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Mrs Fox
Headteacher
Okehampton Primary School
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Okehampton
Devon
EX20 1JB

Dear Mrs Fox

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Okehampton Primary School

Following my visit with Judith Goodchild, Additional Inspector, to your school on 13 and 14 May 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 second 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

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.

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.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey

Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Okehampton Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 13 and 14 May 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior school leaders, teaching staff, some parents, five members of the governing body, including the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The interim headteacher has been appointed permanently and a part-time special educational needs coordinator joined the staff at Easter. The leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage is on long-term sick leave. There has been some redeployment of staff to support Year 6 in their preparation for Standard Assessment tests. Three new parent governors have been appointed.

The school has taken over the employment of the cleaning and caretaking team from the local authority.

Considerable improvements have been made to the environment, particularly in Reception. Decoration has been carried out in the Year 6 area, some carpets have been replaced and the library area cleared to release space.

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

The school now has a robust system in place for tracking pupils' attainment. This is being used effectively by literacy and numeracy subject leaders to track pupils' progress. The limited data so far available show that pupils in Years 2, 5 and in some mixed Year 3/4 classes now make good progress. In other classes and year groups progress remains satisfactory. Many pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities continue to make good progress due to the high-quality support provided by an able and conscientious team of teaching assistants. In Year 6 pupils still make better progress in reading than in writing and mathematics, although the attainment gap in literacy between boys and girls is narrowing. Although there has been some improvement, a legacy of underachievement means that pupils in Year 6 are unlikely to achieve results in national tests that meet the school's challenging targets. Average results for the year group are expected to be close to the minimum expected in writing and mathematics, but close to the national average in reading. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher levels is predicted to increase from 2009. One-to-one support is provided for some underachieving pupils, but the impact of this provision on pupils' progress has not yet been measured.

Lesson observations by inspectors supported the school's current assessment of pupils' attainment and found progress in lessons closely linked to the quality of teaching. External support to develop teachers' skills in teaching literacy and mathematics has had a positive impact in some classes, but this is inconsistent across the school. In Reception the systems for assessing children's attainment are not sufficiently rigorous, robust or regular to give reliable data, so it is not possible to determine children's progress accurately. Lesson observations show that there is inconsistency in the quality of teaching and assessment across the three Reception classes. Insufficient focus on developing children's reading, writing, numeracy, personal and social skills means children are not prepared well enough for transfer into Year 1. In the Nursery children make good progress.

Where teaching is stimulating, pupils really enjoy their lessons and join in enthusiastically. Several pupils talked about how much they had enjoyed the recent 'Maths Days', and how mathematics is much more fun.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

Other relevant pupil outcomes

As a result of very rigorous new systems, supported by the local authority, attendance has improved from well below to just above the national average. There has been a dramatic reduction in the number of pupils who are persistently absent over the last term, and the school is no longer deemed a 'Persistent Absence' school.

The new School Council, formed from pupils in Years 5 and 6, has a strong focus on improving the quality of learning and is now acting independently, including setting its own agenda and running meetings. These pupils are eloquent and sensible, and show a good sense of responsibility for others and a pride in their school. Year 6 pupils have enjoyed being involved in planning the attractive new decoration in their part of the school.

Pupils generally behave well around the school and in lessons. However, when children leave Reception and transfer into Year 1, their inability to sit quietly, listen and cooperate in the more formal classroom environment limits the rate at which they can make progress.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching has improved since the last visit, although there is still not enough that is consistently good, and there are still some lessons that are inadequate. Support provided by local authority advisors, lead teachers and in-

service training from within the school means that teachers are now much more aware of what outstanding teaching looks like, and that pupils' progress is closely linked to the quality of their planning and delivery. In the better lessons seen by inspectors, teachers were thinking creatively about how they could best maximise learning. Medium and long-term planning for literacy and numeracy is now in place, so teachers have a clearer understanding of where pupils are coming from and where they need to get to, but day-to-day planning is less thorough. Many teachers are successfully using curricular targets and differentiating work for the main part of their lessons, but are not using assessment data rigorously to identify personalised targets for individual pupils, which would ensure more rapid progress. Sometimes, more-able children are left under-occupied or repeating work they have already mastered because the teacher has not taken their needs sufficiently into account, and so learning time is lost. In Reception classes teachers are not consistently identifying next steps in learning and then providing activities to allow opportunities for children to progress. This is largely because they do not have enough accurate assessment information. Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities was not examined in depth on this visit.

Teachers' expectations of pupils' handwriting and presentation of work are not high enough, so pupils do not always take a pride in what they do, and sometimes leave work unfinished. The marking policy is better applied than since the last visit, but is still inconsistent, and sometimes there is not a clear balance between praise and identifying what needs to improve. Although opportunities are sometimes given for pupils to respond to teachers' comments, this is unreliable across subjects and classes.

A group of staff is currently developing a new curriculum which focuses very clearly on developing pupils' skills as they move through the school. The literacy and numeracy aspects are already in place and other subjects will be linked in by September.

Since the last visit, the school has reviewed its systems for transition between Reception and Year 1. Care and support of pupils are good, but the lack of reliable assessment data from Reception means that progress slows as they enter Year 1.

Progress since the last visit 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 – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The permanent appointment of the interim headteacher has had a very positive effect on staff morale, and this has helped to sustain steady progress towards improvement in outcomes for pupils. The pace of change is fast, with considerable demands on all staff. Although so far the impact of the changes made on outcomes for pupils has been limited, there have been some considerable successes, notably the rapid rise in attendance, and improvements in the quality of teaching. A stable senior team will be in place by the autumn term. A new special educational needs coordinator has been appointed, and with the coming retirement of the long-serving deputy headteacher the process to appoint two new assistant headteachers is underway. The roles of middle managers have been reorganised, and as their confidence increases, they are beginning to take their share of responsibility for the school's progress.

Monitoring systems are securely in place, with middle managers starting to implement them. Lesson observation, particularly by the headteacher, is focused and accurate so teachers know what they need to do in order to improve. Staff feel both accountable and well supported. They embrace enthusiastically the headteacher's vision and are anxious to make their own contribution to improving the school. Planning takes into account the need to link lesson observations with book scrutiny, results, performance management and professional development. The current improvement plan is being reviewed in the light of the progress made over the last year.

The governing body is very clear about the school's strengths and weaknesses and is beginning to act decisively, but recognises that its work must lead to long-term sustainable change. This will improve further as the impact of each member having a link with a specific aspect of the school's work begins to develop. All members are committed to undertaking training, and have a clearer understanding of their responsibilities. Evidence from the minutes of meetings show that the challenge the governing body provides for senior leaders is sharper and more focused and its understanding of the school's data is more thorough. The budget deficit is now resolved. Particular progress has been made in working with the headteacher to engage parents and carers; for example, through attendance at parents' evenings, setting up an open morning each week and the introduction of home-school books. Although a questionnaire to find out parents' and carers' views has been carried out and analysed, feedback about actions taken as a result has not been given. Shortcomings in the single central record are now very satisfactorily resolved. However, there is currently insufficient clarity in the systems for reviewing and monitoring statutory policies.

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

Extensive support from local authority consultants and advisors, the education welfare officer, lead teachers from other schools and the school improvement partner has a very positive impact, particularly on the curriculum and the quality of teaching and leadership. Recently additional support has been provided by the local authority for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The school makes good use of its links with the local secondary school.

Priorities for further improvement

- improve the rigour and accuracy of assessment within Reception and systematically use the data collected to identify and make provision for children's next steps in learning.