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Elspeth 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 Thursday 11 to Friday 12 July 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 fourth 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 is 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 July 2013

Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and had a meeting with you and a representative from the local authority. I met with staff and talked to parents and carers. You and I carried out a learning walk in both classes to look at work on display and pupils' behaviour in lessons. We completed a scrutiny of pupils' English, mathematics and topic books. I had meetings with the English and mathematics subject leaders, and the leader for special educational needs. I had discussions with the Chair of the Governing Body and governors.

Context

You are continuing to lead the school as acting headteacher until the end of the summer term. The governing body has appointed a permanent full-time headteacher with a teaching responsibility, from September 2013. Staff changes mean that the Reception and Key Stage 1 class will be shared between the headteacher and another member of staff. The Chair of the Governing Body is stepping down and the vice-chair is taking over the role. Numbers of pupils in each year group remain small. However, there has recently been increased interest from new parents and carers looking to send their children to Sheepscombe Primary. The school meets the governments' floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Since the last monitoring inspection more pupils across the school are catching up to where they need to be. The strongest performance is in English. All pupils in Year 6 achieved expected levels in the recent English National Curriculum tests. Half of the pupils reached higher levels in reading and writing. This is because teaching and assessment remain consistently robust, as at the last monitoring visit. While half of the pupils in Year 6 achieved higher levels in mathematics, progress in this subject is not quite as rapid in the other year groups in Key Stage 2.

In Key Stage 1, pupils' progress in writing and mathematics is being maintained. The acting headteacher and English subject leader carefully review pupils' progress in phonics. School information shows that more pupils are confidently using their knowledge of the sounds letters make in their literacy work. During the monitoring inspection, Key Stage 1 pupils read their individual reading books to me. Pupils competently used their phonics knowledge to work out unfamiliar words in the text. The scrutiny of pupils' literacy books showed examples of how pupils used their phonics knowledge to spell new words. Progress in reading is improving because of

better teaching of reading and the expectation that pupils read regularly at home and at school. There is better use of learning time, so that pupils write at length, and expectations of what pupils can achieve are higher than previously. Longer pieces of writing observed showed how pupils connected ideas to create interesting narratives, for example, using phrases such as 'they fight to the death' when referring to dragons as part of an imaginative and engaging story.

The assessment system is now reliable and firmly embedded in all key stages. The assessments for Key Stage 1 and the targets are better matched to the levels pupils are working at. The accurate basis for measuring progress and planning next steps is having a positive impact on raising standards. The teacher responsible for the Early Years Foundation Stage has devised an effective tool for assessing how well children are doing. Children are making good progress in their learning and development. The end of Reception Year assessments have been externally validated as being accurate.

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

- Raise pupils' achievement in English and mathematics – good

The quality of teaching

Training for staff is now leading to improvements to teaching and learning. Teachers expect more of their pupils and generally set appropriately high challenges. Parents and carers report that their children say lessons are more interesting than previously. They say that their children enjoy learning about different curriculum topics. The displays of pupils' work in classes are purposeful and support pupils' learning. A literacy display in the Reception and Key Stage 1 class shows the better progress pupils are now making. Examples of pupils' written work cover a range of genre, including poetry. In Key Stage 2, pupils' topic folders demonstrate high-quality written work, both in quantity and presentation. However, this is not always the case in pupils' English and mathematics books where the quality of presentation is varied.

The best examples of teachers' written marking comments are detailed and give pupils advice about improving their work. In Key Stage 2 some marking is done orally, through discussion with the teacher or other pupils. Some marking in both key stages, however, remains as ticks, or a simple comment, praising what pupils have done well. There is still more work to be done to improve the consistency and quality of marking. At times, when marking gives advice, there is no evidence in the books that pupils have 'had another go' or corrected errors. Marking in English and mathematics would be even better if teachers routinely built time into lessons for pupils to act upon teachers' comments from previous lessons.

Interventions for pupils who need extra help continue to be well matched to their needs. Parents and carers speak highly of the work of the school in this area. The extra help provided for pupils in English and mathematics is helping pupils catch up to where they need to be. School information shows that some pupils are now making exceptional progress.

The activities planned for the reception children are purposeful. There is more time for children to select their own learning activities that match to their interests. Reception children are well prepared for the move to Year 1.

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 continues to be a strength. During the inspection some pupils joined their new class or year group in preparation for 'moving on' in September. Both classes in school are mixed-aged classes and pupils treat each other with care and respect. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning continue to support their progress. This is now raising achievement in all key stages.

Parents and carers report that their children are happy at school and everyone gets along well. During the inspection pupils ate their lunch outside in the orchard. Pupils either sat at picnic tables or on rugs chatting amiably to their friends, enjoying one another's company and the surroundings.

The school monitors how regularly pupils come to school as well as lateness. While attendance is not an area of improvement identified from the section 5 inspection, I agree with the acting headteacher and the governors that more could be done to improve attendance and punctuality. As yet, the school has not checked information on individual pupils' progress in their work against their attendance record.

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

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since the last monitoring inspection the acting headteacher has transformed the school's approach to leadership. She has led the school with an unflinching resolve to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the previous section 5 inspection. Her success is demonstrated by the improvements in teaching and learning and

pupils' achievement. As a result of staff training, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have a curriculum that is more appropriate for their age. There is a huge difference in the quality of leadership at all levels. Teachers with responsibility for a subject or an area of learning have 'stepped up to the mark' and are becoming 'experts' in their field. There is planned support for teachers new to the role of subject leader.

The school improvement plan is an effective working document, which involves all staff. Subject leaders' action plans feed into improvement planning. Sharper monitoring of teaching and learning gives school leaders a clearer picture of how well standards are rising, and what needs to be done to raise achievement further. Staff report that everyone has their part to play in the school's success. They welcome the higher expectations placed upon them, and the increased accountability. The system for checking how well teachers are performing underpins the school's work. The teachers who are earning higher salaries now have responsibilities commensurate with their remuneration. Staff share the features of good teaching. Subject leaders lead staff training and model aspects of teaching for colleagues. This approach has been instrumental in raising expectations.

Governors have carefully considered the future of the school by securing a permanent headteacher from September 2013. The induction of the new headteacher and handover has already begun. Parents and carers have welcomed the opportunity to meet informally with the new school leader. As a result, there are high expectations for the future, by building on what has been achieved thus far, and raising standards further. Governors have sensibly put plans for succession in place for when the Chair of the Governing Body steps down. Two governors are attending governor training in readiness for taking over lead roles within the governing body. The governing body continues to check how the small amounts of extra government funding (pupil premium) available to the school are spent. In this way they are fully involved in promoting equal chances for all pupils. A testament to this approach is the effective progress made by pupils who are vulnerable or at risk of falling behind.

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 been quick to support the mathematics subject leader, new to the role, by providing an experienced teacher from within the local authority to support and guide planning and subject leadership. This approach has been welcomed by staff, and is planned to continue in the new academic year.