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30 September 2008

Mr M Barnes
The Acting Headteacher
Bridgerule Church of England Primary School
Bridgerule
Holsworthy
Devon
EX22 7EN

Dear Mr Barnes

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Bridgerule Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 September 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 February 2008. 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 Chief Education Officer for Devon.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D Edwards". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

David Edwards
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Bridgerule Church of England Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 18 September 2008

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, met with the headteacher, the chair of governors and spoke with pupils. Prior to the monitoring visit, a telephone conversation was held between the inspector and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the school was made subject to special measures the substantive headteacher resigned and an acting headteacher was appointed in March 2008. This headteacher will remain in post until the school is successfully removed from special measures and a substantive headteacher appointed.

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory progress has been made in raising teachers' expectations of what pupils will achieve. Teachers now set appropriately challenging targets for all pupils in English and mathematics. Particularly pleasing progress has been made by pupils in the Key Stage 2 class. This is because teachers now set higher expectations for pupils and are gaining confidence in providing more creative and stimulating lessons that engage and maintain pupils' interests. Lesson objectives are provided at the start of each lesson and make it clear to pupils what they need to do.

In the Key Stage 1 class, despite learning objectives being rehearsed at the start of each session, pupils do not always engage fully with the learning task because activities lack an appropriate focus and structure. Consequently, they are prone to lose concentration or become distracted, particularly when the pace of the lesson slows or the teacher is focusing on other children.

There is still work to do on providing pupils with personalised targets that are reviewed regularly by teachers so pupils can focus effectively on their work and achieve higher standards. Teaching assistants, in both classes, provide appropriate support to learners under the direction of class teachers.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2008:

- raise teacher expectations of what pupils will achieve by setting appropriately challenging targets for all pupils in English and mathematics – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

This visit did not specifically focus on pupils' personal development and well-being. The previous inspection judged this area as good, and the inspector did not find any evidence to disagree with that judgement. Behaviour, both in and around the school, is good. In conversation, pupils were polite, courteous and able to talk confidently about their work. The only signs of restlessness or off task behaviour observed were when tasks set for the younger children failed to engage the children successfully, or when teacher expectations were too low.

Quality of provision

Although there has been effective recent progress in the quality of teaching and learning for older pupils, steps were not taken swiftly enough to raise the teaching standards in Key Stage 1. Consequently, the quality of teaching seen during this visit varied from good to unsatisfactory. As a result, the overall quality of provision remains inadequate. The headteacher's self-evaluation concurs with this judgement.

The best lessons demonstrated high expectations, a good level of appropriate challenge, and clear planning. Pupils' interests were captured and maintained through stimulating activities that enabled the pupils to complete tasks satisfactorily. Not all pupils, however, are being provided with the right level of challenge to make good progress. In lessons observed for the youngest children progress remains inadequate or barely satisfactory. This is because teaching is not based on a secure understanding of the children's prior attainment, nor on clear and relevant targets for their progress. This restricts expectations and limits the level of challenge. Children are therefore not enabled sufficiently to make the rapid progress that is now required, given the long history of underachievement.

There has been satisfactory progress in providing pupils with clear guidance and specific targets to help them improve their standard of work. Satisfactory support has been received from local authority consultants to help teachers to set targets for English and mathematics. This has begun to have a positive impact on pupils' progress.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2008:

- improve the quality of teaching by ensuring lessons provide the right level of challenge for all pupils and are conducted at a pace that enables them to make good progress – inadequate
- provide pupils with clear guidance and specific targets to help them improve their standard of work and measure their progress – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management have improved significantly since the appointment of the current headteacher. He has single mindedly implemented the agreed action plan for school improvement. This is providing staff and governors with a clear focus for improvement and has brought staff successfully together to work more closely as a team. A culture of monitoring has been established which is enabling leaders to understand the school's strengths and areas for development. Outcomes from monitoring are shared with staff and areas for improvement discussed. Staff are also working together to improve the quality of assessment information which is beginning to show more accurately how well pupils are progressing. Governors are now being provided with accurate data and other information which is helping them to gain a better understanding of the progress teachers and pupils are making. This in turn is enabling them to become more strategic in their support for the school. Steps to recruit a permanent headteacher have yet to be initiated. Governors understand this is an essential part of securing good capacity to improve, along with ensuring at least satisfactory teaching in both key stage classes. The governing body is now in a stronger position to help the school move forward having recently attracted three new members. A committee structure to oversee areas of the school's performance has been established and is enabling governors to hold the headteacher more effectively to account. The chair of governors acknowledges there is still much to do, but governors now have a sound understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They appreciate the support given by the local authority, particularly through recent training. Regular visits to the school are also helping governors to develop a better understanding of the strengths and areas for development.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2008:

- improve leadership and governance by developing expertise in monitoring the work of the school rigorously and dealing more effectively with weaknesses – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority's statement of action and the impact of its support are satisfactory. The headteacher, staff and governors appreciate the support they have received in recent months, but the initial response to deal with the unsatisfactory provision identified in the inspection report was too slow. This resulted in the youngest pupils being denied their entitlement to high quality education for an unnecessarily long period of time. The local authority worked swiftly with the governing body to secure the secondment from another school of an acting headteacher which has contributed to the school's capacity to improve. A range of advisers and consultants have also offered support to teachers and provided training for the governing body which built confidence in the leadership of the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- To quicken the pace of improvement in teaching.
- Ensure longer term plans are in place to secure the appointment of a substantive headteacher.