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Mr K Imbush
Headteacher
Somers Heath Primary School
Foyle Drive
South Ockendon
RM15 5LX

Dear Mr Imbush

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 May 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the pupils for their help during the inspection and to your Chair of Governors for taking time to meet me to discuss his view of the school's progress since the last inspection.

The headteacher at the time of the last inspection has left the school. An interim headteacher was appointed for two days each week from the beginning of March when leadership of the school was shared with the deputy headteacher. Since the start of the summer term, the interim headteacher has been working full time and will continue in post until the end of the autumn term 2010. The local authority and governing body have discussed the future leadership and management options for the school including the possibility of amalgamating or federating with another local primary school. Governors have decided to retain the school's current status and are organising the recruitment of a substantive headteacher. No other significant personnel or governing body changes have arisen since the inspection.

The local authority has provided the school with satisfactory support. Consultants have worked with staff to help improve pupils' writing and to standardise planning and the teaching of calculation skills in mathematics. Another local school has also been asked to work with senior leaders to help bring about improvements. A post-inspection plan was drawn up to guide the school's improvement over the 12 months from December 2009. This statement of action was judged fit for purpose subject to two amendments. The raising attainment plan, which forms part of the local authority strategy for improvement, includes suitably focussed objectives for tackling the issues from the inspection. However, some of these require a sharper focus on how success will be measured and an indication of the time by which they will be achieved.



As a result of the inspection on 11 November 2009, the school was asked to: ensure that the child protection policy, procedures and staff training are brought into line with current requirements; raise attainment by intervening to accelerate progress for pupils who have fallen behind, by improving teachers' subject knowledge and curriculum coherence in mathematics, and by regularly reviewing the progress targets of pupils with special educational needs; improve the effectiveness of leadership and management and increase the school's capacity for improvement by ensuring the school's self-evaluation is rigorous and up to date, by clarifying the strategic priorities for improvement, and by meeting statutory requirements in relation to community cohesion and equal opportunities.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Achievement, attainment, and pupils' learning and progress were judged satisfactory in the last inspection and they remain so. The latest teacher assessment data show continued variability across the year groups in pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Improvements are still required, particularly in mathematics in Key Stage 1 and in writing in Key Stage 2. Most Year 6 pupils are on track to meet their end of year targets in English and mathematics, although they are further from the targets in English because of weaknesses in writing. Pupils with special educational needs are now having their learning targets reviewed every half term and this is helping them to make better progress.

Pupil progress tracking receives a higher profile than it did at the time of the last inspection and teachers' assessments are being strengthened to improve their accuracy and reliability. An improved system of data collection and analysis is to be introduced to sharpen the school's approach to identifying any underachievement for groups and individuals. Teachers know more about the levels at which their pupils are working and use their daily assessments in lessons to plan suitable learning activities. Improvements in the quality of teachers' planning and the introduction of a whole-school planning proforma have improved consistency and coherence in the teaching of mathematics. A review of the calculation policy has helped to sharpen teachers' subject knowledge and their understanding of teaching different calculation methods. In a majority of the lessons seen during the monitoring inspection, pupils were enjoying their learning and making good progress. Improvements are still required in providing suitably challenging activities for higher ability pupils and in teachers' marking to help guide improvements in pupils' work.

The arrival of the interim headteacher has boosted the school's capacity for sustained improvement. He has brought a commitment towards tackling the key issues from the last inspection and a determination to enhance provision for pupils. The profile of monitoring and evaluation has been raised significantly and includes regular observations of lessons to secure improvements in teaching. Checks have also been made on the quality of teachers' planning, and regular meetings are held



with staff to discuss pupils' attainment and progress. The school self-evaluation form has been updated and now provides a more realistic assessment of the school's effectiveness. The headteacher acknowledges that it requires further work in consultation with staff and governors. Work has begun on drafting a new school development plan in which the school's strategic targets will be prioritised. Policies for community cohesion and equalities have been written, discussed and adopted by the governing body but further work is required in drawing up action plans, which set out the school's approach to improving these aspects of its work. Although the concerted efforts of the senior leadership team are moving the school forward, the work of other key leaders continues to require improvement, for example, in the monitoring and evaluation of provision for pupils with special educational needs.

The governing body has reviewed child protection procedures and updated its policies to bring them into line with current requirements. Almost all staff and key governors have now received the appropriate level of child protection and safeguarding training. The local authority has helped the school conduct a safety audit and leaders have almost finished working through a list of recommended improvements. Leaders recognise the importance of ensuring that regular and systematic monitoring of safeguarding procedures must now take place.

During the inspection, it was noted that the level of pupil attendance, which is currently below average, and provision for information and communication technology require improvement.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rob McKeown
Her Majesty's Inspector

