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5 December 2008

Mr N Harris
The Headteacher
Colyton Primary School
The Butts
West Street
Colyton
Devon
EX24 6NU

Dear Mr Harris

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Colyton Primary School

Following my visit with David Westall, Additional Inspector, to your school on 3 and 4 December 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third 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 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 Chief Education Officer for Devon.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Laurie Lewin". Below the name is a stylized flourish or signature mark.

Laurie Lewin
Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Colyton Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 3 and 4 December 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, talked with the local authority advisor by telephone and met with the headteacher, staff, a group of pupils drawn from across the school and the chair of governors and the governors' action planning chair.

Context

Since the last visit, two members of staff have left the school. Changes in the number of pupils on roll have resulted in reorganisation to one fewer class than previously. One new member of staff has been recruited to teach the Year 6 class and the role of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) coordinator has been upgraded to deputy headteacher.

Achievement and standards

Since the last visit, the school has built strongly on its ability to track the progress of pupils across the school and this is giving a clear picture that shows improving standards and accelerated progress in most classes. The EYFS children and pupils in Years 1 and 2 now achieve well on a consistent basis and are on course to achieve above average results by the end of Year 2. This is evidenced by the work in lessons, the tracking information, and by the work in books and around the classrooms. In this part of the school, teachers rightly place a strong emphasis on oral and practical work that boosts pupils' knowledge and understanding well and develops their ability to think and work independently. However, there is not always enough recording in pupils' work books in Years 1 and 2 to give them full confidence in learning to set things out clearly.

In the Years 4 and 5 and Year 6 classes there is much evidence from books and the school's tracking that pupils are making accelerated progress in English and mathematics, with especially good progress noted for pupils in Year 6 over the last term. Much of the work seen with these Year 6 pupils is now at an above average level, although the class teacher rightly identifies that more needs to be done to improve reading, writing and spelling skills. The good teaching for these pupils is also ensuring that pupils adopt an increasingly reflective and independent approach to all activities. For example, pupils are becoming adept at choosing the methods they would like to use to solve problems in mathematics.

The main impediment to the school's drive to improve standards remains in the lack of sufficient clear improvement in pupils' work in the Years 3 and 4 class and with a few pupils' work deteriorating over recent times. This means that pupils are not sufficiently advanced in their work by the time they move on to the next class so

that much work is having to be done to help them catch up. Particular weaknesses in the work are the lack of challenge for the higher attaining pupils and that too often the work set for all ability groups is too easy. Pupils themselves recognise this and those spoken to said things like, 'the work is always too easy we don't get enough things to do' and, 'I always get everything right!' While there is clear evidence of improved, and sometimes much improved, progress in most of the school, pupils' inadequate achievement in Years 3 and 4 means that improvement with this key issue is only satisfactory overall.

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

- raise pupils' achievement and standards, especially in English and mathematics – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Improvements noted at the time of the last visit, that showed pupils' good attitudes towards work, have been maintained in the main across the school. In most classes, there is a buzz of purposeful activity with pupils concentrating and working hard to do their best. In most classes, and the Year 6 class in particular, pupils show an increased enjoyment in their work because they feel the work is now challenging them effectively. However, this is not the case in Years 3 and 4 where many of the pupils feel they could be doing better.

Behaviour is good across the school. There are signs in most classes that pupils are increasingly taking responsibility for their learning. For example in the EYFS and Year 1 class and the Year 2 class, through good quality classroom discussions, pupils get to have a say about the kind of things teachers will include in next week's work. In one session seen pupils came up with lively ideas such as one pupil suggesting, 'can we do something about designing a floating sledge for Santa'. This idea was duly added to the brainstorming chart being constructed. This approach very much reflects the efforts being made by staff to get pupils involved as much as possible in areas that will advance their learning. The school's recent greater involvement in the local community is also helping pupils gain a better idea of how they can contribute and be involved on a wider basis. This, along with their improved progress and standards, means there is now more security in pupils' abilities to establish the kind of skills that will help them progress towards reaching their full potential in the future. Pupils are safety conscious and concerned for the welfare of others. Good relationships flourish throughout the school between staff and pupils and between pupils. This contributes strongly to the positive atmosphere evident throughout the school.

