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2 December 2008

Mrs J Barke
The Headteacher
St James CEVA Primary School
Harleston Road
Northampton
Northamptonshire
NN5 7AG

Dear Mrs Barke

Special measures: Monitoring Inspection of St James CEVA Primary School

Following my visit with Rodney Braithwaite, Additional Inspector, to your school on 19 and 20 November 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – inadequate.

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, the Director of the Children and Young People's Service for Northamptonshire and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Tim Bristow
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of St James CEVA Primary School

Report from the fifth monitoring inspection on 19 and 20 November 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with groups of pupils, the headteacher, nominated staff, the chair of governors, and representatives from the local authority and the diocese.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection the school has appointed a deputy headteacher and a Key Stage 1 coordinator. In addition, four teachers have been appointed, two of whom are on short term contracts.

Achievement and standards

The school's assessment information shows that by the end of July 2008 progress in the Reception classes was good with the majority of children achieving the nationally expected levels in most areas of the curriculum. Children make good progress in acquiring language skills, although the majority are below national expectations when they enter Year 1. As in 2007, most children enter the Reception classes with skills that were well below expectations in communication, language and literacy and mathematical calculation. The majority have skills that are below expectations in the other aspects of the curriculum.

By July 2008, progress in Key Stage 1 had accelerated maintaining the good start pupils received in the Reception classes. Overall, standards in Year 2 rose, although they remained below average. Pupils made good progress in writing and standards rose considerably. This is because of the determination of the teachers to improve provision. Since September the progress of the pupils in the Key Stage 1 classes has slowed considerably because of inadequate teaching which has not built on the good progress these pupils made last year.

The unvalidated results of the 2008 tests for Year 6 pupils show that standards overall were well below average. Standards dropped in mathematics, but rose in science. However, in order to achieve these standards, pupils made good progress in Year 6. School assessment information and pupils' work showed that pupils made at least satisfactory progress in Years 3, 4 and 5. Since the beginning of this academic year progress has continued to accelerate as the quality of teaching and learning improves further. Consequently, the school is demonstrating that it has satisfactory capacity to raise standards at Key Stage 2.

Procedures for checking the progress of pupils are now embedded in the school and, where lessons are good, teachers regularly check to ensure pupils are on track to achieve their targets. Where teaching is weak at Key Stage 1, less attention is being

paid to the assessment information so that activities for some groups of pupils are inappropriately matched to their needs.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards and improve achievement by establishing clear assessment procedures so that teachers know how well pupils are doing and can plan work matched to their needs – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils continue to enjoy school describing it as 'smiley' and 'colourful'. They behave well in lessons and when on visits outside the school, and have a good understanding of the behaviour card system which they regard as helpful. They enjoy their many clubs, and feel that school staff keep them safe and secure and deal quickly with isolated cases of bullying or name calling. The school council makes a valuable contribution to the school community, for example by organising cake stalls for 'Children in Need' and enthusiastically taking on responsibilities around the school. Since the last monitoring inspection, attendance has fallen and the steady improvement in the past year has come to a halt. The school has made strenuous efforts to improve the situation, but there are still a significant number of pupils who have high absenteeism or are regularly late for school. The school's staff are constantly involved in working with parents encouraging them to cooperate with the school in ensuring regular attendance by their children. This is not yet proving to be effective enough because the school has insufficient knowledge of systems for improvement in schools with a similar background which are proving successful.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- work with families of pupils who are frequently absent to improve attendance – inadequate.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching continues to improve in Key Stage 2 and is satisfactory, and often good. This is because teachers are now working together effectively in teams to plan and teach a consistent curriculum. Teachers are encouraging more speaking in lessons, but sometimes their questions are closed, and pupils are not invited to try to give more extended answers.

Teachers in Key Stage 1 made a promising start to the year. However, significant staff absence has led to a lack of consistency and continuity in Years 1 and 2, resulting in inadequate teaching and learning overall, and pupils are at present making insufficient progress.

The curriculum continues to improve and is now better balanced as a result of the raised profile of subject leaders, as for example in science where provision is better.

Pupils like the curriculum and indicate their enjoyment of a wide variety of opportunities especially those involving practical activities and educational visits.

Pastoral care remains good and pupils are very confident that they are well supported by the whole staff. The school makes conspicuous and effective efforts to provide well for the needs of different groups of pupils. The previously reported improvement in academic guidance has strengthened. Key Stage 2 pupils are impressive in their detailed knowledge of their learning targets, and can explain what they mean. This is helping them to be ambitious in what they want to achieve. They also enjoy one-to-one discussions with their teachers about their progress and ways in which they can improve. The school's marking policy is ensuring more effective guidance to pupils, and is well balanced between praise and encouragement, and suggestions for improvement.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- plan the curriculum so that pupils experience a variety of subjects, study relevant and interesting topics and have opportunities to develop their basic skills – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Careful reorganisation of the teaching teams at Key Stage 2 has born fruit so that they are now working much more effectively to improve teaching and learning. The Reception team continues to work successfully. This is not the case in the Key Stage 1 team where the successes and progress being made in other parts of the school are being undermined because staff are unable to implement school policy. For example, in one class, pupils had not recorded any science work this academic year until they were taught by a different teacher very recently. The headteacher continues to demonstrate a determination to lead school improvement. However, problems that have arisen this term affecting the continuity of provision, particularly at Key Stage 1, mean that her priorities have been rightly focused on maintaining the smooth running of the school, leaving little time for school improvement priorities. Leadership of the provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language continues to strengthen. The new Key Stage 1 coordinator and deputy headteacher demonstrate a good understanding of where improvements need to be made. The Key Stage 1 coordinator has been frustrated in her plans for continued and focused improvement in learning because of the instability in staffing. Subject leadership continues to strengthen with leaders regularly taking part in checking the school's work and making recommendations for improvement. Senior leaders have correctly identified that they now need to check more carefully that the agreements the school has made, which will make the biggest difference to pupils' progress, are successfully implemented in all lessons. Governors now regularly hold the school to account and demonstrate a greater knowledge and understanding of its work.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- involve subject leaders in taking active roles to improve teaching and the curriculum – satisfactory.

External support

The science subject leader has received good support from the local authority consultant which has enabled her to develop her leadership skills. The local authority has been subject to a major reorganisation of its support and the school has experienced a change in advisors and consultants. The school perceives that, whilst this may be necessary, it has had a detrimental effect at a time when the continuity of support previously experienced would have been most helpful. The local authority has responded to concerns over the attendance rate by increasing the education welfare officer time offered to the school. However, at the time of this monitoring inspection, this has had insufficient impact on the low rate of attendance.

Priorities for further improvement

- Stabilise the teaching team at Key Stage 1 so that teaching and learning improve and pupil progress accelerates.
- Seek expert help to streamline the procedures the school has put in place so that they have a greater impact on the attendance rate.
- Ensure that school leaders rigorously check that teachers are implementing the agreements the school has made into all lessons.