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Mr B Coppins
The Headteacher
Ernesettle Community School
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Dear Mr Coppins

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ERNESETTLE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Martin James, Additional Inspector, to your school on 15 and 16 January 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may now 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, and the Director of Children's Services for Plymouth.

Yours sincerely

Mo Roberts
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ERNESETTLE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 15 and 16 January 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, acting deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher, the senior management team, the standards team, the three person management support team and the local authority (LA) representative, two governors, two part time family support workers and the school council.

Context

There have been three changes of staff since the last monitoring visit. The LA has seconded an acting deputy headteacher. Two new teaching appointments have been made. One of these teachers is in post and the other, the science coordinator, will join the school for the summer term (terms 5 and 6). The senior management support team withdrew from the school as planned in December 2007, but remain available for advice. The building project manager is still in place at the school two days a week. The new school building is currently on schedule for opening in September 2008.

Achievement and standards

Recent test and assessment data show the improvements noted in the first monitoring visit have been maintained and built on successfully, although standards remain well below the national average overall. Progress in all subjects is now more rapid because pupils have many more opportunities to undertake practical activities, including in science lessons. This has encouraged pupils to become increasingly independent and confident in their learning. Teachers' clearer and more succinct lesson introductions lead to pupils paying better attention and getting on quickly with what is expected in almost all instances. The work is more relevant to the needs of pupils, although work for able pupils needs to challenge them further if the intended number reaching the higher levels is to be achieved. Pupils now all have targets for improving their work and most know what these are and what they are aiming for in broad terms. Progress in mathematics is now satisfactory, including in Years 5 and 6 where the pupils are taught in similar ability groupings. These classes are more settled overall, largely due to the influence of the experienced seconded acting deputy headteacher who teaches in this age group. Writing, spelling and punctuation are slowly improving and the daily focus on phonics is raising reading skills. The consistency and quality of phonics teaching for pupils in Year 1 require further monitoring to ensure progress is as fast as it can be for all groups. In order to raise standards further, some teachers' questioning skills need development as they do not always provide enough opportunities for pupils to give full explanations and to talk about their work in more complex ways.

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

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

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour is good and pupils say they enjoy school. They are now more engaged and involved in lessons. Pupils say they feel safe in school and that bullying is not a problem. The school council is more active within the school. Pupils enjoyed raising money for 'Children in Need' and are proud of their role in interviewing the new staff. They recognise the need to follow healthy lifestyles and to carry out all activities safely, such as when carrying out science experiments. Pupils are now making satisfactory progress in the basic skills that are essential to their future education as well as their economic well-being in later life.

Quality of provision

Relationships have continued to develop well in all classrooms, including those where the teacher has recently changed or where there are new children, as in the Nursery. Teaching is more coherent right across the school. Planning more fully meets the needs of pupils. Developments in the curriculum, such as the use made of the building of the new school to stimulate writing and art, are having a very positive effect. The monitoring of lessons to ensure pupils have practical/active elements means pupils spend more time fully engaged in their learning. Occasionally, a few teachers still talk too generally and are not fully focusing on the content they wish pupils to grasp, and this wastes valuable time. Some lesson introductions are still too lengthy. The pupil tracking systems are now securely in place, enabling teachers to identify pupils who need more help. This has a positive impact on pupils' progress as work is now better adapted to help these pupils catch up to their peers. Appropriate interventions and extra support are given by the teaching assistants. Consequently, pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress that is at least as good as that of other pupils. Teaching is now at least satisfactory in almost all lessons and a good proportion is good.

The school continues to provide good levels of care and support. The family support workers are a valuable asset and help the most vulnerable families and children who need extra assistance. This has a positive impact on getting pupils to school. Parents' evenings are well attended. Generally, assessment is being used more effectively to provide work matched to pupils' needs, although some more able pupils' learning could be stretched further. Pupils are beginning to assess their own understanding of the work covered in lessons and quite a few can explain how this will help them meet their targets. Pupils are provided with suitable targets in reading, writing and mathematics. There is still more work to be done to ensure that homework is consistently set and that it helps pupils reinforce their learning. Teachers' marking is not sufficiently linked to the key purpose of each lesson and does not yet consistently provide pupils with enough advice on improving their work to make the next steps towards meeting their targets.

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

Leadership and management

The headteacher is effectively leading steady improvements. The school's development plan is now satisfactory and is appropriately driving specific improvements. Objectives set for the period September to December 2007 have been successfully completed. The school is much less dependent on external assistance. It now has a stronger senior management team in place. The quality of the monitoring of teaching and learning has improved substantially and all the staff have a much firmer grasp of the pupil progress data. This has enabled them to spot accurately exactly where pupils are underachieving. Positive interventions have been put in place and, for example, pupils in the joint Year 5 and 6 classes now benefit from better arranged teaching in groups with similar ability for English and mathematics. This is speeding up progress and helping pupils to catch up towards the levels expected for their age. The new mathematics coordinator has ensured that the subject is more consistently and effectively taught. The senior staff show determination to reach the targets set for the school in 2008. The headteacher is focused on driving up standards and is ably assisted by both the senior management team and the new middle management standards team. The challenge now is to sustain and build on the progress made to date. Governors are better briefed on developments and are beginning to hone their skills to question and challenge the school. They still have one vacancy for a community governor. There are plans to raise their profile in the school so that parents more clearly know who to approach. Parents surveyed by the school in December 2007 support the school and welcome the recent improvements.

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 – good.

External support

The school continues to receive good external support, although the amount has reduced substantially as the school team are better able to evaluate their own progress. Regular LA reviews call the school leadership to account effectively and set appropriate next steps. The school improvement partner has effectively challenged and supported the school to understand the pupil progress data.

Priorities for further improvement

No specific priorities for further improvement were identified during this monitoring inspection.