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14 February 2007

Mrs Maggie Mooney  
Interim Headteacher  
Huish Episcopi Primary School  
North Street  
Langport  
Somerset TA10 9RW

Dear Mrs Mooney

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HUISH EPISCOPI PRIMARY SCHOOL

### Introduction

Following my visit with Peter Kemble, Additional Inspector, to your school on 30 and 31 January 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 2006.

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

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, observed a staff training session and met with the interim headteacher, deputy headteacher, subject leader for mathematics, chair of governors, a group of Year 6 pupils and a representative from the local authority.

### Context

There have been extensive changes in staffing since the previous monitoring visit. The school has been led by the interim headteacher since November 2006. The substantive headteacher's absence was covered by two acting headteachers for short spells before the local authority brought in the interim headteacher. The substantive headteacher has resigned and the appointment

procedure for a new headteacher is underway. A new chair of governors was elected recently.

Two teachers have been absent and their classes were covered by temporary staff. Two new teachers joined the school at the beginning of this term. Staffing was restructured in October 2006 so that Year 2 pupils could be taught as a year group each morning, returning to their mixed-age classes in the afternoon.

### Achievement and standards

The school's assessments show that standards in writing and mathematics are below average. Written work sampled during the visit supports the school's view that too many pupils are underachieving. Since the last monitoring visit, however, pupils' progress has improved. The best progress is still in Years 5 and 6. Pupils in the Foundation Stage and in Years 4 to 6 generally make better progress than in other parts of the school because their work is often demanding and teachers' expectations are high. In Years 1, 2 and 3 there is a very wide range of attainment and levels of challenge are not always high enough, particularly for higher-attaining pupils.

### Personal development and well-being

The pupils' good personal development has been successfully maintained. Given the changes in staffing, this is particularly impressive. Pupils are really pleased that the interim headteacher is involving them in the daily running of the school. They conduct themselves sensibly and carry out responsibilities, such as pupil leader or class monitor, with enthusiasm. Pupil leaders report that they have successfully calmed minor disagreements during playtimes.

Behaviour is generally good in lessons, assemblies and playtimes. Older pupils are kind and considerate to younger pupils. Visitors are welcomed into the school and pupils speak confidently and politely to them. In lessons, levels of concentration are often good, even when tasks are not as challenging or interesting as they might be. Pupils are proud of their school and are keen to attend. Attendance continues to be good.

### Quality of provision

Since the last monitoring visit, the school has made appropriate improvements in teachers' short-term plans, assessment procedures and the curriculum. Staffing difficulties have lessened the impact of these sensible steps on pupils' achievement and standards.

Teachers are enthusiastic about the new guidelines and are working hard to implement them. There is more structure to teachers' planning than before. Lesson plans clearly reflect whole-school initiatives to raise the standards of

writing, punctuation and numeracy in all classes. Teachers are much more aware of the different levels of ability amongst their pupils and are more successful at planning activities of varying difficulty, particularly in English and mathematics lessons. The school has rightly focused on raising expectations and providing more challenging work. There is still work to be done in motivating and challenging pupils on a regular basis in Years 1 to 3.

The curriculum has been successfully reviewed and adjusted. Subjects are studied in greater depth than before. Teachers are using other subjects more effectively to promote pupils' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. For instance, Year 5 pupils produced some writing of good quality in an English lesson, helped by their reading of texts from their history topic about Greek heroes. The school has yet to audit the curriculum to ensure that there is sufficient coverage of the required national guidance on 'Every Child Matters'.

Marking is better. Most pupils benefit from helpful comments to move them on in their learning. Pupils are familiar with personal and class targets and both pupils and teachers refer to these regularly during lessons.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2006:

- Ensure that all pupils do as well as they should by matching teaching to their needs and covering the curriculum in sufficient depth in all classes – satisfactory progress.
- Strengthen marking and target setting so that pupils know better how to improve – satisfactory progress.

### Leadership and management

At the last monitoring visit, the school's major need was to secure effective leadership and management for the school. The interim headteacher has brought a clear direction to the leadership of the school. Rightly she has focused on the key priorities that had to be tackled for the school to move forward. The current school improvement plan usefully pinpoints tasks to be completed in the short term.

The interim headteacher has brought a management style that expects everyone to play their part and she encourages all to do so. The deputy headteacher has made a huge contribution in compiling and managing data about the pupils' attainment, and has ensured that difficult messages are not ducked. The staff share this openness about challenges and commitment to securing improvements. A constructive and thoughtful spirit was very obvious at the staff meeting and training session – a very different picture from the lack of shared purpose and direction at the last monitoring visit.

A major move forward is the new guidance for staff about aspects of their role (for example, on managing behaviour, teaching and learning, marking). The guidance clearly outlines expectations of staff and provides a valuable marker for monitoring whether there is greater consistency in classroom practice. The monitoring of teaching has usefully led to agreed targets for improvement, support and further training.

Recently, the governing body elected a new chair and recruited two additional members, extending the range of expertise. The new chair is keen to ensure that the various committees meet regularly and address their responsibilities. Difficulties in relationships are firmly in the past and the school community is working together on improvements. The new school improvement plan, rightly, expects the governors to work in partnership with the school to monitor and evaluate the school's progress. Developing this practice and building up these skills are very important if the school is to establish a secure capacity to improve.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2006:

- Improve the rigour of self-evaluation at all levels of leadership and management so that weaknesses in provision, particularly in teaching, are identified and appropriate action taken – satisfactory progress.

#### External support

The local authority has given good support to the school. Securing the interim headteacher, and initially the temporary locum headteachers, to cover the substantive headteacher's absence has enabled the school to move forward. The school improvement adviser's advice and support are highly valued. Staff and governors appreciate the quality of guidance from other advisers and consultants. The literacy training session observed was very effective and should enable on-going support to be focused very productively.

#### Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Children and Young People for Somerset.

Yours sincerely

Brenda Cusdin  
H M Inspector