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Mrs M Mooney
The Interim Headteacher
Huish Episcopi Primary School
North Street
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Dear Mrs Mooney

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HUISH EPISCOPI PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 2 May 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third 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

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the interim headteacher, the deputy headteacher, two subject leaders, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Staffing has been relatively settled since the previous monitoring visit. One member of staff returned to work shortly after the visit. One remains absent. One temporary member of staff has been confirmed as permanent.

A new headteacher has been appointed for September 2007 and has planned a programme of visits to the school during this summer term. There will be

changes in the leadership at the end of this month. The interim headteacher leaves the school then and the deputy headteacher will act as headteacher for the rest of the summer term. The mathematics leader will join senior leadership team meetings. During this transition period, the local authority consultant who has supported developments in the younger classes will be in school weekly.

Achievement and standards

The teachers' good groundwork in improving assessment systems means that everyone is getting a clearer view about standards and achievement across the school. The good assessment systems have only been in operation for a relatively short time. They will help senior leaders to evaluate at the end of this school year whether all pupils are achieving really well.

Currently, the evidence gathered shows that nearly all classes have more pupils working at expected standards than at the beginning of the year. Standards in mathematics are closer to expectations than standards in writing. There is considerable improvement in the numbers of pupils making progress in writing and mathematics, but pockets of underachievement remain.

The school's tracking data reveals that the groups making the best progress are the higher attaining pupils, those with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those learning English as an additional language. The staff have already identified likely factors behind the slower progress of the middle group of pupils. They are taking well reasoned steps to ensure that this group are taught any learning in the basics that they missed in previous years.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' personal development has improved hugely. There are many ways in which the older pupils take responsibility. The school council is very active and pupil leaders help to ensure that playtime behaviour is good. School councillors spoke confidently about the recent thrust on 'Every Child Matters', clearly understanding what was involved. They illustrated how the school council is involved, for example in planning what play equipment will promote healthy lifestyles.

The climate around the school and good relationships between staff and pupils are encouraging greater openness, ownership and participation. Pupils of all ages joined in, and clearly enjoyed, the early morning 'Wake and shake' session which classes are taking turns to plan and run. The school has surveyed pupils' attitudes. The results show that the vast majority have positive attitudes to school with the exception of a few boys in each year group. The interim headteacher and deputy headteacher are keen to find out

why these few are not as happy as their classmates. Behaviour in lessons has improved greatly. Pupils understand that actions bring consequences.

Quality of provision

The staff have worked hard to gather up to date evidence about the standards of pupils' work in writing and mathematics. Rightly, they have set out to judge how well pupils are making progress, which groups are really doing well, and who may be lagging behind.

Teachers are thinking carefully about the most important next steps in learning that pupils need to make. They have identified these in short-term 'curricular targets' for particular groups of pupils (for example to use joining words to make longer sentences). Staff use these targets when they are planning lessons and when marking pupils' work. The targets are well displayed in the classroom and pupils know that their targets are very important. Regular review of the targets helps staff and pupils to see how well they are doing.

The quality of planning has improved considerably. There is very effective planning in some year groups. Typically, staff identify the key learning that all should achieve, and the specific skills that particular groups of pupils need to master by the end of the lesson. This helps to ensure that work is now matched more closely to the pupils' needs.

Teachers are using a stimulating range of resources to motivate learning. There is very good improvement in the use of strategies that encourage pupils' participation in learning and promote good behaviour.

The school's monitoring of classroom practice shows that there is some inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning. The quality of teaching is good or satisfactory in virtually all classrooms but there are continuing weaknesses in one area. The lessons sampled during the visit confirmed the school's evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning.

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 – good
- strengthen marking and target setting so that pupils know better how to improve – good.

Leadership and management

The interim headteacher has led the school very effectively and much has been achieved since the previous monitoring visit. The planned agenda of

improvements has been managed very well. Messages from external feedback have been sensibly blended into the school's improvement agenda.

The senior team has developed effective strategies to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in provision. The deputy headteacher has a very good oversight of the pupils' recent progress in the various year groups. She has led the developments in setting and reviewing targets very well.

Increasingly, staff at all levels are held accountable for their contributions and recognise the major priorities that they need to tackle with their year group and in their responsibility area. Subject leaders' roles are developing steadily. Team working is very strong across the staff at the school.

The governors have determinedly strengthened their roles, clarifying where and how they review the school's progress. They have a better grasp of the improvements that senior leaders want to make and why. The governors are undertaking training. They value the guidance and support from the local authority, for instance in the appointment of the new headteacher.

Progress on the areas 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 is taken – good.

External support

The local authority's support has been very productive. Sound advice, useful guidance and timely evaluation have all helped to strengthen the school's progress. The programme of support has been closely focused on the school's needs.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that changes in leadership are managed effectively.
- Consolidate the considerable improvements that have been achieved in a short period of time into sustainable working practices.

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