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7 October 2008

Mrs C Prynn
The Headteacher
Upton St James CofE Primary School
St James Road
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Dear Mrs Prynn

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Upton St James CofE School

Following my visit with Janet Brennan HMI to your school on 24 and 25 September, 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 November 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

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 Director of Education for the Diocese of Exeter, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Torbay.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Lindfield".

Mark Lindfield
H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Upton St James CofE School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 September

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, subject coordinators, the school council, the chair of governors, a representative from the local authority and the headteacher of the National Support School.

Context

The school currently has three temporary teachers covering for staff on long term sickness leave.

Achievement and standards

Based on first hand evidence and the school's assessments, the progress of pupils in Years 5 and 6 is satisfactory. Pupils continue to make progress which is in line with the national average. The performance of last year's Year 6 pupils in the 2008 end of Key Stage 2 national tests provides further confirmation that academic progress in the core subjects is satisfactory and has improved since the last inspection.

Based on first hand evidence, the progress of pupils in Years 1 to 4 has improved since the last visit and pupils are currently making satisfactory levels of progress. The school is aware that the majority of these pupils previously made inadequate progress in the core subjects and particularly in writing. The introduction of individual writing targets is improving performance in this area.

The overall progress of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage based on their starting points is satisfactory. Through a more rigorous analysis of the previous Foundation Stage Profile assessments, the school has identified the comparative weakness of pupils' performance in early reading and writing skills. There is, at present, a lack of consistency and rigour in the teaching of phonics which is contributing to weaknesses in developing pupils' spelling, reading and writing skills across the school.

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

- accelerate the progress made in Years 3 to 6 to ensure that pupils do not underachieve – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Pupils have quickly settled into their new classes with new teachers. It was noticeable on this visit that pupils throughout the school were friendly and courteous

to each other and to visitors. Children in the Reception class move cheerfully around the classroom and outdoor area. Good classroom management helps these children to take turns when playing with a well organised range of activities. The role play costumes are shared and children join in each other's role play scenarios with enthusiasm.

The school sets clear guidelines on acceptable behaviour and pupils now respond consistently well across the whole school. They work cooperatively in small groups and listen carefully to instructions. The majority of pupils were clear about their learning targets and these were suitably matched to their different abilities. Staff are quick to offer praise and encouragement and this is having a positive effect on pupils' levels of concentration and attention. The school council members are confident and are able to recount the ways in which they help out round the school, whilst older pupils show good personal development in recognising that they act as role models for the younger ones.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching across the school has improved and there was no unsatisfactory teaching. The majority of lessons now have main objectives which are made clear to pupils and give a broad outline of learning. In the better teaching these objectives were more specific, based on assessments from the previous day and differentiated accordingly and this resulted in more rapid progress by pupils of all abilities. Plenary sessions at the ends of lessons are being used more effectively to reinforce learning and to provide up to date assessments of pupils' progress.

The curriculum gives a strong focus to the core subjects and the timetable has been reorganised to incorporate an additional half hour a day of 'basic skills' teaching. The school has not yet completed an audit of the impact of this allocation on the time available for all National Curriculum subjects, as well as religious education.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- develop the quality of teaching so that there are no unsatisfactory lessons – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is committed to making the necessary progress and, alongside a more united staff team, continues to focus on the key areas for improvement. The school has introduced a thorough system for monitoring the progress of all pupils. Assessment data now shows individual pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This has been used further to identify those pupils that need additional support. The school is now better placed to evaluate the effectiveness of this support and make informed decisions about the optimum duration and approach for these pupils. In addition, the assessment data has been used to set individual targets for pupils in narrative writing which are having an impact on raising standards.

Subject leaders are more involved in monitoring their curriculum areas. The English coordinator is monitoring pupils' books regularly to assess their progress, and the involvement of staff in agreeing judgements on the quality of narrative writing has led to a greater level of professional dialogue and consistency. The newly appointed mathematics coordinator has a good knowledge of the assessment data and is clear about the areas of mathematics which still need to be developed. Together with support from the National Support School, a clear sequence of development has been planned for the subject leaders' roles.

Governors are clear in their roles and responsibilities and the chair of governors continues to provide strong support for the headteacher and school. A separate governor committee meets regularly and, with the support of the NLE headteacher, is monitoring the progress of the school more actively.

The school improvement plan is clear and well organised and is built on sound evaluations of the previous plan. It has a strong focus on raising standards in the core subjects across the school. The plan includes an observation and monitoring schedule within a realistic timescale and with a clear purpose. This is reflected in the school's monitoring of teaching which includes realistic and achievable points for development.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve the ways pupils' performance is assessed and recorded and make effective use of such information – satisfactory
- improve the effectiveness of the leadership and management of subject coordinators and governors – satisfactory.

External support

The school is clearly benefiting from a range of external support. All parties have made a concerted effort to improve communications and, as a direct result, all involved are clearer about their roles and responsibilities. There is a more consistent approach to reviewing progress and identifying realistic future actions in terms of their impact on the school. The several contributions made to a clear and focused improvement plan include specific monitoring events to review progress. Individual members of staff are gaining in confidence and expertise through the support provided by the local authority and the National Support School in the areas of special needs, the early years, mathematics and English subject development.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure a consistent whole school approach to the teaching of phonics through training for teachers and teaching assistants, the provision of resources and monitoring of the quality of teaching.
- Maintain the use of accurate assessment data to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention strategies.

- Ensure that learning objectives are specific and based on continuing daily assessments of individuals' progress.