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Ms L McLean
The Headteacher
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Dear Ms McLean

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF FINEDON MULSO CHURCH OF ENGLAND JUNIOR SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with George Logan, Additional Inspector, to your school on 27 and 28 February 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 June 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 16 lessons and an assembly, met with the headteacher, staff, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Following the section 5 inspection in June 2006, the school appointed an experienced deputy headteacher and has received support from a mentor head and a number of education consultants.

Achievement and standards

Some signs of improvement in pupils' progress have now started to come through as a result of the school's more recent actions. Although progress for many pupils, given their broadly average starting points, continues to be fragmented, so that standards across the school remain inadequate. In order to raise achievement and improve the consistency of learning across all year groups, the school continues to work on improving teaching.

In Year 3, two thirds of pupils now show improvement in their reading since November; but this still reflects an overall decline from the levels recorded at the end of Year 2. In mathematics, improvement since November has been marginal and represents an overall decline since Year 2. However, the improvement in pupils' performance in Year 4 is more secure with around two thirds of pupils improving in both reading and mathematics.

In the upper school, achievement is stronger overall. Around three quarters of Year 6 and the more able pupils in Year 5 made significant improvement in mathematics. However, less able pupils in Year 5 do not make enough progress. There is also a significant variation in the proportion of pupils improving their performance in reading. Whereas the majority of Year 6 pupils have made reasonable progress in their reading, only a quarter of Year 5 pupils have raised their standards in reading this year.

The school provides good support through individual tuition for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, particularly in reading. Nearly all of these pupils have made good progress for their stage of development and have significantly improved their reading scores this year.

No up to date data was available on writing at this monitoring visit, although scrutiny of work in books confirms that standards are below what is expected for pupils' ages. Across the school, pupils' performance is constrained by weak skills in handwriting and there is little evidence that this is improving in spite of the strategies which the school has implemented.

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

- raise standards throughout the school in English, mathematics and science and ensure pupils' targets for learning take full account of their prior attainment – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' attitudes are mostly good and pupils are keen to learn. The behaviour of the higher attaining pupils is usually good. The concentration skills of many of the lower attaining pupils are showing signs of improvement. Behaviour is

almost always well managed by the class teacher. The school has reasonably effective strategies for dealing with less desirable behaviour. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are not barriers to learning, but poor attendance of 10% of pupils and some punctuality issues undoubtedly hinder overall progress.

There are good relationships between staff and pupils, including support staff. Pupils sometimes enjoy their lessons, usually where they take an active role in the lesson and are not listening for too long. They are more successful when they are given clear, individual and relevant targets to work to. This is still not consistent across the school and not all staff have adopted the consistent approaches agreed upon by all. The pupils make a positive contribution to the school and wider community. Their lack of secure basic skills means that they still do not all have sufficient skills to contribute to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory or better in 14 of the lessons seen, including five good lessons. Teaching was inadequate in two lessons. These findings are similar to those found in the inspection and monitoring visit in 2006 and in the very recent local authority (LA) review. The school has not yet managed to reach the LA's target of all lessons being satisfactory or better, with at least a third being good or better. Weaknesses in teaching have not been totally eradicated. Whilst school monitoring shows some improvement over time, this has not been sufficiently sustained since the last visit to ensure satisfactory or better learning for all children.

The quality of teaching and learning remains inadequate, although it is more consistent in the upper school than the lower school. The marking of pupils' work is now better at informing pupils of how to improve, but the consistency of this is still in its early days. The setting of homework now follows the new school policy but it is too early to judge whether it is making a valuable contribution to pupils' progress.

Where teaching is good, lessons are well planned and lesson objectives are stated clearly so that pupils are clear what they are about to learn. Teachers explain concepts well and effectively challenge pupils through questioning to gain an awareness of their subject knowledge. Visiting specialist teachers provide good quality lessons which provide a valuable contribution to pupils' wider curriculum.

Where teaching is weak, pupils do not have sufficient basic skills to be able to solve problems because insufficient account has been taken of pupils' starting points and abilities. In other unsuccessful lessons, staff do not have sufficient knowledge to provide adequate and accurate explanations so pupils' understanding does not sufficiently improve. Pupils' concentration is

developing satisfactorily and subject rich vocabulary is now identified on the lesson plans, which is an improvement since the last monitoring visit.

