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21 October 2008

Ms C Taylor
The Advisory Headteacher
Lydd Primary School
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Dear Ms Taylor

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Lydd Primary School

Following my visit with Gail Robertson and Robin Thelwell, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 13 and 14 October 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 March 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 in Years 3 to 6, but may be appointed in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), Year 1 and Year 2.

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 Education for Kent.

Yours sincerely

David Curtis
Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Lydd Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 13 and 14 October 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, groups of pupils, parents, the chair of governors, and the School Improvement Partner as a representative of the local authority (LA).

Context

The advisory headteacher, who was appointed in March 2008, will leave the school at the end of December 2008. A new substantive headteacher will take up her post on 1 January 2009. The English subject leader/Reception class teacher has been in post since 1 September 2008. One of the Year 4 classes is taught by a temporary teacher who is covering the maternity leave of the full time teacher. The Year 3 class is taught on a job-share basis, with one of the teachers in post since 1 September 2008. Delegated powers have not been returned to the governing body.

Achievement and standards

Whilst there is clear evidence that standards and achievement are improving in writing and mathematics, especially in Years 3 and 4, standards in Years 5 and 6 are well below average, with too many pupils underachieving and not on course to achieve their end-of-year targets. For these pupils, there remains a significant legacy of underachievement, particularly in key literacy and numeracy skills. This legacy was reflected in the provisional results of the most recent national tests for pupils in Year 6, which were well below average in English, mathematics and science. In mathematics and science, boys achieved better than girls. Too few pupils achieved the higher Level 5 and current evidence indicates that there is still insufficient challenge in lessons for more able pupils.

Displays of work around the school show clear signs of improvement in writing. In Year 4, poems on the theme of 'Waterfalls' reflect pupils' good knowledge and understanding of the use of similes. Pupils' 'My Safari Adventure' stories show good use of imagination and creativity. In the main, standards of spelling, grammar and punctuation are good. Similarly, in Year 6, the 'My Amazing African Discovery' stories are of a good standard. However, a number of pupils still use a mixture of joined up and non joined letters in the same piece of work. A weakness remains in spelling, particularly in science where the analysis of pupils' work showed significant errors in the spelling of key scientific vocabulary. For example, in work on healthy living looking at dairy products, pupils used 'dairi' and 'derrey' and were not corrected through marking.

In mathematics, particularly in Years 5 and 6, too many pupils are insecure in their knowledge and understanding of key multiplication and division facts. As a result,

they struggle to see patterns in number and this impedes their work in learning, for example, about improper fractions and mixed numbers. Work in books shows pupils are becoming more confident in mathematical calculations and this is an area of clear improvement. However, pupils still do not spend enough time on mathematical investigations and problem solving, especially the more able. In science, weaknesses remain in pupils' skills in scientific enquiry and in interpreting data from the results of experiments. Currently, pupils do not apply their literacy and numeracy skills successfully in science.

In the most recent assessments for pupils in Year 2, standards were well above average in reading, writing and mathematics and showed dramatic improvement over previous years. Evidence from lessons indicates that these high standards are being maintained. The strengths in Years 1 and 2 build successfully on the flying start children make in the Nursery and in Reception. Significant strengths in the teaching of letters and sounds in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) have a positive impact on standards in reading and writing in Years 1 and 2.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- tackle weaknesses in pupils' use of punctuation, descriptive and extended writing, mathematical calculations and problem solving skills, and use of scientific vocabulary and investigation, in order to raise standards – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

This area was not a particular focus of the monitoring inspection because there were no areas of improvement linked to it in the previous inspection report. However, there is evidence of good improvement in this area, particularly in aspects which were previously judged as satisfactory. Behaviour is good and pupils are confident that there is no bullying. In discussions with pupils, it is clear that they enjoy learning much more and have more positive attitudes to school. They appreciate the significant improvements made in the provision of games and activities during breaks and lunchtimes. The school council now works as an effective means for the pupils' views as stakeholders to be shared with the advisory headteacher and staff. Current attendance levels are below average and there is an issue over the number of pupils who arrive late for school. As a result, these pupils miss out on important learning, which impacts negatively on their achievement.

