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Mrs Hazel Fox
Okehampton Primary School
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Dear Mrs Fox

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Okehampton Primary School

Following my visit with Stephen Lake, additional inspector, to your school on 13 and 14 January 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in June 2009. 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.

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 Children's Services for Devon, and the inspection team.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Okehampton Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 13 and 14 January 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, teaching and non-teaching staff, a group of Year 6 pupils, two governors and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors also observed lessons and met the leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Context

An interim headteacher was appointed from November 2009, after the resignation of the previous headteacher. There has been substantial reorganisation of roles within the leadership team. Rearrangement of staffing has led to smaller class sizes in Year 6 for literacy and numeracy lessons.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Data from national tests show that the attainment of pupils in Year 6 in 2009 remained below the national average overall and too few pupils reached the higher levels. Pupils made slightly better progress in English than in 2008, but progress in mathematics was still significantly below the national average. The school does not have assessment data to give a comprehensive picture of pupils' progress in other year groups, but lesson observations during the visit also showed better progress in English than in mathematics across the school. Writing skills are still weaker than reading, particularly for boys, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where pupils' progress in early writing skills is well below those found nationally. Some of the pupils who have special educational needs are making good progress due to the high-quality support provided by an able and conscientious team of teaching assistants.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- raise standards and improve achievement in writing and mathematics – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils like being at school and enjoy their learning. Behaviour is good and pupils report that the new behaviour systems put in place recently have made them feel safer and able to learn well because everyone is behaving better. During the visit pupils showed considerable self-discipline, behaving very well at playtime and lunchtime when they were unable to go outside. Teachers also report that support from senior leadership in managing behaviour is both consistent and effective. Year



6 pupils particularly value the opportunity to contribute to developments in their learning area.

Attendance fell in 2008/9 and is now well below the national average.

The effectiveness of provision

Lesson observations confirmed the school's own view of the quality of teaching, which is broadly satisfactory. The improvement in the amount of progress that pupils are making in English, particularly writing, is largely due to the impact of external support in developing teachers' skills in teaching literacy. This has inspired teachers to improve their practice, and has given them greater confidence to employ a wider range of strategies to ensure that pupils make more progress. Inspectors also saw some good examples of teachers using their individual expertise and imagination in other subjects to provide stimulating and motivating experiences for pupils.

Teachers' planning is limited by a lack of assessment data, and by a curriculum that is concerned primarily with coverage of content, rather than with developing pupils' skills as they progress through the school. This means that planning is not sufficiently personalised for individual pupils. A new system for recording assessment information and tracking pupils' progress, which is well understood by teachers, is now in place. Baseline data is available, but the first assessments which will allow accurate monitoring of individual pupils' progress have not yet taken place. Teaching staff are working together well to develop a better curriculum, with more progress being made so far in English than in other subjects. At Key Stage 1 there is already a stronger link between phonics and literacy. The current systems for providing appropriate strategies for teachers to support pupils who have special educational needs are cumbersome and insufficiently precise. These pupils do not always have clear individual learning goals or curricular targets, so in lessons teachers are unable to support the generally effective intervention that takes place outside the classroom. Responsibility for the progress these pupils make is devolved to the teaching assistant on too many occasions. Weak assessment procedures and a lack of focused planning also mean that teachers are not consistently providing appropriate challenge and pace for those pupils who are more able.

Pupils say they have a clear understanding of the recently introduced new marking policy, and this is already having an impact on their understanding of what they need to do in order to improve. Marking for literacy is better than for mathematics, but overall the system is used consistently and pupils are beginning to respond to it.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not sufficiently ambitious, and there is insufficient focus on developing early writing and numeracy skills to support progress further up the school. This is partly limited by the current accommodation which is overcrowded and cluttered. The lack of easy access for some children to an outdoor area that has provision for



all aspects of learning, limits free flow between indoor and outdoor activities. Progress is further limited by a lack of coherence in planning at the interface between the Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1.

Systems for monitoring and analysing attendance data are not sufficiently robust, with too much administrative work being done by senior staff.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensure that the curriculum promotes progression in skills from year to year and across key stages, particularly in writing and mathematics – satisfactory
- ensure that all teaching draws on assessment and is closely matched to pupils' different needs – satisfactory
- make sure that marking provides all pupils with clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their performance – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

In the very short time since her appointment, the interim headteacher has generated confidence and a 'can do' culture among the staff, so they are anxious to improve their skills in order to ensure that pupils make more progress. Although the pace of change has been fast, teachers trust the headteacher's sense of direction and are beginning to feel empowered to take more risks in their teaching. Morale is rising among both teaching and support staff, and they are working well together as a team. Reorganisation of the leadership team and clarification of roles and responsibilities has accelerated the pace of change, enabling fast implementation of an efficient and sustainable system for tracking pupil progress and development of a curriculum that really meets the needs of pupils.

Strategic planning is based securely on a sound knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and monitoring systems – for example, of the quality of teaching and marking, and teachers' planning – are increasingly robust. Wherever there is sufficient evidence, planning is modified to take account of the data collected. A sensible balance is being maintained between the need to provide intervention to support the attainment of pupils in the current Year 6 and the implementation of long-term sustainable change that will lead to improved outcomes across the school. Challenging targets based securely on the available data have been set for 2010 and 2011.

Governors are very anxious to move the school forward. They have undertaken training, particularly in data analysis, and are well informed by the headteacher about pupils' attainment and progress. They are asking increasingly challenging and relevant questions. There are shortcomings in the school's Single Central Record,



which mean that it is not compliant with current legislation. This needs to be remedied urgently. Other aspects of child protection and safeguarding procedures are sound.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement:

- rigorously evaluate the school's effectiveness in order to take swift and focused action for improvement and develop the role of the governing body in holding the school to account – satisfactory.

External support

Support from the local authority in helping the school to make progress out of special measures has been good. Their statement of action was evaluated by Her Majesty's Inspectors as fit for purpose and has enabled good development of staff skills, particularly in teaching literacy. Support for mathematics teaching is just beginning. Changes to the school's leadership have necessitated some appropriate modification to plans. The local authority need to quickly provide support to tackle both the shortcomings the school's Single Central Record and the high levels of pupil absence.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop more robust systems for monitoring and intervention in order to improve rates of attendance.
- As a matter of urgency and no later than the end of February 2010, resolve the shortcomings in the school's Single Central Record.