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Mr W Grace
Headteacher
Norton Fitzwarren CE VC Community School
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TA2 6TB

Dear Mr Grace

Implementation of Norton Fitzwarren CE VC Community School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Susan Wheeler HMI and Brenda Cusdin HMI to your school on 8 and 9 June 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings which are recorded in the attached note.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the quality of the action plan; the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the school; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

The school's action plan is satisfactory.

The LEA's statement of action is satisfactory.

The school has made good progress since being subject to special measures.

The LEA's target date of December 2006 for the removal of special measures is realistic.

The school is permitted to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, the Director of Children's Services for Somerset and the Diocese of Bath and Wells. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF NORTON FITZWARREN CE VC COMMUNITY SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

Findings of the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures

During the visit 17 lessons or parts of lessons were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the co-ordinators for English, mathematics and special educational needs, the chair of governors and the LEA link school development adviser. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, the chair of the governing body, a representative from the LEA, and a representative of the diocese.

The school has an action plan that responds effectively to the areas for improvement outlined in the section 10 report. The actions are likely to raise standards and improve the quality of education provided. The phasing of actions is well reasoned. However, the plan places considerable workload on class teachers and manageability will have to be monitored carefully. The proposed strategy for monitoring the completion of tasks is sound. The long-term measures for judging whether standards are rising are appropriately challenging, but there is insufficient focus on shorter-term indicators. Usefully, the core support group, which includes the headteacher, deputy headteacher, chair of governors and LEA staff, is clearly charged with taking stock of strengths and weaknesses, and acting upon and responding to developments.

The LEA's statement of action is well coordinated with the school's action plan and is appropriate. There are sensible strategies in place to monitor the school's progress and for reviewing the effectiveness of their support.

In lessons, standards were mainly in line with the national age-related expectations. Occasionally, they were higher in mathematics, but sometimes lower in science. Most pupils made satisfactory progress and in some mathematics' lessons, pupils made significant gains. There were a few lessons where pupils consolidated skills, but this continued for too long and their learning did not move far enough. The lower attaining pupils made at least satisfactory progress, but higher attaining pupils were not always challenged sufficiently.

Teaching was good or very good in seven lessons. In these lessons, teachers were well prepared, carefully planned and provided appropriately challenging objectives. In the most effective sessions, there were high expectations of what pupils could achieve. The rest of the lessons were satisfactory bar one where expectations were too low and the pace was slow. Teachers used language carefully, set out to create an element of fun and in most there were clear objectives.

Characteristically, in all lessons seen, classroom routines operated smoothly and behaviour was managed well. Teaching assistants supported pupils constructively and helped them succeed at their tasks. They were appropriately briefed and usefully, they noted how well the pupils were learning. Relationships between the pupils and the adults were positive and conducive to learning.

The headteacher is leading the school forward well. He has recognised the areas for development and understands fully what needs to be put in place to eliminate the weaknesses and raise standards. Middle management's skills have been underdeveloped and relevant training is now under way. The chair of governors is actively committed to supporting the school and ensuring necessary improvements are secured. Encouragingly, she has a good grasp of the key developments required.

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons and around the school were good or very good. They were always interested in the activities provided. Pupils' voiced their ideas and were not afraid to do this even when uncertain.

The LEA has provided good support and its input is valued by the school. The support has been in a number of relevant curricular areas and for the governing body. The funding to release the headteacher from class teaching responsibility until August 2006, to support his work on improving the school, is beneficial in enabling expectations to be clarified and procedures to be set up.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: raise the standards in English, mathematics and science

Progress is good. Shorter term planning is more effective and aligned with national guidance. In English and mathematics, the guidance adopted provides a sound framework for developing knowledge and skills over time. More lessons are promoting learning efficiently and effectively. There are now timetabled sessions for science.

2: ensure that sufficient religious education is taught so that standards rise

No evidence sought on this area for improvement.

3: devise effective systems and structures to ensure better planning, monitoring and evaluation of the standards, the curriculum, teaching and learning

Reasonable progress has been made in this area for improvement. There are more effective systems for planning English and mathematics. The headteacher is insisting that there is a clearer accounting of the use of time, but this is not yet fully secure. The restructuring of the morning into shorter sessions is proving more

productive particularly for English and mathematics. A programme for monitoring and evaluating standards has begun.

4: improve the teaching, including assessment, and hence pupils' learning

Reasonable progress has been made in this area for improvement although the majority of tasks for developing this area are planned for the autumn term. Teachers' expectations have improved and the pace of learning is better. Pupils with special educational needs had work modified sufficiently so that they could make appropriate progress. In some, but not all classes, there was useful marking which indicated how well the pupils' had achieved the learning objectives.

5: improve the effectiveness of the governing body

Reasonable progress has been made in this area for improvement. The governing body has reviewed its structure. Governors have identified their skills and expertise and highlighted their training needs. Helpfully, they have assigned responsibilities for liaising with staff and agreed a protocol for visits to the school.

6: improve school development planning, linking this to financial planning

Reasonable progress has been made in this area for development. The school's action plan is setting an appropriate agenda for improvement. The funding to implement the plan has been secured and allocated carefully.