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Mrs A Charman
The Headteacher
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20 Skinner Road
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Dear Mrs Charman

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Lydd Primary School

Following my visit with Fran Ashworth, Additional Inspector, to your school on 2 and 3 March 2009, 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 March 2008. 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 in Years 3 to 6, but may be appointed in Early Years Foundation Stage, Year 1 and Year 2.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

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 second monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, the senior leadership team, groups of pupils, parents, the chair of governors, together with two members of the governing body, and the School Improvement Partner as a representative from the local authority.

Context

The headteacher took up her post on 1 January 2009. Since the previous monitoring visit, there have been further changes in the make up of the governing body.

Achievement and standards

This monitoring visit focused on standards and achievement in Years 3 to 6. The school's own tracking data, supported by 'learning walks' by inspectors, indicates strongly that the strengths identified on the last visit in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2 have been maintained.

Since her appointment, the headteacher has introduced a new and rigorous system for assessing pupils' progress. The results of the most recent assessments in February show that in Years 3 to 6, too many pupils make slow progress towards their end of year targets. These results are supported by evidence gained through lesson observations and the analysis of pupils' work. Significant weaknesses are evident in Years 3 and 4 where progress is especially slow, and inadequate in Year 3. In these year groups, pupils do not develop their key skills in literacy, numeracy and science at a fast enough rate. In Years 5 to 6, the picture is more encouraging with good progress made in reading, but satisfactory or slow in writing and mathematics. As a result, standards in writing and mathematics are not high enough.

The initial evidence from the first few weeks of the 'Big Write' project is that it is impacting positively on pupils' writing skills. In Year 4, the standard of the more able pupils' 'Walking through the Snow' stories is good. Similarly, in Year 6, work on 'The Extended Forest Adventure' is much closer to expected levels. There is a discernable improvement in the use of punctuation and grammar. Weaknesses remain in the quality of handwriting and spelling. Teachers' marking does not consistently pick up on pupils' spelling mistakes nor reinforce high expectations of presentation. The introduction of 'Big Write' coincides with the introduction of individual targets for pupils in literacy. Early indications are that teachers are not linking the use of such targets when pupils have their 'Big Write' lessons. Marking is not linked sufficiently to giving pupils next steps in their learning.

In mathematics, staff have carried out a detailed analysis of gaps in pupils' previous learning. The impact of this is that five teaching groups have been created in Years 5 and 6. Although these groups have only had two lessons so far, evidence from observing lessons and discussion with pupils suggest a positive impact. More able pupils in Year 6 have made good progress in the two lessons in developing their skills in mathematical reasoning. However, there are still pupils in Years 5 and 6 who remain insecure with basic addition and subtraction skills. Since the last visit, there has been a stronger focus on teaching multiplication facts and giving pupils more time to explore number patterns. The 'Count' session observed in Year 4 was particularly effective in developing rapid counting skills, with one pupil stating, 'This really helps you to learn better.' The results of this particular area of focus are seen in a more secure understanding of key numeracy skills, although many gaps remain to be filled.

Evidence from the analysis of pupils' work in science shows pupils spend more time on investigations and experiments. There are more examples of pupils using numeracy skills to support their learning, especially in the use of graphs and tables. The introduction of science vocabulary books gives pupils a greater understanding of key scientific words. However, evidence from books indicates there are still weaknesses in spelling key vocabulary and these are still not being addressed by teachers through marking. For example in the same piece of work the word material was spelt 'matirial' and 'metirial'.

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 investigations, in order to raise standards – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

This area was not a focus of the inspection. Behaviour is good and pupils feel safe in school. The amount of bullying has decreased significantly this term, but there is still some reluctance for victims to report it when it happens, in case everyone finds out. Pupils love the chance to earn rewards and to have their efforts recognised in the weekly assemblies, especially the chance to win something from the sparkle box. In most lessons they are attentive and try their best. In some classes they find working cooperatively very difficult and do not listen to the ideas or opinions of the others in their group. They like all the improvements which have been made to the school and the school council feels that it really does have a say in decisions. The school has raised awareness of how much poor attendance and lateness slow down pupils' progress, but current attendance and punctuality levels are still unsatisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching is good in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2. In Years 3 to 6, it is not consistently good enough to ensure pupils make good progress. The better lessons here are well planned, tightly timed and organised so that the pupils can see what it is they are learning and the teacher can judge how much they have understood. Materials are well chosen to interest the pupils and set at different levels so that all pupils can make progress. Teaching assistants provide valuable support for those pupils who find the subject difficult or are used to guide the ablest pupils through extension questions.

