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Mr S Morley
Acting Headteacher
Swaffham Junior School
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Dear Mr Morley

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SWAFFHAM JUNIOR SCHOOL

Following my visit with Catherine Stormonth, Additional Inspector, to your school on 20 – 21 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*.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

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 Norfolk.

Yours sincerely

John Francis
Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF SWAFFHAM JUNIOR SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 20 – 21 September 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, deputy headteacher, subject leaders, groups of pupils, a governor and a representative from the Local Authority (LA).

Context

Through LA reorganisation, the school has changed status from a middle school (Years 4 to 7) to a junior school (Years 3 to 6). At the end of the summer term, both Year 6 and 7 pupils left the school and in the autumn term, Year 3 pupils were admitted for the first time. The substantive headteacher left the school following the inspection. The deputy headteacher took on the role of acting headteacher for the remainder of the summer term, supported by an experienced local headteacher. The appointment of two additional governors supports and enhances the work of the governing body. Since the start of September 2007, a specialist County headteacher has become the acting headteacher. The governing body are currently seeking to make a permanent appointment.

Achievement and standards

The latest data from national tests in 2007 show little change from the standards reported at the time of the inspection, remaining well below average. The results show that pupils make inadequate progress as they move through the school. Pupils' progress in lessons is in line with the quality of teaching, which is now broadly satisfactory. While there is a more accurate match of work to pupils' current needs, much remains to be done to improve pupils' achievement, accelerate the rate of progress and raise standards to an acceptable level. Even though some subjects are grouped by ability, there is not sufficient opportunity for pupils to respond at the higher levels. The progress and achievement of those pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities is not yet good enough. For all pupils, standards in English, particularly in writing, are exceptionally low. Pupils have low-level writing skills: their vocabulary is limited and spelling and punctuation skills are poor.

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour is much improved and pupils report that the school has a much calmer feel. This is building well on the strategies introduced by the deputy headteacher – then acting headteacher – in the second half of the summer term. While exclusions rose significantly during this time, this was effective in setting clear expectations for pupils and parents. There is a more settled start to this term, with no exclusions and reduced use of internal detentions.

The more consistent application of behaviour rules by class teachers and improvements to teachers' planning and direction given to pupils is enabling them to apply themselves more diligently to their work. Relationships have improved and in lessons, pupils work together more willingly. While a small minority still disrupt lessons, pupils appreciate the calmer feel to the whole school and say that due to the changes they feel they are achieving greater success. Attendance is good and much improved on the previous year. Pupils feel much safer in school with the reduction in bullying and believe staff have more time for their problems. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles as a result of a good range of physical activities, healthy school meals, snacks and free access to drinking water. Pupils feel they now have more opportunity to contribute to the smooth running of the school through taking on a range of responsibilities in and around school. However, low-level skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) hinder their preparation for the next stage of education and beyond school.

Judgement

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

- Ensure that behaviour is consistently and effectively managed so that no lessons are disrupted – *good*

Quality of provision

In the 10 lessons seen, teaching was good in five lessons and satisfactory in the rest. While this is an improvement, the proportion of good teaching is still not yet high enough to improve progress to the rate needed to make up the lost ground for pupils. Work in pupils' books still shows significant weaknesses, particularly in the secretarial skills of spelling and punctuation, presentation and handwriting. Teaching strategies introduced towards the end of last term have continued to make an impact on learning. Teachers tell pupils what the lesson is aiming to achieve and what they will be looking for when assessing how well they have done. There is still some variation in the quality of this guidance. The best examples of learning objectives are very clear and enable the teacher and pupils to measure their success. Others are less helpful and are too vague to support clear evaluations. As this is a relatively new initiative, not all teachers are used to returning to the objectives at the end of the lesson to get a clear picture of the lessons' impact.

Lesson plans now follow a common format that gives clearer guidance on planning for pupils of differing ability. This is an improvement since the inspection and results in a better match of work to pupils' current needs. However, for some pupils, the work set still lacks the challenge needed to accelerate their progress further.

Improvements to target setting through the LA's Intensive Support Programme give teachers and pupils a better indication of where the learning is going. However, many pupils feel these targets are not sharp enough and that the statements merely refer to the expectations for the broad ability groups in the class. They have little understanding of their own level of work and what they as individuals need to do to progress to the next levels. Teachers' marking also reflects this. While all work is regularly marked, not enough shows where pupils are particularly successful or what the next step in their learning should be. Marking is too general and does not identify

the most important gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding, which would more accurately guide teachers' planning for the next series of lessons. Pupils are not involved enough in assessing their own work or that of their classmates, which would help them to gain a better understanding of the expectations on them.

While the curriculum meets most requirements, timetables for some classes are unbalanced and do not give enough time to subjects other than English, mathematics and science. In some classes, pupils have more than two hours of English teaching on some days of the week. Conversely, for some other subjects, pupils only receive half of their entitlement. In all subjects, there are too few opportunities for pupils to draft and redraft their work to improve its quality. Teachers are not making effective links between their overall targets for literacy, previous lesson aims and the writing pupils do in other subjects.

Strategies for regular assessment, recording and analysing data are gradually being introduced, but are not sufficiently established to show any impact on progress. The data currently available has not been analysed in sufficient depth or evaluated to show what the rate of progress is like for different groups of pupils, for example, by gender or specific learning needs.

Judgement

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to accelerate progress and raise standards in English, mathematics and science – *satisfactory*
- Raise the expectations that teachers have of the standards that pupils can attain – *satisfactory*

Leadership and management

While the school began its improvement programme in the summer term, the recent significant changes to the leadership team and governing body mean there has not been time to establish new systems or approaches. However, there is an improved climate in school and teachers are more closely focused on improving their own performance and that of the school generally. The school is much calmer and the first steps in addressing unsatisfactory behaviour have been achieved. Along with the acting headteacher, the composition of the senior leadership team is new and there have been changes to subject leaders' responsibilities. Subject leaders have not developed an understanding of their role across the school. As a result, there is not yet a programme for systematically monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. The senior leadership do not yet have a comprehensive view of the improvements needed to the quality of teaching and learning in different subjects.

The school's action plan, created following the inspection recommendations, is long and complex, with much repetition throughout the different sections. The actions needed to address the long-standing weaknesses are not well enough prioritised or in a form that will effectively guide the work of the school. Few of the success criteria are sufficiently sharp to enable the school to measure its progress accurately. There are no clear milestones to check on the rate of progress. This is also the case

with the governing body's action plan, although this is of much better quality. In addition, there is insufficient linkage between the two plans to enable the governing body to use them to evaluate either the school's work or their own effectiveness. The school lacks a good, overall improvement plan that will give clear focus and direction to its work for the next year and beyond.

Judgement

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

- Develop and apply effective systems for planning, monitoring and evaluating improvements in the school – *inadequate*

External support

The LA's action plan is satisfactory. The commentary clearly outlines the action it intends to take and the resources needed. The LA has supported the school before and since the section 5 inspection. Inspectors, advisers and consultants have been providing support and in-service training for staff. However, this was late in starting and while the outcomes of some of the introductions can be seen, its impact not yet seen across all aspects of the school's work.

Priorities for further improvement

- Revise the school's development plan to make it a more effective tool for guiding, monitoring and evaluating the work of the school.
- Develop clearer principles for marking pupils' work so that pupils know what they do well and the specific things they need to do to improve.
- Revise class timetables to ensure better coverage of all subjects and improve the links between literacy and the rest of the subjects.