who need extra help and planned how to spend the small amounts of extra government funding available to the school, such as for educational visits and teaching assistant support for groups and individuals over and above the usual support. In this way they are involved in promoting equal chances for all pupils. Some governors carry out observations of lessons in school with the headteacher to check on how well the quality of teaching

in all lessons is improving. They use their expertise to challenge and support the school to raise standards. The current headteacher, seconded from the local authority, has responsibility for the school fulltime and due to her other responsibilities is in the school for a minimum of three days a week. This reduces the impact on improving teaching and learning and raising school performance.

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

- Develop the capacity of staff and governors – satisfactory

External support

The local authority has provided the school with a new acting headteacher, but recognises the difficulties associated with putting a leader in place for part of the week. Representatives from the local authority meet regularly with the headteacher to assess whether actions from the improvement plan are improving teaching and learning and raising achievement.