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Mrs L Cottle
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cottle

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 on 17 October to look at work done to improve the school's overall effectiveness since it was placed in special measures in June 2002.

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 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, the deputy headteacher, a teacher, nursery nurses, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the governing body. Other relevant documentation was scrutinised.

A new substantive headteacher was appointed to the school shortly after the designation of special measures. The school was removed from the category in October 2003. Further changes in leadership followed, with the appointment of another substantive headteacher just prior to the section 5 inspection in September 2006. Throughout this period the pattern has been of continuous improvement in the quality of provision and in the outcomes for children. This is evidenced firmly through inspection reports and in conversations with a range of staff and other stakeholders linked with the school throughout this period. A strength of leadership post special measures

appears to have been the skill of identifying individual's strengths and unlocking this potential through a combination of targeted professional development and delegation of responsibility. Staff reflect on a regime prior to June 2002, in which they felt 'stifled' and 'not valued'. This is in marked contrast to their experience of leadership and management post special measures. Summing up the present situation, it was said 'the Headteacher gives you room to fly' and appreciate a leadership style which delegates responsibility. Nevertheless, staff are secure in the knowledge they have an astute professional at the helm, to lead the school along a path of continuous improvement. In discussions with staff there is a very strong sense of a whole-school culture founded on high expectations of themselves and of the children. These expectations are clearly translated in the children's behaviour, positive attitudes and enjoyment of learning.

Pivotal to the school's success is the priority given to the evaluation of actions identified in the improvement plan. At the end of each day all staff meet to reflect and share what has gone well and to discuss areas of individual or collective concern. This reflective practice is valued enormously. Staff stress the importance they place on working in a climate where they feel sufficiently secure to share with colleagues when things have not gone well. The evaluation process is central to the daily work of the school. It has cemented a team approach in which all staff report they have an equal input. The school improvement plan drives the day-to-day work of senior leaders, teachers and nursery nurses. Governors now use it to monitor the progress of improvement work and keep a check on the outcomes of provision.

Both headteachers appointed since special measures, the local authority (LA) and governors have worked in partnership to build management capacity at all levels. The skills and potential of existing staff have been developed through the investment of time and funding for external training. That this has been effective is demonstrated through greatly improved provision and outcomes for children. In discussions with a range of staff the positive impact on their self esteem, morale and motivation is clear. Staff appointments have been matched well to the needs of the children. Two bilingual staff appointments have strengthened language support provision and enabled a number of parents to engage more easily in the life of the school. Parental involvement has increased enormously since the school was in special measures. On this visit a number of parents were in school and involved with their children's learning. The successful inclusion of parents in the life of the school has benefited the wider community and had a positive impact on the children's personal development and well-being. That the school has had to hold elections for parent governor positions recently, is a measure of the distance travelled in seeking greater parental engagement.

A crucial feature of the school's success has been the careful management of improvement work at transition periods to ensure continuity of actions and sustainability. The work of the LA has been significant here, particularly through actions taken in guarding against slippage during the 'holding period' between successive substantive headteachers. The right balance between

support and rigorous challenge has ensured LA intervention has been influential in achieving a trend of continuing improvement. The LA know the school well. A clear exit strategy, agreed with all stakeholders, ensured improvement was sustained. The LA continues to maintain a link with the school through productive dialogue with the headteacher.

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