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Mrs Honoria Thompson
Locum Headteacher
Shepton Mallet Infants' School
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Dear Mrs Thompson

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Shepton Mallet Infants' School

Following my visit to your school on 11 and 12 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

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 Somerset.

Yours sincerely

Stephen McShane
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Shepton Mallet Infants' School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 11–12 May 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the locum headteacher, members of the governing body, staff, pupils, the National Leader for Education who is supporting the school and the School's Improvement Partner.

Context

The substantive headteacher has been on sick leave since September 2009. In the autumn term, the school was led by the deputy headteacher. Following the inspection in November 2009, she was supported by the deputy headteacher from a local school for a few weeks while arrangements could be made to appoint a locum headteacher. A locum headteacher took up post in January 2010 but resigned after four weeks. Another locum headteacher, a deputy headteacher from a local school, took up post at the beginning of March. It is planned that she will remain at the school until the substantive headteacher returns or until summer 2011. One class is being taught by a supply teacher for four days each week while their regular teacher is absent because of illness. One teacher now works part time and another has moved to full-time work at the school. The teacher in the Nursery class intends to retire at the end of this term.

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

At the last inspection, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was low and pupils were making inadequate progress. Assessment was weak.

The leadership team has now assessed pupils in the current Year 1 and Year 2 to provide a more secure baseline on which to judge future progress. A system of regular assessments in writing, reading and mathematics has been established to check on pupils' progress and to establish how well they are doing in relation to their end of year, or end of key stage, targets.

The most recent assessments by the school show that attainment remains low. In particular, few pupils are working at the higher levels expected for their age. A majority of pupils are now making improved progress but data show that progress overall over the last two terms remains uneven and a minority have not made enough progress in reading, writing and mathematics and remain at risk of underachievement.

Improvements in pupils' progress are evident in certain lessons. When the work is carefully structured and pupils are in appropriate groups, they now work diligently at tasks and make steady progress. This is particularly the case in literacy. Young children are becoming more confident with their knowledge of letters and sounds through using 'Fred Fingers' and the use of adjectives by writing 'whizzy words'. Evidence from the writing 'once a month books' shows that most pupils are now taking much more of a pride in their work. The large majority are beginning to acquire skills appropriate for their age. In a few lessons, and for some groups, learning is still unsatisfactory when the intended outcome is unclear or pupils are all given the same task.

Progress since the last inspection

- Improve pupils' learning and progress so that all groups of pupils achieve as well as similar groups nationally in reading, writing and mathematics by 31 July 2011 - inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour has improved. The school is now a calm environment. The very large majority of pupils respond quickly to staff and to the consistent strategies that have been introduced to manage behaviour. Pupils are enthusiastic about the stickers and rewards they can earn. Pupils say they feel safe at school and there is no bullying. Those spoken to have a clear sense of right and wrong and can distinguish between good and bad behaviour. They are confident that staff will sort anything out. They have coped well with the many changes to staffing and organisation that have happened recently. Pupils play energetically and are aware of the need to keep healthy through a sensible diet and exercise in physical education lessons or after-school sports clubs. Attendance rates remain low. The school's interventions have yet to have a consistent impact. When talking with pupils, they know that it is important to come to school regularly. One said, 'You have to come because you need to learn stuff'; another said, 'If you don't come to school you won't be smart.' However, too few pupils are attending consistently and no class achieved the 94% target in the second half of spring term.

Progress since the last inspection

- Ensure that by 31 July 2010 pupils' attendance is above 94% by raising pupils' and parents' understanding of the importance of regular attendance to support good learning and progress - inadequate.

The effectiveness of provision

Significant changes have been made to the organisation to the Year 1 and Year 2 classes. Previously, both classes were mixed age and mixed ability. These have been restructured to narrow the ability and age range. After a period of turbulence in the spring term, both classes now have new teachers: one who was permanent to the school and moved from another class, and another who is on long-term supply.

Ongoing monitoring by the headteacher and outside agencies indicates teaching is improving and observations during the inspection confirm this. However, the school is aware that improvements in some year groups are fragile and there is much still to be done. All classrooms are now organised. A particular strength is the positive relationships between staff and pupils. In Years 1 and 2, as a result of the assessments that have been carried out, pupils have been put into small groups for guided reading, literacy and mathematics. These are organised well so that little time is lost. Work is carefully structured. Sensitive support helps pupils to move on. Planning is in place and this ensures efficient organisation and pace. It does not, however, make explicit the intended learning outcomes for different pupils. Pupils are often working hard but are not always sure what they are learning or what they are expected to achieve. At times, there is too much adult direction to complete work or activities and not enough emphasis on checking learning and understanding of all the pupils. Assessment procedures in the school have been strengthened, including the moderation of work. Pupils now have individual targets. They are aware of these, particularly in writing, but they are not consistently informing classroom practice.

