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17 July 2008

Mr John Searl
The Headteacher
Abington Vale Primary School
Ashford Close
Abington Vale
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Dear Mr Searl

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

Following my visit with Nina Bee, Additional Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 July 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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.

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 & Young People's Services for Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Peter Callow
Additional Inspector

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 10 and 11 July 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the interim headteacher, pupils, the chair and vice chair of governors, representatives from the local authority (LA), senior staff and subject leaders.

Context

The substantive headteacher left in April 2008 and an interim headteacher was appointed for one year from that date. The LA and governing body are working closely together to appoint a new substantive headteacher for April 2009. Two of the nine classes have had a change of teacher since the first monitoring visit.

Achievement and standards

The youngest children in the school get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage and achieve well because of the good teaching and curriculum which is well matched to their ages and abilities. In Year 2, school data shows that standards are below average and lower than in 2007. However, this represents satisfactory achievement as pupils have moved through Years 1 and 2. A significant number of pupils have joined the cohort during Key Stage 1 and a high proportion speaks English as an additional language.

School data indicates that standards at the end of Year 6 are above average. As pupils in Year 6 moved through Key Stage 2, they made satisfactory progress overall in reading and some made good progress. The majority made satisfactory progress in writing and mathematics. However, because of staffing issues, lack of careful checking of how well pupils were doing, and weaknesses in teaching, not all pupils did as well as they should. Current achievement in all classes is satisfactory and underachievement in Years 3 to 6 has been eradicated. The improvement in achievement is due to teachers becoming more aware of the levels pupils are working at and using this information more skilfully to match work to pupils' individual needs. In addition, they are beginning to identify individual targets for pupils in literacy and numeracy in order to ensure that all pupils are challenged to reach the standards of which they are capable.

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 – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their attendance which is above average. They show positive attitudes to their learning and pupils' behaviour is good

in all that they do. During the monitoring visit, pupils performed in a rock concert that was held in the hall. They confidently sang and played musical instruments, such as guitars, as well as getting the audience to join in. The concert was enthusiastically received by staff, parents and pupils.

Quality of provision

Teaching is satisfactory overall, but good teaching was seen in all key stages. Teachers have continued to develop their understanding of the levels at which pupils are working. This means that they are more precise in matching work to pupils' needs and abilities when planning lessons. Support for pupils who find learning difficult is generally good and enables them to take part in all class activities. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are sensitively supported and gain confidence quickly. As a result, they make similar progress to their classmates. Weaknesses in lessons often continue to be related to the lack of pace which, at times, means that not all pupils make the progress of which they are capable. Occasionally, work is still not matched carefully enough to the needs of individual pupils. Consequently, a few cannot complete the activities because they are too hard or finish quickly because they are not sufficiently challenging.

The school now has more accurate data on all pupils to show how well they are doing and the standards they are reaching. This has had a positive impact on the improvement in achievement since the last monitoring visit. The system for setting targets in literacy and numeracy is improving, but neither the format nor the use of targets is consistent throughout the school. At the moment, therefore, target setting is only making a small difference to the better achievement of pupils. The best examples of teachers' marking are comments which not only let pupils know how well they are doing, but also indicate what they need to do to next to reach their targets. However, the quality of marking is very variable with still not enough having these good features.

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 interim headteacher has, in a short space of time, taken a number of positive steps to improve the leadership and management of the school. Underlying this is a well structured plan for the school's removal from special measures and its further development. Staff and governors acknowledge the impact that this strong leadership has already had in establishing a common sense of purpose and boosting morale. There is increasing evidence in lessons, pupils' work and assessment data to show also how a clear focus on raising standards is starting to improve the quality of education provided. Pupils too have noticed a new sense of direction and appreciate, for example, the high expectations of how they should behave.

A good system has been put in place for analysing pupils' progress. This is giving leaders at all levels a clearer view of standards and achievement of individuals and groups and in different subjects, although they recognise that even greater use could be made of assessment data to improve the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils. The interim headteacher has demonstrated to senior leaders how this information can be used successfully at pupil progress meetings. Pupils at risk of underachievement are now identified more quickly and support strategies planned, as well as teachers held to account for the progress their pupils are making. As yet, key stage coordinators have not led these pupil progress meetings themselves, but are well placed to do so next year.

Key stage coordinators and subject leaders in English, mathematics and science have a much clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities, particularly with regard to the use of assessment information. For example, the mathematics coordinator has identified as a priority the need to focus on mathematical investigations and ensuring sufficient challenge for the more able. Leaders at all levels say how much their confidence has grown, not only because of the support of the interim headteacher, but also that provided by the LA and subject consultants in particular. Their skills in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning are developing soundly, through a range of paired activities and coaching. Work scrutiny is now regularly undertaken, although opportunities are sometimes missed to provide feedback to staff about areas for improvement. Whilst it will not be put into place until September 2008, a new comprehensive annual cycle for measuring the performance of the school includes good opportunities for all leaders and managers to become involved in the monitoring of teaching.

The drawing together of a teaching and learning policy has been a key factor in the interim headteacher's drive to secure improvement at a faster rate. The engagement and commitment by staff to this has helped to ensure that the proportion of good teaching has increased a little since the first monitoring visit. Teachers have a much clearer idea of what are the key features of a good lesson and all are enthusiastic about improving their practice. Governors also show that same commitment to better fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. With good support from the LA, they are taking a much more strategic role, thinking carefully about the appointment of a permanent headteacher, as well as being more knowledgeable about how well the school is performing.

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 – satisfactory
- rigorously analyse how teaching and the curriculum influence pupils' progress and take swift action for improvement – satisfactory.

External support

Staff and governors are keen to acknowledge the good support they are receiving from the LA. Regular meetings of the Task Group ensure that the performance of the school is systematically checked and evaluated. A review of the school's effectiveness in May 2008 not only provided further pointers for development but also gave the school confidence in its ability to bring about improvement. Recent support and

training for governors have been particularly helpful. The skills of subject leaders continue to be enhanced considerably by the effective support of LA consultants.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of good quality teaching and learning across the school.