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14 June 2007

Mr B Chalmers
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Chalmers

Ofsted survey inspection programme – schools formerly in special measures now judged to be good or better

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Andrea Lyons HMI on 11 June to look at work done to improve the school's overall effectiveness since it was placed in special measures in November 2000.

As outlined in my initial letter, the visit focused on the successful actions taken by the school to build capacity and significantly improve provision, particularly in relation to: the impact of external support; the involvement of pupils and parents in school improvement; issues around staffing and leadership and management.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the outcomes of the visit included interviews with the headteacher, senior staff, teachers, a group of pupils, the local authority link advisor, the chair of governors and a group of parents. Other relevant documentation was scrutinised.

A significant factor at the designation of special measures was the very recently appointed headteacher's experience of having worked with schools causing concern and with good schools. This experience provided a valuable perspective. The headteacher identified short-term priorities and communicated these clearly to all staff. The initial leadership style was highly directive, arising from the urgent need to stabilise the school sufficiently to establish a platform from which to build improvement. Simultaneously, a

highly aspirational and non-negotiable agenda was set to challenge an entrenched culture of low expectation. The impact was to catalyse significant staffing changes as individuals chose to move on. However, intervention team teachers provided by the local authority were subsequently removed simultaneously and too early in the process. This, together with new appointments which did not have the hoped for impact in raising standards, substantially slowed the pace of school improvement. All stakeholders were quick to acknowledge fundamental mistakes and used this experience to develop an effective appointments policy and procedure. This resulted in the development of a highly effective staff team. Stakeholders are unanimous in identifying recruitment of the right individuals and their subsequent impact on classroom practice as making the greatest contribution to building capacity rapidly. However, the school is quick to acknowledge the importance of well-directed training and development on maintaining the direction of travel.

Behaviour at the time of special measures was poor. The headteacher galvanised the staff behind clearly understood behaviour management strategies. Consistency of approach was the key to success. The local authority intervention team and other support through EMAG and BEST was effective in developing teachers' skills to manage the challenging behaviour of a significant number of pupils. Behaviour is now good, although staff continue to work hard to maintain this. Visitors to the school are struck by the calm and orderly atmosphere in classrooms and around the school.

The headteacher quickly recognised that inadequate systems to support learning for the high proportion of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) were a significant barrier to raising standards. In collaboration with the local authority external support was focussed on developing the skills of classroom teachers and teaching assistants to meet the needs of EAL pupils. The impact of this work was to demonstrably raise standards in literacy. In 2006 standards in English at the end of Key Stage 2, although below average, rose faster than the national trend.

Parental involvement with the school was poor. Well over half the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and many parents themselves had EAL and were not familiar with the education system. Work to engage parents in the life of the school has been remarkably successful. A range of innovative strategies has involved parents well in the school community. They say they feel included and cite examples of where their opinions have influenced school policy. On the day of the visit a group of Somali parents were in school working on a project planned to better reflect the cultural diversity of the school community through lunchtime menus.

Having established control in the classrooms the headteacher employed a more distributive style of leadership from which evolved the current collaborative style of working. Staff say they are involved in decision-making and empowered to take risks without fear of failure. Morale is high and team ethos is strong.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop in the school.

A copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Kirby
Her Majesty's Inspector