There has been a great deal of work to make the school a more welcoming environment. The library area has been reorganised and classroom displays have been improved. The outdoor area of one of the Reception classes has been enhanced by the additional equipment and resources and this has addressed the previous inequality in provision between the classes. Recently, in Year 1 and Year 2, there has been emphasis on securing basic skills and the curriculum has been rightly focused on this with regular routines and structures. Some planning with outside agencies has taken place and has led to more activities to capture pupils' interest, such as a topic on castles that included dressing up in costumes and a mathematics topic related to 'Rainbow Fish'.

The particular strength of the school in caring for its pupils continues. Staff are kind and have worked hard to re-establish expectations related to behaviour and work. Newly introduced reward systems have had a positive response from the children. 'Writer of the week' has been particularly successful in motivating children and has been extended so that achievement of more pupils in writing can be celebrated by the whole school. The school has taken many actions in order to raise attendance and more are planned. Reward for individuals and classes are now in place. An 'attendance tree' to celebrate good attendance is in the playground for all to see.

Work with the Education Welfare Service and social services is taking place to support individual families. The headteacher has met with parents and carers and recently a court prosecution has taken place. However, as previously reported, these strategies have yet to have consistent success.

Progress since the last inspection

- Ensure that by 31 July 2010 all teaching is at least satisfactory, with a significant proportion that is good by:
 - ensuring that teachers' planning meets the needs of all pupils
 - ensuring that pupils know what they are expected to achieve by the end of lessons
 - ensuring that day-to-day assessment and marking give pupils a clear understanding of their next steps in learning - inadequate.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The current locum headteacher has worked very hard to bring about significant improvements since her arrival. However, due to the short time she has been in post, and the inevitable consequences of an abrupt change of management and the absence of some staff, the time has been too short for these to have made enough impact on learning, teaching or attendance. But there are now some very encouraging signs. Morale is rising among teaching and support staff. Support staff describe themselves as 'more of a team than we ever were' and are determined to improve the school. The headteacher has given a very clear steer as to the priorities and made things happen. She has established or confirmed clear whole-school expectations and put in structures and strategies to support these. She has brought together a leadership team who now have a common set of priorities and work hard to achieve these. The management of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, together with those learning English as an additional language, remains effective. Training has taken place to secure the leadership of the school at different levels, including the coordination of mathematics and literacy. As yet, roles and responsibilities in the senior team are not developed enough and, although plans are in place, senior staff are not yet monitoring, evaluating and clearly accountable for improvements.

The governing body is committed to the school. A minority of governors are new to their role and inexperienced. There are some vacancies on the governing body. Some governors have been very angry about local authority support and the special measures judgement. However, they now describe themselves as ready to move on. They have had a great deal to do and are currently engaged in additional training, resolving personnel issues, and bringing about improvements to the buildings and to the budgeting of the school and the Children's Centre. The monitoring by the

governing body of pupils' attainment and teaching and learning is currently inadequate.

Parents and carers remain very loyal to the school. Those spoken to were shocked by the inspection report and upset by the subsequent newspaper coverage, particularly as their children were happy and they appreciated the approachability and friendliness of staff. Although some remain rightly concerned about their child's learning with recent staff changes and changes in management, they welcome the arrival of the locum headteacher and liked the recent changes, and had noticed positive changes in behaviour.

The school is developing a number of effective partnerships to support its improvement work. The Community Learning Partnership's learning mentor is now focused on working with groups of pupils to reflect on their behaviour. Links with other schools has meant support for teachers and more effective support for pupils with English as additional language.

Progress since the last inspection

- Enable the senior leadership team to fulfill their roles and responsibilities in monitoring and evaluating whole-school performance through additional training and coaching by 30 April 2010 - inadequate.

External support

The local authority's statement of action was evaluated by Her Majesty's Inspectors as fit for purpose. While the governors and some staff feel let down and have been very critical of aspects of the external support, it is clear that:

- the local authority responded appropriately following the special measures judgement and supported the senior management team
- decisive action was taken when the first locum headteacher resigned
- appropriate human relations support has been available so that the school is able to take steps to support individuals
- highly effective support from an experienced National Leader of Education is in place to support the current locum headteacher and this has played an invaluable role in bringing about improvements
- advice has been available regarding the particular issues of the school's and Children's Centre's budget and these are now clearer so decisions can be made
- although affected by staff absence, effective consultant support has brought about improvements in the classroom and to the knowledge and practice of the school's subject leaders
- additional funds have been made available to cover the unexpected costs of locum headteachers

- effective monitoring by the School Improvement Partner and the core group is in place and has resulted in a very realistic view of the school and although overall progress has been disappointing so far, there are structures in place to enable this to be accelerated and the school effectively held to account.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure steps are taken to strengthen the governing body so that it can develop the skills and structures to monitor standards and teaching and learning effectively.