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8 October 2007

Mr Tony Cox
The Headteacher
Spratton Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mr Cox

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF SPRATTON CHURCH
OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with George Falconer HMI to your school on 25 and 26 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 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 Director of Education for the Diocese of Peterborough and the Director for Children and Young People for Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF SPRATTON CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 25 and 26 September 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, nominated staff, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

There has been considerable staffing turbulence and turnover since the last inspection. Following the resignation of the headteacher, an interim headteacher was appointed for the summer term. The substantive headteacher took up post in September, two weeks before the visit.

Achievement and standards

Standards of attainment are rising. However, pupils' achievement remains inadequate because the legacy of slow progress means that the standard of too much work, particularly of the older pupils, is not as high as it should be.

In the most recent Key Stage 1 assessments, standards were broadly in line with age related expectations in reading and writing, and above average in mathematics. Unvalidated results in the most recent Key Stage 2 national tests show improvement overall, most notably in English and particularly in writing. Compared with the previous year, a greater proportion of pupils achieved the expected Level 4 in English and mathematics, with a significant increase in the proportion gaining the higher Level 5 in English. These improvements in English are commendable, given the recent staffing difficulties. Standards were broadly in line with national figures, although there was significant underachievement in mathematics and science where the school failed to achieve its targets. In lessons, the standard of pupils' work in numeracy and literacy is broadly in line with age related expectations, but higher attaining pupils often do not produce the standard or quality of work of which they are capable.

The school has taken suitable steps to implement better systems for tracking pupils' progress. Teachers have a better understanding of where pupils are at and the progress they are making and ought to make. The information is beginning to be used to target appropriate intervention and support. However, these systems are relatively new and are yet to have sufficient impact on teachers' planning or target setting for pupils. In addition, assessments and the moderation of assessments need to be more robust, so that the tracking information is reliable. Although pupils have targets for literacy and numeracy, these are not consistently used to plan work that is matched to their different needs, or to guide what pupils need to do to improve. Too little reference is made to pupils' individual targets in lessons or in marking.

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

- ensure that systems for tracking pupils' progress are complete and supply information that is used to provide pupils with clear guidance on how to improve progress – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

In general, pupils are well behaved and have positive attitudes to learning. Their good levels of attendance reflect the fact that most enjoy school. They are friendly and helpful with visitors and collaborate well when working together in pairs and small groups. Children in the Reception class have settled quickly and are making very good progress in the development of their personal and social skills. Throughout the school pupils respond to good teaching with lively interest and enthusiasm. However, too many pupils have a rather casual approach to their work. This is manifested in the slow and unsettled start to some sessions, and in the rather careless quality of some written work, particularly amongst older pupils. When the pace of teaching is pedestrian, some pupils do not sustain their concentration well and become restless or inattentive.

Quality of provision

Elements of teaching have strengthened since the last inspection, but weaknesses remain. Although some lessons observed during the inspection were good, too many were barely satisfactory and the pupils' progress in these sessions was too uneven.

Improvements have been made in planning, particularly in the way that lesson objectives guide pupils' learning, and in the type and variety of planned learning activities. The stronger teaching is developing well so that more lessons are good and some are outstanding. However, inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching, including the planning, the assessment of learning, and the expectations of pupils. There are too many occasions when pupils, particularly the higher attainers, are not sufficiently challenged.

The best lessons are well founded on detailed planning that considers what and how different pupils will learn. When lessons were carefully planned, the teacher was able to work at a brisk pace and make effective use of teaching assistants. Pupils made most rapid progress when they were fully engaged in their learning, either through well structured pair and group work or with skilful questioning. In the weaker lessons the pupils were not occupied or suitably challenged by the work set, either in independent group work or in whole class sessions. In these lessons, pupils became distracted and tended to disengage from their learning.

The school is working hard towards being inclusive so that all pupils can make good progress in relation to their starting points and abilities. The curriculum, including science, has been reviewed and revised to provide appropriate opportunities for all pupils across the subjects. A curriculum map has been developed. There is now a much clearer understanding of curricular balance within some subjects as well as across the curriculum as a whole. As an example, greater emphasis is being placed on planning investigative work in science.

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

- ensure that work given to middle ability and high ability pupils in English and mathematics is sufficiently challenging – inadequate
- ensure that the curriculum provides coverage of science topics – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The school's leadership and management have been strengthened significantly by the work of the interim headteacher and substantive headteacher. These appointments have bolstered staff morale and successfully galvanised the efforts of the staff, all of whom are fully committed to the school's improvement. The school's provision has been strengthened, inadequate teaching has been identified and addressed, and suitable systems for monitoring the school have been developed. The substantive headteacher is already building on the foundations laid during the summer term, and has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Communication with parents has been sensibly improved.

School self-evaluation is more systematic and there is greater clarity in improvement planning. There is still a long way to go in developing leadership capacity at all levels, but the roles of subject leaders in literacy and numeracy are developing well. Key staff are beginning to understand their responsibilities within the school. New procedures for monitoring the school's work give each of them a clearer overview of standards and their own accountability for raising them. This has strengthened the process of self-evaluation, although this still needs to be more rigorous.

Lesson observations have been used to identify strengths and areas for development in teaching. Teachers are given points for improvement that are subsequently reviewed. However, evaluations of lessons, pupils' work and planning need to focus more sharply on the progress of individual pupils.

The governing body has worked very hard to fulfil its responsibilities since the last inspection. Improvements in school leadership ensure that governors are better informed about the quality of provision and progress, and are therefore in a stronger position to hold the school to account. However, the governing body needs to clarify its monitoring role.

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

- carry out more rigorous and detailed monitoring of teaching in order to identify exactly what teachers need to do to improve – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority's statement of action sets out an appropriate programme of support for the school. Since the last inspection the school has made good use of consultants from the local authority. This advice has been suitably focused and the recent support has been valued by the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Focus teaching more sharply on precisely what and how pupils with different abilities will learn.
- Make more effective use of individual targets to guide pupils' learning and to engage them in evaluating their own improvement.
- Raise expectations of the pupils, particularly in their attitudes to learning and the quality of their work.