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Mr Benson
The Acting Headteacher
Chilton Primary School
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Dear Mr Benson

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CHILTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Robina Tomes and Beryl Richmond, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 2 and 3 May 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 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, and met with the acting headteacher, members of staff, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The substantive headteacher is on long term absence. Prior to the 2006 inspection, the assistant headteacher took over the role. Early this year an experienced acting headteacher was appointed and a new, but temporary, leadership team has been created. Two members of staff have left during the last six months and there has been a number of changes within the governing body.

Achievement and standards

Many children in the Reception classes are on course to achieve the expected outcomes for their age by the end of the summer term. Pupils' standards in Year 2 and Year 6 remain below those expected for their ages. However, the first signs of improvement can be seen in individual lessons as the better quality of teaching has developed.

Whilst improving, achievement overall remains inadequate. Children in the Foundation Stage continue to make good progress because they are consistently taught well, but in Years 1 to 6 progress is more variable. In individual lessons seen both during this visit and as monitored by the school, pupils' progress ranges from good to satisfactory and this improvement reflects the initiatives put in place to raise the quality of teaching as a result of monitoring by the school and the LA. However, over the longer term, the legacy of underachievement has not been fully remedied and the gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills have not closed as pupils have moved through the school.

In addition to the issues already identified in mathematics and science, stringent evaluation by the school has also uncovered that there had been significantly weaker progress in English. The targets for national tests in both Years 2 and 6 are highly ambitious. Information about whether these can be achieved cannot be fully verified because of the quality of previous assessment information. However, information from lessons would suggest that the targets are realistic and would represent an improvement on last year.

In subjects other than English, mathematics and science, progress is equally variable. For instance, it is clear that whilst some classes are making satisfactory progress in information and communication technology, art, geography and design and technology, others are not because whole-school planning for these subjects has not been cohesive to ensure that pupils build on their previous understanding. It is also limiting their opportunities for the future.

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

- improve achievement in Key Stage 2 particularly in mathematics and science – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Personal development continues to be satisfactory but discussions and monitoring indicate that behaviour has markedly improved. There are now virtually no exclusions and the school is generally calm and orderly. Children collaborate well in most classes, even in some of the very small classroom areas they have to work in. They listen well to each other and effectively share ideas and discuss possibilities.

Pupils know the difference between right and wrong, and the playtime rules. However, a number of pupils, particularly boys, indulge in boisterous rough and tumbles and some pupils feel that there is not enough to do in the playground. The school is effectively using a sports partnership to develop the playgrounds and activities and train support staff. Children across the school say that bullying is not a concern and that any instances are dealt with effectively. Pupils show a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and enjoy the sports and clubs that are available. Most pupils take on their responsibilities sensibly, for instance, when preparing and clearing up the hall at lunchtime. Year 5 'Redcaps' enjoy supporting the younger children. Older pupils rightly say that they would like to take on more responsibilities. Attendance is satisfactory and procedures are effective.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall on a day to day basis, although there is not yet enough good teaching to overcome past problems. Nevertheless, there are examples of best practice being used to support members of staff who have more limited expertise. Effective monitoring by the acting headteacher and LA has had a positive impact. It has improved the pace and structure of lessons and raised all teachers' understanding about what pupils are capable of. This outside support has refined individual planning, provided a more cohesive approach and has eliminated most of the unsatisfactory teaching.

In the Foundation Stage, there is an effective mix of directed and self-chosen activities with an appropriate emphasis on purposeful play. Through the rest of the school, pupils noted how they now understand what is expected of them and can see how a series of lessons is helping them move on. In the best cases this is allied to comprehensive marking and feedback, but it is not universal across the school. Better use of assessment information has resulted in improved groupings and support being provided for those pupils whose progress was significantly lower than the rest. The provision for the pupils with learning difficulties is now good.

The monitoring of the curriculum has also shown that coverage of all subjects is not secure. For instance, some pupils said that they rarely used computers or had art lessons whilst others were having lessons in these subjects weekly. This means that not all pupils are having similar opportunities. The senior leadership team is undertaking a full survey of topics and themes and is in the process of revising the curriculum.

Safeguarding procedures have been adapted and completed. There is now an effective system for vetting staff. Good progress has been made in classroom behaviour management with effective support from the behaviour mentor and a social skills group. Child protection procedures are in place and the training of all staff has been carried out. The policy is in the process of being updated. Risk assessments are now in place and governors have approved an updated health and

safety policy. However, although risk assessments fulfil statutory regulations these are not yet focused well enough.

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

- raise teachers' expectations and improve subject expertise and skills in pacing lessons appropriately and in matching the next steps in learning to pupils' needs – satisfactory
- ensure consistent practices across the school, particularly in the management of behaviour and implementation of safe practices – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher is providing clear educational direction and has been able to stem the downturn in the school's provision. He, along with support from the senior leadership team, has raised the morale and self-esteem of staff, improved pupils' behaviour, and developed better teaching.

Stringent monitoring and analysis have unearthed other key areas for improvement that were not initially identified in the previous inspection report. A good, revised action plan has been completed with realistic timescales. All of this has meant that the staff, particularly those with management responsibilities, now place a much greater emphasis on pupils' progress and have a clear understanding of what is expected. For instance, the development of an inclusion manager and behaviour mentor has ensured consistent management strategies. Pupils have noticed the difference and feel more secure as a result.

The governing body is beginning to be better informed about the school's true position and governors now understand how to play their part in improving provision. An action plan committee has made a very good start analysing progress and governors are beginning to be actively involved in monitoring this. They still have some way to go before there is a full capacity to work without high levels of support. To help this happen they have been provided with a governor mentor and training from the LA as well as much clearer, realistic and precise information from the school.

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

- improve leadership and management, including monitoring and evaluation at all levels, so there is a clear basis for planning improvements and reliable strategies to see them through – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has provided good support through the implementation of its statement of action, which has been focused well on the priorities identified by the

inspection report and on the emerging issues and changing circumstances that have been identified since. This has included extensive training opportunities for staff, governors and leaders, as well as mentoring of those who needed substantial support. All this is being regularly monitored and refined in light of the findings.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed until the leadership team is more stable.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise pupils' achievement in English so that there is clear evidence that they are making good progress each year.
- Ensure that all subjects of the curriculum are covered in sufficient depth throughout all classes.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of the Children, Families and Education Directorate for Kent.

Yours sincerely

David Collard
Additional Inspector