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20 September 2007

Mr B Coppins
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Coppins

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ERNESETTLE
COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Patricia Davies and Peter Kemble, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 12 and 13 September 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 March 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed at this stage.

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 Children's Services for Plymouth.

Yours sincerely

Mo Roberts
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ERNESETTLE COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 14 September 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, the core subject coordinators, the local authority (LA) project manager, the school improvement partner, the three person management support team, the chair of governors, a parents' group, and two groups of pupils.

Context

This large school serves an area with significant social deprivation. One teacher has left since the last inspection and a management support team was brought in by the LA in June in response to senior staff illness.

Achievement and standards

At the time of the last inspection standards in Year 6 were reported to be well below average and pupils' achievement inadequate. The results of national tests in English, mathematics and science taken in May 2007 confirmed the low standards. In Year 2, results showed standards to be well below average in reading, writing and mathematics but with an increase in the percentage of pupils achieving the higher level (Level 3) in all three subjects.

More recent school test and assessment data show that pupils are beginning to make better progress in Years 1 and 2, particularly in reading and mathematics, although standards are still below average. Writing standards across the school remain well below average. Progress is improving in Years 3 and 4. In Years 5 and 6 the pupils' progress is inadequate because the pace of lessons is not yet sufficiently rapid to make up for the previous gaps in pupils' knowledge, especially for the oldest pupils. Children with learning difficulties and disabilities make similar progress to their peers.

Standards in English are showing signs of improvement. Staff have focused on improving pupils' speaking and listening skills and many more pupils show confidence in answering questions and giving opinions. In mathematics, pupils do not have enough practical activities to help them learn. There are still too few opportunities for independent work and too much unfocused teacher exposition still slows progress.

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

- raise pupils' standards and achievement in English, mathematics and science – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

The strengths in pupils' personal development and well-being have been maintained since the school was last inspected. There are improvements in pupils' behaviour as

lessons are better planned and engage pupils more effectively. In contrast to conversations at the time of the last inspection, pupils now report no anxieties about poor behaviour. In general, it is clear that pupils like and enjoy their school. Where lessons are stimulating, pupils' enthusiasm and responsiveness make an important contribution to learning. However, this is not yet a sufficiently common feature of all lessons.

There are good relationships between pupils and adults, and pupils are quick to comment on the friendliness of children in the school. The work of the pupils' school council is due to be resumed shortly. The school plans to make much greater use of pupils' opinions and views to support the monitoring of initiatives to improve academic achievement. Whilst there are some early signs that the pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills, essential to success in later life, are improving, these are still not developing rapidly enough to make up for lost ground and to ensure older pupils are ready for the next stage of education.

Quality of provision

Teachers have established good relationships with their classes and routines to support learning. Their lesson planning has improved. This has increased consistency across year groups, including where classes contain two year groups. The current quality of teaching is satisfactory overall and two good lessons were observed. Expectations are rising, especially in English lessons. However, higher ability pupils' thinking could be stretched further; extension activities tend to occupy pupils rather than challenge them. The new emphasis on speaking and listening involving partner work and drama is having a good impact on pupils' levels of confidence. Boys are being drawn in more effectively to discussions.

Mathematics lessons offer slow and steady opportunities for pupils to improve their basic skills but they are not yet sufficiently matched to the needs of the individual pupils. This is undermining pupils' ability to fully catch up to national standards.

The relevance of the lessons has improved but more can be done to fully excite pupils' interest. Pupils enjoy school, especially where teachers are building in engaging activities. However, not all lessons give sufficient priority to pupils being actively involved. There is still too much time spent sitting listening to teachers talking. The pace and progress too often lack the necessary urgency to ensure pupils reach higher standards. The curriculum has been thoroughly reviewed and mapped out for a two year period. Teachers are clear about what they are expected to cover, but there is room to include more imaginative elements to inspire pupils' efforts further.

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

- ensure greater consistency in the quality of provision, improving particularly the way teachers engage pupils' interest and make learning relevant – satisfactory.

Care guidance and support

The school has maintained good levels of care, support and pastoral guidance for its pupils since the last inspection. Parents continue to be pleased with the way their

children are looked after. Staff have worked hard to establish better systems and procedures for giving academic guidance to pupils, but these are still in the early stages of development and have yet to demonstrate sufficient impact on progress. Teachers' daily assessments are still inconsistent but they are leading to some improvement in pupils' progress in English. Despite good work on analysing school data, teachers need continued support to ensure they rapidly grasp its significance in pinpointing where pupils are underachieving.

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

- use assessment of pupils' progress more to lift teachers' expectations, set appropriate challenging targets and show pupils how to improve – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is currently working with strong support from a three member part time management support team made up of serving senior school staff from elsewhere in the LA. This arose because he was away from school much of last term due to a medical emergency. The deputy was concurrently on sick leave.

Together, the headteacher and this management support team have ensured that the quality of teaching is now broadly satisfactory. They are developing an evaluation and monitoring programme and evidence of early impact can be seen in the improved planning and better organisation in all classrooms. However, the robustness of this monitoring needs rapid development. It should provide clear action points to ensure the pace of pupils' learning develops sufficiently quickly. The school's action plan, as it currently stands, is too cumbersome and contains some unrealistic timescales and expectations.

In order to increase the pace of change and pupils' progress, the school must refine the action plans and identify the key priorities which will lead to its rapid further improvement. The school recognises that the leadership of mathematics is not effective and they are introducing a new standards management team to oversee academic performance in English and mathematics. The function of the special needs coordinator is compromised as there is insufficient management time allocated to the role. English, on the other hand, is showing early signs of improvement as a result of staff training, the use being made of national strategies, and the enthusiasm of the new coordinator.

An important management development has been the coordination and analysis of all the school's assessments about pupils' rates of progress. This is providing the school with much more reliable information. Senior staff are being supported to ensure they fully understand its significance.

Governors are more prepared to challenge the school and have been given training in how to call the school to account. The chair of governors has a clear and robust view of how the school needs to move forward.

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

- strengthen leadership and management to make sure that the strategies introduced to raise achievement are monitored and are successful in bringing about the necessary improvements – satisfactory.

External support

The LA now has a timetable for the expected improvement. It also now has strong support in place for the school. Whilst the initial response was delayed somewhat by various factors, the subsequent monitoring has been astute and helpful. A robust interim review has taken place and the headteacher is challenged to review the school's progress regularly. A senior member of the LA ensures training and interventions are coordinated, appropriate and timely.

The management support team were appointed swiftly in response to the headteacher's emergency sick leave and the deputy headteacher's recurrent absence due to illness. The team use their relevant expertise well, one member runs the building project related to the new school and another is doing valuable work on the data analysis and offering related staff development. The team leader has had a good overall impact on school organisation and works effectively in supporting the headteacher. This high level support for the school, which also received the intensifying support programme the previous year, will be phased out by Christmas. The external oversight of the building project will be retained. The development of the governing body is being supported appropriately. Overall, the LA support is now good.

Priorities for further improvement

- Complete the revision of the school action plan to make it clear and manageable, and ensure all staff know their responsibilities in its implementation.