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20 March 2008

Mrs F Jones
The Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Jones

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ABINGTON VALE
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Ian Hodgkinson and Fiona Robinson, Additional Inspectors, 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 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 – inadequate.

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

Peter Callow
Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF ABINGTON VALE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and the chair of the governors' finance committee, representatives from the local authority (LA), senior staff, subject leaders and a consultant headteacher who is providing support to the headteacher and staff.

Context

There have been some changes to the governing body since the school became subject to special measures. Two parent governors resigned and have been replaced and a new community governor has been appointed. In addition, two associate governors have been appointed to strengthen the governing body.

Achievement and standards

Standards remain broadly average overall by the time pupils reach the end of Year 6. Most recent assessments of Year 6 pupils show a high proportion reaching the National Curriculum Level 4 expected for their age in English, mathematics and science. However, the proportions reaching the higher Level 5 are well below average in all three subjects. Given the high standards they reached at the end of Year 2, there continues to be substantial underachievement for these pupils. As reported at the last inspection, underachievement is particularly evident for those in the middle and higher ability groups. Most pupils in Year 6 have made satisfactory progress since the start of the year, but progress has not been strong enough to make up the ground they lost earlier. Whilst pupils make satisfactory progress in reading, their progress in writing is a weakness across Years 3 to 6. There are signs that clearer targets for pupils are helping them to recognise what they need to do to reach higher levels and are serving to raise expectations in writing and mathematics, but these have not had time to significantly reduce underachievement. Progress remains satisfactory for pupils in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

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

- improve pupils' progress and ensure that all pupils reach the standards of which they are capable – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Attendance is above the national average and pupils arrive at school on time. They have good attitudes to learning and enjoy school life. Pupils are encouraged to listen attentively, and they have good relationships with adults and cooperate well with one another. Most pupils work hard in lessons and behave well. Occasionally, pupils lack motivation when lessons lack pace and are less interesting.

Quality of provision

Teaching seen on this visit was satisfactory overall, with about a half of all lessons being judged good. There are a number of positive features to lessons. Teachers generally use a good range of resources, including information and communication technology (ICT) and off site visits, to enliven pupils' learning, and pupils respond with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Since the last inspection, teachers have revised their method of planning the curriculum so that teaching and learning are set in interesting contexts and themes which run coherently across subjects. This is starting to give pupils the opportunity to develop their key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT across subjects. Teachers are now planning with clearer expectations of the levels at which pupils should be working. There remains, however, some inconsistency in the pace of learning in lessons. In too many lessons, pupils spend too long on the carpet listening to the teacher before engaging in the independent work of which they are clearly very capable. In some lessons, there is insufficient extension work to challenge higher attaining pupils and to move those who finish tasks early on to more demanding tasks. Pupils are not always given sufficiently clear models to follow in their work, to help them engage quickly. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities often receive well planned support in lessons and withdrawal sessions, with work which is adapted well to meet their needs.

Pastoral care continues to be good, including arrangements for settling children into the Reception Year. Pupils are well cared for and arrangements for safeguarding pupils are satisfactory. The school works closely with outside agencies to provide effective support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Assessment procedures have improved, with pupils' standards being recorded at regular intervals. The school has recently got to a position whereby it can use this information to provide more accurate information about the progress pupils are making and whether it is sufficient for them to reach the standards of which they are capable. Targets have become more specific and challenging in literacy and numeracy. Pupils' work is marked systematically across the school, but guidance about how pupils can improve their work is inconsistent. There are still occasions when pupils are uncertain about their next steps in learning and this slows their progress.

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 expectations of all pupils are high enough – satisfactory
- provide all pupils with clear guidance on how to improve their performance – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The school's leaders have maintained the strengths in pupils' personal development and well-being and have successfully promoted their enjoyment of school. However, the weakness in the quality of the school's self-evaluation remains and, together with a lack of detail in the school improvement plan, this is limiting the school's capacity to improve. The pace of change necessary to develop a robust system of analysing pupils' progress to support this self-evaluation has been too slow. As a result, leaders at all levels are only just in a position to start making use of the data that has been

collected, to track pupils' progress rigorously and, in particular, to identify those at risk of underachievement. A lack of accurate performance data, until very recently, has also meant that the impact of the quality of teaching and the curriculum has not been able to be systematically assessed. For example, the underperformance of more able pupils in Year 6 has gone unchecked and, at the moment, they are unlikely to reach the standards of which they are capable by the end of the year. Regular pupil progress meetings at which all teachers are held to account for the progress their pupils are making, based on recent assessment data, are not yet in place.

Key stage coordinators have a growing awareness of their roles and responsibilities, particularly with regard to their use of assessment information. They have the energy and commitment to ensure that this is now used systematically across the school, as a matter of priority, to identify strengths and weaknesses in pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching and the curriculum. Unfortunately, through a lack of data, key stage coordinators, subject leaders in English, mathematics and science, and the governors have not yet been able to be accountable for pupils' progress. However, because of good support from the LA, subject leaders are now more confidently able to make judgements about standards and achievement in their subjects when looking at pupils' work. This is helping to strengthen their understanding of pupils' performance in their subjects. Monitoring of teaching, learning and the curriculum is primarily done by the headteacher and so is not enabling leaders at all levels to make informed judgements about what aspects need to be improved and to take swift action to address them.

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

- develop the roles and responsibilities of leaders and managers at all levels and make sure that they are accountable for pupils' progress – inadequate
- rigorously analyse how teaching and the curriculum influence pupils' progress and take swift action for improvement – inadequate.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is satisfactory and clearly identifies the level of support, the action to be taken and the timescales. Issues for improvement are well embedded, but the success criteria for each individual issue are not always clear enough, which makes evaluation slightly more difficult. The wide range of support provided by the LA is satisfactory overall and has included a review of teaching and learning across the school and the establishment of a parent champion to improve communication with parents. Help has been particularly good in enabling subject leaders in English, mathematics and science to develop their roles and responsibilities. There has been much less impact so far in improving the quality of the school's self-evaluation. The guidance given to the headteacher and staff by a consultant headteacher has been well received and teachers are keen to say how much they have been helped to improve their practice.

Priorities for further improvement

- Urgently improve self-evaluation by making better use of pupils' performance data.

- Raise the proportion of good teaching by providing more opportunities for teachers to see and share good practice.