Quality of provision

Teaching has improved because there is now a consistent focus on improving pupils' learning. Typical strengths in teaching include good relationships, use of the interactive whiteboards, good classroom management, and effective use of praise and encouragement. However, there is still not enough good teaching to ensure that all pupils make consistently good progress and rectify the legacy of underachievement. Teachers plan work and often adapt it to ensure that each lesson builds on the work pupils have already covered and learnt. Teachers provide clear learning objectives for each lesson and these are shared with pupils so they

understand the purpose of each activity. However, there is inconsistent use of success criteria for pupils to aim towards and insufficient challenge in the tasks for the more able pupils. Children in the EYFS gleefully take part in the activities that the staff plan for them and they make good progress towards the early learning goals.

Teachers' marking across the school is slowly improving. In their marking, teachers give praise and identify where pupils have achieved the lesson's objective. However, there are too few examples of teachers marking towards pupils' targets or informing pupils of how they could improve their work. Far too many spelling, punctuation and calculation mistakes in pupils' books are uncorrected.

In most lessons, teaching assistants provide skilful support for individual pupils and small groups to promote their learning or to respond to particular needs. There are a few times where assistants are not well deployed, such as during the mental warm up to mathematics lessons.

Tracking of pupils' progress is still at an early stage of development. There is a good tracking system for English and mathematics. It clearly shows the progress pupils make, highlights those who need extra support and those that that would benefit from further challenge. Teachers clearly know which pupils are underachieving. However, the process for moving pupils on to the next level of attainment is not rigorous enough. Target setting for groups of pupils effectively focuses them on particular aspects of their learning but these targets are not referred to enough in lessons. Pupils do not routinely use them when tackling a piece of new work and there are too few opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own work or that of their peers. Tracking for science is not under way.

All pupils really enjoy the curriculum. They are proud of the work displayed in classrooms and corridors. These displays show the pleasure pupils have had in learning through the relatively new creative curriculum which is making pupils more aware of cultural diversity.

Immediately after the last inspection, the school started to rectify the inadequacies in meeting the current legal requirements relating to safeguarding of learners. This was tackled with the utmost urgency and requirements are now met in full. Procedures for child protection are secure. Parents quite rightly think this is a school where their children are safe and well cared for.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that assessment information and targets are used effectively so that pupils are challenged to do their very best and achieve well – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The advisory headteacher has been successful in raising morale and establishing a shared commitment to school improvement. As such, she has, with good support from assistant headteachers and the appointment of several new teachers,

established a caring and supportive learning environment. She has taken swift action to redress fully the concerns regarding safeguarding that were highlighted by the last inspection, and taken steps to strengthen communication between parents and school.

The advisory headteacher's clear vision for moving the school on, together with effective support from the LA, has resulted in improved systems to monitor the school's performance. For example, subject leaders have benefited from training and support and now monitor the quality of lessons in subjects for which they are responsible. This, together with a greater focus on professional development, has led to an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. A more systematic approach to assessment and tracking of pupils' performance, especially in English and mathematics, now provides teachers with a clearer view of pupils' progress and any gaps in learning. However, although such measures have gone a long way to eradicating the legacy of underachievement, there has been insufficient time for them to have had a full impact on standards. Indeed, the school is well aware there is more to be done to raise performance further for pupils now in Years 5 and 6. The school has a realistic understanding of its strengths and areas for development. Planning for improvement is thorough and the action plan for improvement, combined with the LA's support plan, although not sufficiently costed, is an effective tool to move the school forward.

Governors' recent and gradual improvement in their understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses has been hindered by recent vacancies on the governing body. Roles and responsibilities, including recently established curriculum link governors, are not established fully. However, planning is in place for governors to attend training courses in the near future. Although being led by a dedicated chair, there is still a way to go before the governing body plays its full part in strategic planning, acts as a critical friend in challenging the school to do its best, and is ready to receive back full delegated powers from the LA.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure leadership and management contribute effectively to raising standards and that the school complies fully with current Government requirements for safeguarding learners – satisfactory
- develop and implement rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the school's work in all year groups to improve the school's effectiveness – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is satisfactory, although the timescales for some of the actions are not entirely clear. The School Improvement Partner has provided effective support to the school. He has worked in close partnership with the advisory headteacher in developing the monitoring roles of subject leaders and in the overall monitoring of teaching and learning across the school. Strong support from an advanced skills teacher and a member of the Kent Improving Schools

Programme has improved the school's focus on raising attainment and accelerating pupil progress.

Priorities for further improvement

Within the existing areas for improvement, give greater emphasis to:

- developing the role of the governing body, so that the governors are more involved in school improvement and can challenge leaders and hold the school to account
- improving pupils' knowledge, understanding and application of key literacy and numeracy skills, especially in science.