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18 March 2008

Mrs J Lapsa  
The Headteacher  
Vernon Terrace Primary School  
Vernon Terrace  
Northampton  
Northamptonshire  
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Dear Mrs Lapsa

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF VERNON TERRACE  
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Suzanne Gerred, Additional Inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 March 2008, 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 October 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 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 and Young People's Services for Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

John D Eadie  
Additional Inspector

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF VERNON TERRACE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 4 and 5 March 2008

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work in all classes, scrutinised documents and pupils' work, and met with the headteacher, key subject leaders, groups of pupils, parents, the chair of governors, and representatives from the local authority.

### Context

There have been no significant changes since the last inspection, although two staff are leaving at the end of this term. The school is advertising for a new deputy headteacher to replace the previous post holder who left in July 2007. The post is currently shared between two members of the school's staff.

### Achievement and standards

Although there have been some improvements in pupils' achievement, these are very recent. They are too variable between classes and have not made a real difference to redressing past underachievement. Standards are still low. The improvements to the quality of teaching are not yet sufficiently embedded to have had a major effect on pupils' progress. The school is now keeping careful records of pupils' progress and these have been used well to identify pupils who are in danger of falling behind. Support for these pupils has been put in place recently, but it is too early to say whether they are making faster progress as a result.

Children make a good start in the Nursery, where provision has improved well. They make good progress, particularly in their personal development and in their acquisition of language skills, but from a very low baseline. However, this progress is still not being built on consistently throughout the rest of the school. Whereas pupils are often making good progress in some classes, this is far too patchy and too many pupils make limited progress.

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

- improve pupils' progress and the standards they attain in all subjects – inadequate.

### Personal development and well-being

Children in the Nursery behave well and grow in confidence as they respond to the many opportunities to work independently, for example by deciding when helping themselves to their own snacks and deciding when to take them. In Reception to Year 6, pupils report that behaviour in the playground has improved. Behaviour in lessons and around the school continues to be satisfactory. Some lack of concentration and restless behaviour occurs when teaching fails to capture pupils'

interest. Pupils generally enjoy coming to school and particularly like lessons which involve them in practical activities, such as investigations in science. Good relationships are a feature in most lessons and pupils say that this is a 'friendly' school. Pupils show adequate awareness of healthy lifestyles. They know how to keep themselves safe in physical education and in other practical lessons. Pupils are still not prepared well enough for the next stage in their education because their basic skills and independence as learners have not improved enough.

The school has made a good start at working with parents to improve pupils' attendance. Although the rate of attendance has improved significantly, the overall picture is still well below the national average.

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

- work more closely with parents to improve pupils' attendance and punctuality – satisfactory.

### Quality of provision

Teaching has improved since the last inspection. The good features found in the Nursery and in the special unit for pupils with a hearing impairment have been maintained. The proportion of satisfactory or better teaching has increased, but some remains inadequate. There is not yet enough good teaching to raise standards and to accelerate the rate of pupils' progress. Teachers are developing a clearer understanding of the levels at which pupils should be working by making better use of the tracking systems. This is helping in the process of providing work that is matched more closely to pupils' needs. However, too much inconsistency remains in planning for the needs of different groups of pupils in lessons and expectations are not always high enough. There are occasions when pupils simply sit and listen for too long and 'switch off' or become restless and fidgety. The use of teaching assistants is better, although there is some variability.

Work is in progress to improve the curriculum. Whilst recognising that there is still some way to go, a greater effort is being made to provide opportunities for speaking and listening. For example, the use of 'talk partners' is now a feature in some lessons. Teachers are beginning to exploit links between subjects and to engage pupils in more practical activities. Pupils say that some lessons are more fun now and feel that work is more challenging and exciting. More frequent opportunities for the development of key skills in literacy and mathematics are being planned in other subjects. However, much of this work is at an early stage of development and is not consistent. The analysis of tracking information has led to intervention programmes that are meeting pupils' specific needs. The school has made every effort to support the increasing number of pupils who arrive with little or no English by, for example, employing a bilingual teaching assistant. This is helping these pupils to follow the same curriculum as others in their class.

As at the last inspection, the use of visits and visitors enriches the curriculum well. Extra-curricular clubs provide opportunities for personal development in a varied

range of activities. A number of these clubs, such as Karaoke, relaxation and rock band, have been provided at the pupils' request.

The school is now able to demonstrate that all government requirements for safeguarding children have been met and that the expected central record contains the required detail. There have been improvements to academic guidance. Pupils are more aware of their targets in English and mathematics, although there is still some inconsistency in how they are used to guide pupils' next steps. Teachers are using the recently revised marking policy to help pupils get a better understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. However, staff are not using it consistently.

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

- ensure that teaching and the curriculum are closely matched to all pupils' needs and that teachers' expectations of all pupils are high enough – satisfactory
- provide all pupils with clear guidance that helps them to improve their performance and to take more responsibility for their learning – inadequate
- as a matter of urgency, fully implement government requirements for safeguarding – satisfactory.

#### Leadership and management

There is a concerted drive to raise standards, which has been led well by the headteacher. However, other key managers, such as the literacy and numeracy leaders, have only recently had sufficient training to evaluate standards in their own subjects, so much of the monitoring work has fallen on the headteacher. This has been carried out rigorously and shared well with staff and governors. There is a corporate sense of responsibility and all involved have a clear picture of the work that remains to be done.

Many good plans and procedures have been put in place, although few have had much impact. An exception is that new tracking systems are being used well to identify pupils who might be underachieving and to put in place intervention groups for them. Clear expectations have been set for the quality of teaching, but this has not yet resulted in the consistently good teaching necessary to improve pupils' achievement.

A recent local authority review of governance has provided a very necessary spur to governors in improving their involvement. They are aware of their accountability and a reorganisation of responsibilities has ensured some relevant expertise in supporting and challenging the school. They are very much part of the teamwork recognised in the last inspection. This teamwork has resulted in all concerned having a much clearer, and more accurate, picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This means that the school has now set its foot on the uphill path and is ready to move onwards and upwards.

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

- rigorously analyse the influence of provision, particularly teaching and the curriculum, on pupils' progress and involve subject leaders fully in this – satisfactory.

## External support

The local authority has been instrumental in supporting developments to raise standards and improve pupils' achievement. In particular, the work of literacy, numeracy and science consultants has been valued by the school in giving subject leaders the necessary skills to monitor and evaluate standards in their own subjects. Although the training needs of governors have been identified, these have not yet been met by the local authority. A consultant headteacher is providing valuable support and relieving some of the burden from the headteacher.

The local authority statement of action was judged to be inadequate as there were no success criteria or a precise timescale for one issue. This has been amended and action taken promptly to address the issue. As outlined in its action plan, the local authority has provided effective support in a number of areas.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure consistency of teaching so that pupils make faster progress.
- Ensure that the new marking policy and target setting procedures are used consistently so that pupils know the next steps in, and take more responsibility for, their own learning.
- Extend the monitoring of the effectiveness of the school to include more involvement of key staff and governors.