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Mrs T Withers
The Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Withers

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF COSBY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Howard Dodd and Robina Tomes, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 12 and 13 December 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 January 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Leicestershire.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF COSBY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 12 and 13 December 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. They met with the headteacher, assistant headteachers, subject leaders for English, mathematics and science, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, and representatives from the local authority (LA), including the school development adviser and School Improvement Partner.

Context

Since the last visit, four teachers have joined the school temporarily to cover maternity leaves of three permanent teachers. Leadership of English has passed from the headteacher to an assistant headteacher.

Achievement and standards

There was a significant improvement in standards in mathematics and science results in Year 6 national tests in 2007. Test results had been below average in mathematics and science in 2006. In 2007 they were broadly average in mathematics, science and English. Since the prior attainment of these pupils was above the national average, there were evidently still weaknesses in the progress they made. In particular, too few pupils, especially boys, reached the higher levels in writing. Pupils' progress in mathematics remained weak, although it was markedly better than in the previous year. Progress in science improved strongly.

The school has made considerable improvements to support pupils' progress including the introduction of more effective targets, which, when used well and linked to pupils' current learning, enable pupils to know what they are achieving in their work and their next steps. These, in conjunction with the extensive tracking system, are used well to enable staff to match work better to pupils' abilities and needs, and to enable a sharper level of challenge. In addition, there has been an effective analysis of the gaps in the pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in mathematics. This, and other improved provision, is having a positive effect on pupils' progress and attainment. However, the impact of this improved provision is not yet consistently strong enough across the school to enable all pupils to achieve well. For example, a significant minority of pupils in the current Year 6 are unlikely to reach their targets in mathematics.

Attainment in mathematics by Year 2 continues to improve, with test results rising strongly and faster than the national trend. Results were significantly above the national average with a high proportion achieving the higher Level 3. Attainment by

Year 2 is broadly average in English. However, fewer than expected pupils achieved the higher Level 3 in writing in Year 2 national tests in 2007, confirming whole school weakness in writing accurately and at length. The school has recognised that pupils have had insufficient opportunities to write at length in contexts which stimulate pupils' interests, and particularly the interest of boys. Teachers are now successfully creating more exciting links between subjects and other activities to promote more lively writing, such as in describing the warlike power struggles of Queen Boudicca in Year 3 history. Such links might be still more effective in raising writing standards if teachers could make more reference to pupils' writing targets, where relevant, when assessing work in other subjects.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- improve progress in mathematics by ensuring that teachers have higher expectations of what can be achieved by middle and higher ability pupils – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

This aspect was not inspected in detail as there were no specific matters of concern arising from the previous inspection. Pupils continue to have very positive attitudes and get on well together. Their excellent attendance is a sign of their enjoyment of school.

Quality of provision

The significant improvement in standards in science is due to the changes that the school quickly implemented after the last inspection. The time allocation for science was increased and Year 6 teachers provided their pupils with science booster sessions. The science provision across the school has been further strengthened this year by the implementation of a totally revised science curriculum. The early indications are very positive. Teachers can more easily see how the science topics relate to each other and are therefore able to teach science more confidently. The increased time allocation and additional resources, including new equipment for experiments, allow teachers to give pupils more practical work. Pupils now say that they really enjoy science lessons. However, some teachers' subject knowledge remains uncertain and the science subject leader will need to offer appropriate help and guidance to ensure that pupils' misconceptions about science phenomena are properly corrected.

The overall quality of teaching continues to improve. During the monitoring visit, the majority of lessons were good and some outstanding practice was seen. Good teaching can now be found at all Key Stages. This improvement in teaching and learning is due to the measures taken since the last inspection. The sharing of good practice, following the increased number of lessons observed by the senior management team, has been particularly beneficial. A more open culture of teachers observing each other is now in place and this is also enhancing the overall quality of teaching. This, together with a more detailed and focused approach to planning sequences of lessons with the addition of more challenging tasks, is beginning to have an impact on raising the standard of work of the higher attaining pupils. In the majority of lessons now, teachers have a

clear understanding of what their pupils need to learn next and use a good variety of different stimulus material, including ICT resources, to maintain the interest and motivation of the pupils. In such lessons pupils show a genuine eagerness to learn and a highly productive learning environment is created. However, there are still too many lessons that lack pace with teachers spending too long in giving lengthy explanations and instructions before allowing pupils to start working themselves. This is particularly constraining pupils' progress in mathematics.

The quality of teachers' marking has improved and good references are now being made to the pupils' own assessment of their learning against 'success criteria'. This allows teachers to congratulate pupils for good work completed and provides an easy mechanism for indicating how their work might be improved. The success criteria used with Key Stage 1 classes are, however, sometimes expressed in language that these young pupils cannot readily understand. It would be helpful to rewrite some of these using simpler words.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- improve achievement in science by ensuring that sufficient time is devoted to the subject – good.

Leadership and management

The school's leadership has responded very positively to the findings of previous inspection visits and to advice and support from the local authority. It has also used the results of the school's own monitoring of performance to construct detailed plans for improvement, which specify clear actions and realistic timescales. It is a credit to the positive 'can do' attitude amongst the whole staff that they have carried through these actions with urgency and commitment. The impact of this effective action planning is already showing in improved standards and teaching quality. The school's self-evaluation recognises that the school still has some way to go to eliminate all signs of underachievement and secure consistently good provision for its pupils. In evaluating its own performance though, the school is not always sharp enough in celebrating what the school does really well and identifying features which are not working so well. In particular, the evaluation reports to the review group of governors do not sharply identify those parts of the school or the action plan where progress is slower, or offer a clear diagnosis of problems. Greater sharpness in the school's own self-evaluation is required for it to demonstrate fully the capacity to improve.

In the light of its recent performance, the school's target setting is over ambitious. There is a danger that unrealistic targets may be demotivating and cause the school to take too pessimistic a view of its performance. This does, however, in part reflect a renewed confidence in the school and the aspiration to do much better. The governing body clearly shares in that aspiration and it is now much better at holding the school to account for its performance.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in January 2007:

- strengthen leadership and management so that the most important weaknesses in the school's performance are suitably prioritised and swiftly addressed – satisfactory.

External support

The school has received intensive and well focused support for leadership and management, curriculum development and the quality of teaching and learning. The impact of this support has been good. There have been at least sound improvements in all of these areas, particularly in the reformed science curriculum and in spreading good practice in teaching. For example, advanced skills teachers and consultants have been very effective in working alongside teachers to demonstrate the strategies that can be used to maximise the learning for all pupils. The school improvement partner has been an effective critical friend to the school, with sharply focused reports which draw out accurately which aspects of performance are most in need of further improvement, and helping the school to refocus its planning.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that mathematics teaching is consistently lively and challenging and helps pupils develop their capacity to solve problems independently.
- Sharpen school self-evaluation so that it consistently identifies what is, and what is not, working well.