Quality of provision

In nearly all classes there have been significant improvements in teaching since the last visit. Those teachers new to the school over the last year have settled in very well and are making a strong impact on improving the learning for the individuals in

their care. The deputy headteacher provides a good role model through his own class teaching. Teachers now use the school's assessment information more effectively to identify pupils' needs, and this has helped them improve the quality of their planning. Teachers are also making effective use of assessment information to set targets for individual pupils. In Key Stage 1 and Year 6, pupils are successfully encouraged to evaluate their own targets, but this good practice is not yet consistently the case across the rest of the school. Pupils generally know what they are expected to learn and there is an increased air of confidence in the way that they set about tasks. Most lessons are lively and interesting and engage pupils well. Questions are often used skilfully to probe understanding and extend thinking, and this demonstrates that most teachers have confident subject knowledge. Explanations are usually clear and behaviour management is effective.

The main inhibiting factor for improving the consistency of teaching remains the lack of improvement in the quality of teaching for pupils in the class for pupils in Years 3 and 4. The tasks set for these pupils do not match closely enough with their needs and the expectations for what pupils can achieve are set too low. Occasionally, the teaching does not reflect confident subject knowledge. This is indicated by weak and rather vague questioning of pupils that does not develop their thinking and understanding. During lessons not enough checks are made on how well pupils are coping with the work so that refinements to the teaching approach can be made, and this limits the guidance and encouragement that would help move individuals on more quickly. Despite the large amount of extra support provided by both the school and the local authority, there has been insufficient progress in improving teaching in this class over the last year and the pupils' progress in learning is therefore inadequate.

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

- ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching and support, improving particularly the way teachers engage pupils' interest and match learning to their individual needs – satisfactory
- use assessment of pupils' attainment and progress more effectively to raise the expectations of staff, set appropriately challenging targets and show pupils how to improve – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is doing a very good job in leading the school forward. Since taking up post he has empowered key staff and set a tone of confidence and determination to improve things. He has been especially effective in gaining the respect and support of staff, governors, parents and the pupils so that everyone has some ownership of the school improvement plans. As a direct result of his efforts the school is a very different establishment from that visited initially. There is now a good atmosphere and sense of energy around the place. The new library and staff room have helped a lot in giving the buildings a facelift and in improving facilities for the staff and pupils.

Since the last visit the school has continued to strengthen all aspects of its leadership and management. There is now a very effective senior leadership team with the deputy headteacher and the recently appointed literacy coordinator providing good support for the headteacher. They are giving the school a strong steer by helping to provide clear action plans that provide a highly focused approach to boosting pupils' progress. The local authority advisor linked to the school rightly expresses confidence in the increasing capacity and independence of the senior leadership team to evaluate performance and devise strategies to underpin continuous improvement. Staff and governors are now very aware of the need to see the full impact from the strategies put in place. In particular these strategies need to show that all aspects of the school's performance are finally eliminating any areas of pupils' underachievement.

Since the last visit the school has moved forward effectively to establish good links with the local community, for example through appearances at local events and articles in the local newspaper about school activities. Along with good relationships established with the parents, this means that the school is becoming effective in ensuring that community cohesion is well promoted. Governors are now doing a good job in guiding and supporting improvement initiatives and acting as critical friends. In particular, their action plan monitoring committee ensures that they are kept fully in tune with how performance is being improved. Since the last visit governors have moved effectively to put rigorous systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of work in the classrooms and this has further increased their clear overview of school effectiveness.

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

- strengthen leadership and management to make sure strategies introduced to improve provision and lift pupils' achievement are successful – good.

External support

As noted at the time of the last visit, the local authority continues to play a dynamic part in aiding the school's recovery programme. Local authority advisors visit the school frequently to monitor, guide and support staff. They ensure that all action plans are clear and sharply focused on raising standards. The local authority is rightly impressed by the way in which the new senior leadership team is becoming increasingly independent and self-reliant with driving forward initiatives. Local advisory staff continue to work hard with staff to increase their skills, knowledge and confidence levels and have ensured that there is good continuity and progression in the work carried out across the school. Along with school staff they have invested much good support in the direction of improving teaching for the pupils in Years 3 and 4 but agree that there has still been insufficient progress, and that this area remains the major stumbling block to helping the school fully recover.

Priorities for further improvement

- Move forward urgently to improve teaching for the Years 3 and 4 class of pupils.