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19 March 2008

Mrs V Coles
The Acting Headteacher
Buckfastleigh Primary School
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Dear Mrs Coles

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BUCKFASTLEIGH
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit to your school on 12 and 13 March 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2006. 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 not 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 Devon.

Yours sincerely

David Townsend
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF BUCKFASTLEIGH PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the third monitoring inspection: 12 and 13 March 2008

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the acting headteacher and deputy headteacher, selected staff, a group of pupils, members of the governing body and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, staffing has been very unsettled. There have been several staff absences in the intervening period and two teachers are on long term sick leave. A substantive headteacher has been appointed and is due to take up post in April 2008.

Achievement and standards

When they start school, children's knowledge, skills and understanding are similar to those found nationally, except in terms of communication, language and mathematical development. The teaching team has worked hard to focus on these weaker aspects of children's learning and especially the ability to link sounds to letters. There has been a particular focus in class on delivering structured phonics teaching and on learning to write independently in a range of styles. Similarly, there has been a focus on the children's awareness of number relationships and early calculation skills. These approaches have enabled the children, especially those who entered school in the autumn term, to make good progress in the first half of this year.

In Years 1 to 4, standards in English and mathematics remain below average because the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding which have built up over time are still apparent, especially in the work of some average and below average pupils. The rate of progress for these pupils, whilst more marked now, has not been consistently good over time and they remain at risk of underachieving. However, more able pupils in these classes are now making good progress as a result of the school's recent focus on establishing and meeting their needs.

In Years 5 and 6, pupils of all abilities have made satisfactory and sometimes good progress in English and mathematics in recent months. Evidence indicates that standards are broadly average, although there continues to be fewer pupils achieving the higher levels. For all year groups, the school has now made accurate evaluations of where the gaps in pupils' learning lie.

Standards in science across the school are rising steadily and are now broadly average in terms of pupils' scientific knowledge, although their understanding of the process of scientific enquiry and the use of the correct terminology remain weaker.

During this visit, inspectors have seen an increased emphasis placed on practical investigative work in this subject and there are clear signs that pupils are beginning to acquire the relevant skills in how to plan, carry out and evaluate a 'fair test', albeit from low starting points.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- raise pupils' standards and achievement, especially in mathematics and science, by improving teaching and the curriculum to ensure that pupils have work that is suitably challenging and interesting – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Personal development and well-being remain satisfactory with some developing strengths. Behaviour in classrooms and around the school is satisfactory overall and pupils generally get on well together at break and lunch times. They particularly enjoy practical and engaging activities when these are offered in lessons and they value their teachers. One said that 'they are kind and helpful' and that 'you can talk to them'. The opportunities provided by educational visits and visitors to school are much appreciated and pupils value the ways in which they can take on responsibilities. For example, older pupils suggested a book club for Key Stage 1, and this is now operated by Year 6 librarians. Pupils can put forward their ideas through the school council and play a role in the school community. Recently, the school council sought pupils' ideas on books they would like to see in the library.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching continues to improve. Teaching is now consistently at least satisfactory, with many good features, and no inadequate teaching was observed. Most lessons continue to move at a brisk pace. Explanations are clear and technology is used well to ensure demonstrations of new concepts are introduced visually.

Teachers are also using good strategies to help pupils understand how to improve their own work during lessons, for example, through their regular references to the 'working wall' on which advice is displayed about the features of good work. Teachers also use the interactive whiteboards well to introduce clear learning objectives for each lesson and to share with pupils the 'learning ladder' steps to take in order to complete their work successfully. Teaching and learning are not consistently good because, at times, it is too teacher rather than pupil led. Opportunities to enthuse and engage learners are not always taken up in each part of all lessons.

The current teaching team are making more accurate assessments of what pupils know and can do and have used these to set challenging, but realistic, predictions of what learners might achieve by the end of the year. Teachers across the school generally provide good feedback to pupils on how to improve their work by referring back to the curricular targets set with individuals when marking their work. In turn, this information is feeding into teachers' planning so that staff can target their teaching more precisely on the learning that the class might previously have missed. Teachers are increasingly modifying the learning resources and adult inputs to take

account of the needs of pupils of all abilities, although the match of tasks to pupils' needs is not yet always close enough. Nevertheless, teachers now more regularly evaluate the effect their teaching is having on each pupil's learning and adjust subsequent plans and teaching accordingly. This process needs fine tuning in order to bring about more accelerated learning for all pupils in the months ahead.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- improve the accuracy of assessment and its use to set targets for pupils so that they know the next steps to take – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher has been effective in securing suitable teaching cover for each class during the recent period of staff absences. She has retained a clear focus on continuing to improve teaching and learning and on ensuring that LA consultancy support is well utilised. With the acting deputy headteacher, she has also promoted pupils' self-esteem and confidence by affording them new opportunities to take on responsibilities in school and contribute to its future development.

However, the lack of continuity in staffing arrangements since the last monitoring inspection in November 2007 has restricted the school's ability to develop its own internal leadership capacity and move forward at the planned rate of improvement. Key leadership roles, for example in literacy and science, have been covered by other staff for extended periods. Many tasks on the post-Ofsted action plan (POAP) have been carried out as planned, for example ensuring that progress meetings alongside pupils have occurred. However, whilst the pace of progress with the plan has picked up again, some key success criteria in relation to securing higher standards and achievement have not been met. For this reason, the plan requires updating.

Senior leaders have had less opportunity to sharpen the school's processes of self-evaluation. They are aware that systems for the monitoring and analysis of pupils' standards and progress remain underdeveloped. The school does not have a completed self-evaluation form (SEF).

The governors remain committed to the school's development. They have had a close oversight of the day to day management issues at the school, its improvement work and, on a strategic level, planning for the school's future. They are reflective and provide good support and challenge. Governors visit school regularly, are closely involved in the monitoring of its action plans, and know how much progress is being made. They have worked successfully as a team to use this knowledge in recruiting and appointing to the substantive headteacher post.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- improve leadership and management by ensuring that the good work done in analysing the school's strengths and weaknesses is used to bring about change, in particular, improvements to the quality of teaching – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has continued to provide extensive support for the school, both through the advice offered to the senior leaders in their roles and through the ongoing consultancy support targeting classroom practice. This support has proved effective in helping the school to identify the facets of good teaching and support staff as they begin applying them in lessons. The LA has also provided good support in helping the school through its current transition period and in addressing its longer term plans for school organisation and improvement planning. The current levels of assistance are set to remain in the coming months. However, through periodic reviews, the LA intends its support should diminish in line with the school's improvement.