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Mrs Kate Utting
Consultant Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Utting

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WAITE END PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Brian Evans, Additional Inspector, to Waite End Primary School on 11 and 12 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 November 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress made on the key issues since being subject to special measures has been too limited and is 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 Services.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF WAITE END PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 11 and 12 March 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the consultant headteacher, staff, pupils and two representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

The school continues to experience turbulence with staffing due to long periods of sickness-related absences. Following an extended period of absence, the substantive headteacher is retiring at the end of the spring term. The school has yet to advertise for a new headteacher.

The school is part of an intensive support programme and receives additional help from three advanced skilled teachers as well as one of the local authority's School Improvement Partners. A consultant headteacher also provides support for three days a week; this arrangement is due to end in July 2008.

Existing members of staff took over the leadership for mathematics and English in January 2008.

Achievement and standards

The school has made little progress in improving standards and achievement since the last inspection. Standards remain well below average and pupils' achievement is inadequate. Progress is accelerated in Year 6 and this is helping to compensate for some gaps in pupils' learning. Basic language skills are well below average because there are weaknesses in phonic knowledge, sentence construction and grammar. Furthermore, there are missed opportunities for pupils to discuss or talk through their understanding of concepts. Mathematical skills are lowest in Year 5 because of the legacy of inadequate teaching in the past. There is still insufficient challenge for the brightest pupils. Support and guidance for pupils with special educational needs is improving. However, this is very recent and has yet to impact on raising standards.

Assessment is not used well by teachers to inform planning or monitor progress. The quality of marking is generally weak, rarely linked to learning objectives, and does not help pupils to know how they can improve. The school is in the process of setting up an assessment and tracking system, but currently teachers do not have a clear overview of pupils' achievement and progress.

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

- ensuring that all managers, and teachers in lessons, make better use of assessment information so that pupils' progress is tracked more effectively, and work is set that challenges and meets the needs of all pupils— inadequate.

Quality of provision

Inadequate progress has been made in improving the shortcomings in the quality of teaching and learning identified at the time of the last inspection. However, teaching is improving slowly and there is some evidence of good practice. An older pupil stated, 'I like practical work in mathematics', and a number of others commented that they like the increased variety of learning activities which help to keep them interested.

Where teaching is most successful, learning objectives are clearly presented and referred to during the course of lessons. A good example was seen in a Year 6 science lesson, when pupils were learning about the way animals adapt to their environment. The teacher's subject knowledge and good use of the electronic whiteboard helped to accelerate learning. Pupils' contribution to the plenary confirmed that most had achieved the learning objective and that some of the pupils in the class are very able.

In most classes, relationships are at least satisfactory and occasionally a little gentle humour and the use of visual aids adds to pupils' enjoyment of learning. Behaviour is at least satisfactory and does not present a barrier to learning. The main weaknesses in teaching are low expectations, teachers talking for extended periods of time while pupils sit passively, and pupils not being encouraged to develop as independent learners. In many lessons tasks are too easy and the lessons progress at a very slow pace. These lessons are not well structured and do not include sufficient challenge for potential high flyers. In many lessons additional adults are underused and their role is not sufficiently well defined within teachers' planning.

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

- ensuring that all teachers have a clear focus on how pupils learn best in lessons, including adapting their teaching to meet the varied learning styles of pupils – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The consultant headteacher has contributed significantly to the smooth and effective day-to-day running of the school since it went into special measures. Nevertheless, there continue to be extensive shortcomings in the leadership and management of the school. This is because the role of leaders has been woefully underdeveloped for many years and some weaknesses still remain. Governors have also to develop their role as critical friend. There is an over reliance on you as consultant headteacher and the LA staff to drive improvements in the school.

Although not legally required to do so, the school has not produced an improvement plan following the inspection. Some staff believe that such a document could help them work more effectively as a team towards the common goal of whole school improvement. Staff and governors do not have ownership of the Statement of Action produced by the LA and have not made use of this document as an action or

improvement plan. With the exception of a couple of leaders, there is currently insufficient self-evaluation, scrutiny of pupils' work or monitoring of lessons other than by the consultant headteacher and School Improvement Partner. As a result, with the exception of the subject leader for mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) as well as the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders are not well informed about progress and standards in their areas of responsibility. Although they have produced position statements these are not informed by the analysis of data or by any monitoring or evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning. The position statements highlight the gaps in subject leaders' knowledge of strengths and weaknesses in their area of responsibility. Subject leaders have yet to produce action plans or share in the leadership and management of the school. The special educational needs coordinator provides one of the exceptions and is becoming more pro-active in leading developments for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This is leading to some improvements in this area; consequently, the quality of individual learning plans has improved. Furthermore, having attended training earlier this term, learning support assistants are now making better use of learning plans to support the needs of pupils with special educational needs during lessons. However, there is currently insufficient additional support for these pupils in mathematics.

With support from the LA the newly appointed leader for English has identified that teaching and support staff are not sufficiently well skilled in the teaching of phonics. This has prevented them from making effective use of the Primary National Strategy document 'Letters and Sounds' to teach pupils. The subject leader for English has ordered a commercially produced phonics programme and is organising training for staff.

There has been good progress in developing the leadership of mathematics since the appointment of the new leader. As a result, teachers have a more accurate view of standards in mathematics for their class; numerical targets have been set for every pupil and the subject leader has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of mathematics across the school. Although it is too soon to see the impact on standards, progress is evident in the more consistent quality of planning. The subject leader has correctly identified the need to focus on what is being taught and help improve rates of progress in mathematics throughout the school.

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

- ensuring that all managers conduct rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the impact of their initiatives, and that systems are in place to track their success – inadequate.

External support

The quality and impact of the external support provided for the school by the LA, the School Improvement Partner, advanced skills teachers, consultants and the consultant headteacher are satisfactory overall.

In the space of 24 days the consultant headteacher has made good headway in laying down the basic systems the school requires before it can begin to improve.

She has updated job descriptions and ensured that all staff understand their roles and responsibilities. She has observed lessons and provided teachers with constructive feedback which has led to some improvements in their practice. Staff have a more accurate view of the strengths and weakness of the school as well as of their own practice. They appreciate the humane and yet clear way this information is communicated to them. As one member of staff states, 'She picks up on things we didn't even begin to consider'. In a short space of time the consultant headteacher has gained the respect of staff and pupils. Some staff are beginning to feel more empowered to effect change; this is most evident with special educational needs, English, ICT and mathematics. Communication amongst staff particularly between teaching and support staff has also now improved. The newly implemented staff briefings have helped staff to become more informed and more involved in the developments and activities which affect them.

The LA, the School Improvement Partner and the advanced skills teachers work well with the school and this has helped to bring about some changes to the hitherto deeply ingrained, but ineffective working practices. However, progress has been very slow due to the extensive work required to effect a change of culture in the school and the school's overall lack of capacity to help itself to improve.

The LA's statement of action is a good, comprehensive and detailed document; however, given the position of the school some of the objectives are over ambitious and the school is already falling behind schedule in meeting them. Minutes from strategy meetings do not indicate a sharp enough focus on the key issues for improvements or the extent to which objectives in the statement of action have been met.

Written feedback from the School Improvement Partner provides an accurate account of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and provides clear indicators of what teachers need to do to improve. The work of the advanced skilled teachers is helping to improve the quality of teaching. This is most noticeable with the teaching of phonics lower down the school.