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Mr William Grace
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Grace

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF NORTON FITZWARREN C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 15 and 16 May 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in December 2004.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, subject leaders for English, mathematics, religious education (RE) and the Foundation Stage, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

There have been no staff changes since the last visit. However, there has been a reduction in the working time of some learning support assistants since April. One member of staff is to take maternity leave from the end of the summer term.

Achievement and standards

Since the last monitoring visit, the school has carried out a detailed assessment of pupils' achievement between the end of Year 2 and the end of Year 6. This was based on teachers' assessments of standards pupils had reached. The progress made is satisfactory in English and mathematics and good in science. This is an improvement on progress made last year by pupils aged eleven. In lessons and from scrutiny of workbooks, standards are satisfactory, although there are still a few higher attaining pupils who could do better. Pupils are making at least satisfactory progress in English, mathematics and science. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities have good levels of support and continue to do very well. Children in the Foundation Stage make satisfactory progress and the vast majority are reaching the levels expected towards the end of their first year in school.

The school has made very good use of recent test results to identify pupils who would benefit from additional help in English and mathematics and has been quick to put this in place. There is consistent use of targets which pupils know and work hard to reach. Last term's whole-school targets on punctuation helped considerably to raise pupils' standards in writing. Regular assessments and monitoring of progress have helped staff to set appropriate new targets for writing focusing on the use of a wider range of interesting vocabulary.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2004:

- raise standards in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

This is not an area for improvement and was not monitored on this visit.

Quality of provision

Teaching is at least satisfactory, with some outstanding features. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. The best lessons have a fast pace and teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do. Pupils are given interesting challenges which make them think and work hard. They are expected to be actively involved in lessons, sharing their ideas in small groups and the rest of the class. This helps them to clarify their thinking and gain confidence, but does not happen in all lessons. Teachers are most effective when they use these opportunities to assess what pupils know and understand. They ask appropriate questions to check if pupils have learnt what is expected and to identify what needs to be taught next. Where teaching is good, pupils are also given regular opportunities to assess their own work and to identify what they can do to improve. Marking is sometimes inconsistent and does not always provide pupils with sufficient guidance on how they could do better. However, teachers and learning support assistants

provide supportive advice throughout lessons to help pupils make progress. Learning support assistants are deployed very effectively to help pupils do their best. Most planning is good and identifies what pupils with differing attainment should be learning. Targets are clearly displayed in each classroom and are referred to regularly. However, many pupils do not understand that they can use what they have learnt in one subject when working in another. For example, they do not always consider their spelling when working in science or geography. Children in the Foundation Stage focus well on their work and try hard. Very good use is made of outdoor sessions in the woods to help make their learning fun and exciting.

Good use is made of a wide range of resources, including the computer suite. Teachers use interactive whiteboards extremely innovatively. For example, a mathematics programme based on the author Roald Dahl is used to develop pupils' understanding of partitioning numbers into thousands, hundreds, tens and units. Pupils particularly enjoy using this equipment and show great confidence when demonstrating their skills to others.

The curriculum framework continues to be developed with good support from the LA. The school has a series of appropriate actions planned for this term to integrate the Foundation Stage curriculum into the framework, to be led by a specialist LA adviser. Focus weeks for science and RE last term gave subject leaders a very good opportunity to gather information on how well their subject is taught and what pupils have learned. The main strengths are consistent planning and regular teaching of the subjects using the school's curriculum framework. In science, the subject leader identified the need for all teachers to plan according to what pupils should be learning and not just a series of interesting activities. The RE subject leader will focus on helping teachers develop pupils' understanding of other faiths and cultures with support from the diocese.

Pupils are well cared for and are given good support. Behaviour is excellent and there are good relationships between pupils and staff. Praise is used very effectively to help pupils understand what they do well. Adults are skilled in helping pupils to appreciate where they have made a mistake and how they can improve.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2004:

- improve teaching, including assessment, and hence pupils' learning – good
- ensure that sufficient religious education is taught so that standards rise – good.

Leadership and management

The headteacher continues to provide good leadership and is developing the strengths of his team successfully. Staff understand fully what has been

achieved and what still has to be done. They have been well guided and supported in working to improve the areas identified in the last inspection report and have clear priorities. Currently, the school is also focusing appropriately on issues raised in last term's monitoring report and has a structured programme of actions for this term. Improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and standards and progress have been enhanced considerably by the time the headteacher has been able to give to support staff and pupils. Subject leaders are gaining confidence and expertise through leading focus weeks when they observe lessons and review pupils' books and teachers' planning. They are developing good leadership and management skills which enable them to provide clear feedback to colleagues on strengths and areas for development in their subjects.

The headteacher and governors are working closely in the preparation of the next school development plan and in updating the school's self-evaluation. The current plan aligns appropriately with the school's finances. However, uncertainties are affecting short and long term planning, for example, over the impact of a proposed housing development nearby. The governing body is almost complete and continues to be well led. It is working very effectively to help the school improve. Governors have a clear understanding of the standards and achievement of pupils and what the school is doing to raise attainment. Good use has been made of a range of training opportunities provided for governors by the LA. The headteacher and governors know what has to be done to help pupils do as well as possible and have monitored the impact of developments very carefully. Quite rightly, the leadership team intends to consolidate what has been achieved to make sure improvements in teaching and learning and the raising of standards in English, mathematics and science are at least maintained or exceeded. The progress made in the key areas for improvement shows that the school's capacity to improve remains good.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in December 2004:

- improve the effectiveness of the governing body – good
- improve school development planning, linking this to financial planning – satisfactory progress.

External support

The school has gained from continued LA support, particularly the specialist guidance in science and governor training. The link adviser and consultants have provided effective help and advice for supporting improvements in teaching and learning. However, the core group organised by the LA to support the school has not met for a considerable time and this has resulted in a lack of objective monitoring of progress made. The work on assessment, led by the University of Plymouth, is providing staff with a variety of effective ways of finding out what their pupils know and understand.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Priorities for further improvement

- To provide consistent, regular opportunities for pupils to be more actively involved in lessons.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Somerset and the Diocesan Director of Education for Bath and Wells.

Yours sincerely

Susan Wheeler
H M Inspector of Schools