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Mr Nicholas Sutton
Headteacher
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Aspatia
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Cumbria
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Dear Mr Sutton

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Oughterside Primary School

Following my visit to your school on the 3 and 4 February, 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 July 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Brian Dower
Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Oughterside Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 3 and 4 February 2009.

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and teaching staff, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

There have been no significant changes in the school's circumstances since the July 2008 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Following a decline in recent years, the provisional results of assessments of pupils in Year 2 showed a marginal improvement in 2008. A greater proportion than in previous years reached the levels expected for their age but none exceeded them. The range and quality of work by children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils in Key Stage 1 show that they are currently making satisfactory progress. The school's own analysis of the results of the Year 6 tests also show an improvement in the percentage of pupils reaching or exceeding the standards expected for 11-year-olds. Their achievement was satisfactory, again an improvement since 2007. The work of pupils currently in Year 6 shows that they are making good progress and the school is confident that test results are likely to be above average.

Much of the improvement in progress across the school is attributable to improvements in the quality of teaching and the closer monitoring of pupils' progress. It is too soon for such improvements to have reversed completely the past shortcomings in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills.

Personal development and well-being

There were no key issues for improvement identified at the July inspection and the monitoring visit found no additional priorities for improvement.

Quality of provision

There have been improvements in the quality of teaching and learning since the July inspection and the continuity of teaching between classes. This has contributed significantly to the improvement in pupils' progress although this is not yet sufficient to overcome gaps in pupils' prior learning. The good teaching seen during the visit

was characterised by the use of clear and appropriate learning objectives, learning activities structured in difficulty to cater for the broad range of ability in each class, the close monitoring of progress and timely help when difficulties were encountered. As a result, the pace of learning was brisk.

Greater continuity in teaching and close collaboration between staff in assessing and monitoring pupils' progress have developed, leading to agreement on the steps needed to address any weaknesses. The standard of presentation in pupils' books has improved. It is now tidy and work is completed. Occasionally, some written work is not ordered logically. Teachers are alert to this and are providing help to those pupils on how to sequence ideas clearly. Pupils are well behaved and keen to learn. A small number who sometimes call out answers to questions are being guided on how to be patient and await their turn to contribute.

The quality of teaching in the Reception class has improved. A good lesson was seen during the visit which focused on language development. Children were confidently forming simple sentences for the start of a story. They were with the Key Stage 1 pupils for the introductory work on writing sentences, they worked outside with the teaching assistant to sequence a story through role play and then returned to share their sentences with the whole class. The pace of their learning in the lesson was good. Regular assessments are made of the steps children make in their learning and those done in the autumn term show that progress since September has been satisfactory. Plans are in place to develop the outdoor play area and are in the process of being implemented.

Improved accuracy in teachers' assessments has led to appropriately challenging learning activities for all ages and ability groups. There is now consistency in curriculum planning to ensure the provision for the most able and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities meets their needs. There have been improvements in the guidance pupils receive. Teachers' assessments of how well pupils are doing academically are accurate. The older pupils' literacy books, for example, contain descriptions of the National Curriculum levels in straightforward language, a clear and accurate indication of where pupils are in their learning and then written guidance on what to do to improve. Pupils say that they find this helpful.

All health and safety and child protection policies are up to date. The January health and safety audit by the LA scored the school highly on its compliance. The range of documentation seen during the monitoring visit confirms that the school is meeting all its obligations to maintain appropriate records, including risk assessments, health and safety audits, safeguarding checks on all who have dealings with children, guidance on health and safety for new staff and visitors to the school, accident records and procedures for dealing with medical matters. Importantly, the school is alert to pupils' welfare in its daily routines and monitors their safety rigorously. This was seen in the diligent supervision of pupils when they arrived in school, the level of adult presence during pupils' free time and the care taken when escorting them off the premises at the end of the school day.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Accelerate pupils' progress by improving the continuity and quality of teaching and learning– satisfactory
- Take urgent steps to ensure that health and safety and child protection policies are fully up to date – good

Leadership and management

In this small school, each member of staff plays a key role in taking the school forward. The headteacher and his colleagues accepted the outcome of the July inspection and determined that they would address the issues of concern and take the school out of special measures before the start of the next academic year. They welcome the advice and support they receive, weigh it carefully and take on board what will be of benefit. They feel that they have gained in strength and are now ambitious to create a good school. This openness has done much to bring the improvements already noted.

An appropriate system is in use to monitor and evaluate pupils' progress as they move through the school and so inform self-evaluation. Good use is made of targets for improvement for individual pupils and conversations show that they know what it is they are aiming for and how to get there. The improvements in monitoring and evaluating performance are having a positive impact on the rate of pupils' progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stages 1 and 2. The challenge facing the school is to use the improvements to accelerate the rate of learning so that pupils' progress becomes good enough to overcome the legacy of past underachievement.

Governors know what is expected of them, particularly in terms of monitoring the school's performance and asking the right questions. They have taken advantage of a range of training opportunities to develop their expertise in this area and now have a good understanding of assessment procedures and how to analyse and interpret data. They combine these skills with knowledge gained from their close involvement in the day to day life of the school and the local community. The governors are monitoring the school's progress in tackling the issues for improvement from the last inspection, one governor being assigned to each key issue. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of these improvements in stewardship on pupils' achievements over time. Governors have fulfilled their responsibilities in terms of ensuring that statutory policies are in place and their implementation monitored.

Governors undertook a survey of parents' views at the start of the autumn term. The returns represented approximately half the school population. They revealed that most parents were satisfied with the quality of education their children were receiving. There were, however, some parents who expressed concern about the security of the school's site, their negative view of its reputation, the extent to which parents were actively involved in its day-to-day life and how well pupils were

prepared for national assessments. The school intends to survey parents again in the near future to gauge if there is now greater confidence in what the school is doing. In the meantime, there is greater parental involvement in the life of the school. Parents have been active in landscaping the school grounds and land adjacent to the site. An evening to update parents on the school's progress was well attended and it is reported that those attending the meeting were supportive. An autumn fair was extremely well attended and the impression gained that the community was intent on supporting the school. The chair of governors has spoken to many parents in the community and they have said that they are happy with the quality of the education provided. There were no formal complaints in the autumn term.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Extend the skills of leaders and managers so that they can accurately monitor and evaluate the school's performance and the quality of education provided – satisfactory
- Ensure that governors are aware of and fulfil all their statutory responsibilities and are suitably skilled to hold the school to account – satisfactory
- Establish a good working relationship with parents – satisfactory.

External support

The LA's statement of action clearly laid out how it intended to work with the school and what was to be achieved together. This was translated into action throughout the autumn term and resulted, for example, in improved monitoring of pupils' progress and more effective intervention when weaknesses were uncovered. All members of staff have spoken about how helpful the support has been. They say that they have developed professionally and gained a great deal from working closely with a range of experienced people. Particular praise was given to the way in which that support and advice was given, leading to a common sense of purpose. The external support provided by the LA has been and continues to be good. The manner in which that support has been provided has been excellent.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no additional priorities for further improvement.