The school has started to address the issue of accurate assessment of pupils' work in core subjects. Teachers' assessments are increasingly reliable and continue to influence their expectations of pupils' achievement and their daily lesson planning. However, LA targets set for the current year are unrealistic.

Teachers now plan lessons together in teams to ensure greater consistency of lessons across the school. English and science in the upper school and mathematics in the lower school all now benefit from setting, so staff have a more limited range of ability to plan for in each class. It is too early to judge the impact of the new arrangements. The school knows that some underachievers, particularly in mathematics, are struggling in their existing groups.

The care, guidance and support to help pupils with their learning is improving. Pupils have targets in all core subjects, which is an improvement since the last monitoring visit, but these are not always sufficiently closely matched to the needs of individuals or remembered by the pupils. Pupils' knowledge of expectations for their work is developing. The school has some good quality targeted support for pupils with learning difficulties and uses data effectively to assess pupils' needs. Systems to monitor attendance and punctuality are more rigorous. The school recognises it has worked hard with those families whose children's attendance is poor, but still has more to do to improve punctuality. Staff ensure that pupils both inside and around the school are safe. The pastoral care continues to be a strong feature of school life.

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

- improve the quality of teaching throughout the school, ensuring that all lessons are sufficiently challenging – inadequate
- improve the curriculum so that it provides suitable opportunities for pupils of all abilities in the mixed age classes to make progress in their learning – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Since the last monitoring visit the leadership team, which includes the deputy headteacher appointed last autumn and another of the curriculum coordinators, has really 'gelled' as a team. This is making a positive impact on the school and its systems. The monitoring of staff performance is now a common feature of the cycle of monitoring and evaluation which has been established. Since the last monitoring visit, the school has introduced more setting of pupils according to their ability. It has been able to do this because of improved tracking of pupils' progress. The leadership team and subject

coordinators now regularly monitor teaching and learning. The headteacher and deputy headteacher ensure that the generic upper or lower school plans are adapted to each group's particular needs. The school also undertakes regular work scrutiny to check on standards of children's work and checks that work is accurately marked. Marking is more consistent in quality than at the last visit, enabling pupils to have a better understanding of how to improve.

The headteacher has made a mainly accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses in the self-evaluation form, which is regularly updated. The leadership team and governors have identified where improvement needs to be sustained and embedded, and further areas for immediate development. Most strategies for improvement are in now in place but there is still much work to do in ensuring that teaching standards are consistently high across the school and progress is consistent across all groups of pupils. School staff and the LA have disseminated best practice, but this has only had a partial impact on improvement and is not yet embedded sufficiently to bring about change where it is needed.

There is a strong focus on raising standards and achievement in manageable steps and staff are becoming increasingly involved in agreeing and implementing the necessary actions. Change is slower in some classes but is gradually happening. However, pupils' progress has reached a plateau and still recedes in some subjects in the lower school. Monitoring of attendance, punctuality, homework and marking across the school has improved and satisfactory procedures are in place. Pupils have largely responded well to the school's initiatives for improving attendance, which has improved slightly, although this remains an issue. Homework is now more consistent across the school.

The governing body is still taking its role seriously and is determined to support the school through this period of difficulty and into sustainability. Support staff are mostly effectively deployed both in and out of the classrooms, meeting the needs of all pupils, including those who require additional support or who have particular difficulties and disabilities. The impact of intervention with pupils is in raising individual reading scores, even though these may still be behind national expectations.

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

- ensure that the leadership and management adopt more rigorous approaches to the way that they monitor and evaluate the quality of the school's work – satisfactory.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Progress since the last monitoring visit – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that all pupils, and their parents, understand their individual targets in all subjects and that pupils are sufficiently reminded of them. Targets should be closely matched to pupils' individual needs.
- Ensure that subject leaders support staff colleagues in accurately and effectively grouping pupils for teaching and help to bring about greater improvement in the quality of teaching, progress and standards.
- Continue to work on incentives and initiatives for pupils who are regular poor attenders or latecomers. Work more closely with parents to improve this and ensure these pupils still make sufficient progress.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Strategic Director for Education Services for Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Jane Melbourne
H M Inspector