

4 December 2007

Ms A Wise
The Acting Headteacher
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Dear Ms Wise

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

Following my visit with Stephanie Lacey, Additional inspector, to your school on 27 and 28 November 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in June 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not 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, the Diocese of Peterborough and the Strategic Director for Education Services for Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Jane Melbourne
H M Inspector Education, Learning and Skills

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

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection: 27 and 28 November 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, observed 18 lessons and an assembly, met with the headteacher, staff, groups of pupils, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last monitoring visit the headteacher has left the school. A new headteacher, who started at the school in September, has also subsequently left the school. The diocese has secured an acting headteacher from October 2007 until July 2008. There are currently two members of staff on long term sick leave and replacements are being provided by long term supply. There is a new teacher in the Year 3 class who has a temporary contract until July 2008 and has some management experience. The school has also had a change of bursar/secretary.

Numbers of pupils on roll have reduced this year. Pupils are no longer in mixed age classes with the exception of one Year 3/4 class. Classes are no longer divided into sets for literacy or numeracy, but pupils are taught in their class groups. There have been changes to the governing body, including a new foundation governor and new chairs to the curriculum and finance committees. The LA has increased the level of support provided to the school since the last monitoring visit.

Achievement and standards

In spite of the school's work to bring about improvement, standards still remain below average because too many pupils are making inadequate progress. The school continues to be challenged by staffing difficulties and, as a consequence, some groups of pupils' learning have been disrupted. Inconsistencies in teaching in the past also mean that too many pupils have gaps in their learning which adversely affect their current progress.

Standards in the 2007 national end of Year 6 tests fell further and were significantly below average. These pupils made inadequate progress from their national assessments in Year 2. Boys did better than girls. Standards in English are lower than in mathematics and science.

Currently, standards in all year groups are below average in the core subjects, although work seen in books shows that they are rising, especially in Year 6. Staff are working hard to fill the gaps in pupils' learning. In literacy this relates particularly to phonic understanding and in numeracy to calculations, especially division and, to a lesser extent, multiplication.

The school's tracking of pupils' attainment this term shows that progress is still inadequate because only just over half of the pupils have moved forward. There are now some sound tracking systems in place, but there are some queries over the accuracy of the assessments made in some classes last term. The use of 1998 national papers this term also led to problems in assessing how well pupils had done. Nonetheless, teachers are using the information they have about pupils' progress, together with day to day assessments, to target lower attaining pupils for extra support where necessary.

Green shoots of improvement are evident in most lessons, where progress is now at least satisfactory. Work in pupils' books also indicates that pupils are making at least satisfactory progress, with the presentation of work vastly improved. There is still room to improve this further. Pupils themselves believe that they are moving forward and learning more effectively, particularly in mathematics. They say that it is easier to make progress in lessons now that pupils' behaviour is better.

Pupils' academic targets are now much more closely tailored to their learning needs, but their relatively recent introduction means that their impact on pupils' progress is yet to be realised.

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 to learning remain mostly good. Pupils are enjoying the playground and its facilities. Year 6 pupils, assisted when necessary by Year 5 pupils, take a lead role in organising the lunchtime play equipment. They believe this has significantly contributed to improving pupils' behaviour in the playground, which has also more recently been reinforced through the introduction of clearer sanctions and consequences. The review of the behaviour policy and the reintroduction of home-school agreements support this and ensure consistency across the school. The behaviour of the majority of pupils in lessons is usually good. The concentration of a small number of pupils diminishes when work set is not sufficiently engaging and pupils are left listening for too long. This is happening less often than at the last monitoring visit.

The poor attendance of around 9% of pupils is still an issue that hinders their overall progress. The school has continued to monitor this closely since the last monitoring visit and provides further incentives for those with poor attendance. However, attendance remains below the national average at close to 93% overall. Punctuality no longer appears to be a significant issue, so pupils are ready to learn at the start of the school day.