Lessons in Years 3 to 6 are unsatisfactory when the teacher is unsure of the subject, lessons are poorly organised, or the materials are badly prepared. Sometimes, explanations are unclear and have to be repeated many times. Pupils do not enjoy these lessons and do not listen to instructions or make much effort.

Teachers' marking in mathematics has improved and most pupils get valuable feedback in their books. Marking of writing is much more detailed and tells pupils how well they have done with each piece. It does not always link to targets or explain how they can improve next time. Too little attention is paid to spelling rules and pupils do not routinely use dictionaries to improve their spellings. Many pupils consistently mis-spell mathematical and scientific words and these are not corrected. Teachers' marking sometimes reveals their own lack of grammar or subject knowledge.

Pupils are now given more opportunities to decide how much they have understood and to check their own and their friends' work for errors. Teachers' assessments in English, mathematics and science are now much more accurate and provide reliable data on pupils' performance.

The curriculum was not inspected on this visit. Parents would like to see more after-school activities, particularly participation in the many local sport events and competitions.

Since the last visit, the school has reviewed its procedures for academic guidance. As a result, pupils have recently been given individual targets in reading, writing and mathematics and these are planned in the future to give pupils a better understanding of how they can improve their work. The initial response from pupils is very encouraging. The school now records pupils' standards and the progress they have shown over time much more accurately in reading, writing and numeracy. This is beginning to identify where there are gaps in knowledge or where groups of pupils are making less progress than others. Teachers are trying to ensure that pupils catch up in these missing areas by giving extra emphasis to them in lessons and or individual support.

Safeguarding procedures are all in place. Parents now regard this as a school where their children are safe and well cared for. They have seen marked improvements to the cleanliness and facilities since January.

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 headteacher upon her appointment took swift and immediate action in order to gain an accurate picture of the school's performance, especially in relation to standards and achievement. The key factor in establishing the current position was the introduction of a detailed assessment of pupils' current standards and progress. The outcome of this assessment has been used successfully to enable the senior leadership to have a clear and detailed view of whole school performance rather than just in individual subject areas. In addition, the results were used to introduce individual pupil targets for literacy and numeracy, and to introduce the use of 'Big Write' to improve pupils' writing skills. It is too soon to measure the impact of these new initiatives, but indications, especially from pupils, are that they have had a motivating impact on learning.

The headteacher and senior leadership team work in very effective partnership and their analysis of gaps in pupils' previous learning has been thorough and rigorous. Together, they recognise that progress for too many pupils is not fast enough and they understand that this is linked to weaknesses in teaching and learning which impact on the whole of Years 3 to 6. Such recognition and acceptance are a significant leap forward. There is now a very strong sense of shared determination to tackle the identified weaknesses through much more rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning. Senior leaders have a detailed timetable in place for improving the quality of teaching through team teaching and individual coaching. The headteacher and senior leaders have a much stronger and more detailed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses than at the time of the last visit. Evidence indicates that the school has the improving capacity to move forwards.

Delegated powers have not been returned to the governing body. Recent changes to the governing body, including the appointment of local authority governors, have strengthened its membership. It is committed to on-going training and it does have an action plan with the aim of restoring delegated powers. Currently, the governing body does not hold the school to account for the standards it achieves and is not able to demonstrate through its minutes its understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. All statutory requirements for the safeguarding of pupils are met fully.

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 continues to provide good support for the school. The School Improvement Partner has developed a good relationship with the headteacher and supports her current initiatives to drive improvement in raising standards and achievement. The school receives regular visits from other local authority staff to support teaching and learning, and to develop managerial staff in relation to developing their roles in monitoring the school's work and in developing a sense of corporate ownership.

Priorities for further improvement

Maintain a rigorous focus on the existing areas for improvement, but, in addition, now give greater priority to:

- improving pupils' attendance and punctuality
- returning full delegation of powers to the governing body by July 2009.