The relationships between staff and pupils are mostly good. Pupils' enjoyment of lessons is often high because staff try to make the lessons interesting and are swift

to enable pupils to become active learners, which is an improvement since the last inspection. However, this is still not consistent across the school. The pupils continue to make a positive contribution to the school and wider community. The school council and peer buddies are particularly effective. Parents have supported their children very effectively in the last term, which is also an indication of their ongoing commitment to their children's education and to the school and the job it is trying to do. This is particularly evident through them enabling their children to follow the school's new uniform code, to be punctual to school, and to complete their homework.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in nearly all of the lessons seen. This is a similar picture to the quality of teaching seen in the second monitoring visit and demonstrates that the school has reversed the decline of last term. This is partly because the school has worked hard to ensure that teachers adopt a consistent approach to planning, assessment and the use of assessment. In the weaker lessons the objective for the lesson is not always sharp enough or made clear. Most teachers explain new ideas clearly and hold pupils' interest. In the weaker lessons explanations are muddled and the teachers do not give pupils enough guidance about what they are meant to do. Pupils are generally managed well and in most lessons there is a calm working atmosphere. Because behaviour in lessons has improved, pupils feel they concentrate better and are moving forward more quickly.

Teachers in parallel year groups plan together and this helps them to share expertise. Planning is detailed and, in English, mathematics and science especially, it identifies activities for different ability groups. These are generally well matched to pupils' needs. However, in some sessions, especially mathematics, lower attainers sometimes struggle on tasks which are too hard. This is sometimes because these pupils have difficulty in reading the text and sometimes because the task calls on mathematical understanding that they do not have. Work is now more challenging for higher attaining pupils. Teaching assistants are being deployed more effectively and most now provide helpful support for individuals and small groups.

The curriculum has improved this term. Placing most pupils into single year group classes makes it easier to plan and organise work. Pupils are no longer set by ability for literacy and numeracy, except for spelling and phonic sessions. About a fifth of the pupils are withdrawn for extra help in literacy and/or numeracy in the afternoons. This means that they are not, therefore, experiencing the same curriculum as their peers. There is a better balance between subjects this term and some interesting work has been planned to capture pupils' interest. Visits and visitors are beginning to be more integrated into planning for different subjects, such as the Year 6 trip to the Imperial War Museum in connection with their work on Britain since 1930.

The school has made some headway in developing systems and procedures for tracking pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science. These systems are understood and used by teaching staff, who now have a clearer picture of how well pupils are progressing. There is scope to involve assistants even more in evaluating

and assessing how well pupils are doing. Assessment has been used effectively to identify and support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are some doubts about the validity of some of the assessments because of the tests used and also because of individual teachers' understanding of different National Curriculum levels. Pupils, especially those in Years 5 and 6, are very clear about what they have to do in English and mathematics to reach the next National Curriculum sub level. Pupils find feedback helpful and are more secure about what they need to do next to improve their work. Their parents are also kept informed of what their children need to do to move forward. About half of the parents clearly understand what these targets are.

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 – satisfactory
- 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

The acting headteacher has brought stability and strong leadership to the school and has worked hard to implement change swiftly. The impact of all of the changes is not yet clear, but the existing staff are developing more as a team with a clearer vision and an understanding of what needs to be done. There are now systems of performance management in place which link directly to the school's Raising Attainment Plan. Core subject coordinators, who are also members of the senior leadership team, are now more accountable for monitoring their areas of responsibility and for tracking and assessing pupils' attainment. Consequently, all staff now have a handle on pupils' learning and their progress. Methods for identifying those pupils in need of additional support are more efficient and their needs are mapped accurately. This has been linked to resources and programmes for intervention and support, which are now mainly working well to ensure all pupils are doing as well as they can.

The governors are also becoming more aware of their roles and responsibilities and are working closely with the local authority's governors' support services to improve effectiveness. This is already making a difference as the finances and budgets of the school are more rigorously monitored. Budgetary issues are not all completely resolved, but are improving. The governors are now more aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses, but have yet to be fully involved in the school's self-evaluation to reflect all of the recent changes. The school has some challenges remaining with the long term absence of staff, which does impact on the quality of teaching and learning and, ultimately, on standards. However, it has proactively tried to, and continues to try to, recruit good quality staff. Whilst systems for monitoring and evaluating provision are now firmly in place, continuing with a rigorous approach to this remains a priority alongside raising standards. The impact of all of the new initiatives, and the development of the staff team, is beginning to show as the school is better informed.

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.

External support

The local authority support has been increased since the last visit. This has helped the school to keep focused on key areas for improvement, and improve the quality of the governing body as well as teaching and learning. The school continues to receive support from LA advisors and a number of education consultants. The extensive level of LA support increasingly ensures the long term sustainability of the school.

Priorities for further improvement

The priorities for further improvement remain as at the original inspection.