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Mr Robert Eyre-Brook
Headteacher
Culvers House Primary School
Orchard Avenue
Mitcham
Surrey
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Dear Mr Eyre-Brooke

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Culvers House Primary School

Following my visit with Andrew Lyons, Additional Inspector, to your school on 25-26 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 be appointed in Early Years Foundation but not in the main school.

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 Sutton local education authority.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Culvers House Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 25–26 May 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other staff, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Following the last inspection the previous headteacher left and was replaced in January 2010 by an experienced interim headteacher who was appointed to the substantive post in April. Of the two members of staff who were on maternity leave, one has returned and the second will do so in the second half of the current term. A third member of staff is on long-term sick leave. There are currently four teachers on temporary contracts, including one long term supply member of staff who provides additional support and cover. The school has attempted to reduce the number of temporary teachers but has not been successful in recruiting experienced, key senior and middle staff, in particular, the deputy headteacher's post, a coordinator for Key Stage 1 and a combined post of English and Key Stage 2 coordinator. The current interim deputy headteacher has been promoted and will leave the school at the end of the current half term. The school has secured funding to appoint an advanced skills teacher and intends to re-advertise early to find a suitable applicant.

Since the start of the current academic year more pupils than usual left the school. The pupil population is now stable and year groups are mostly full, particularly in Years 1 and 2 and Early Years Foundation.

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

Achievement is still well below average at the end of Year 6 but remains close to the national average in Year 2 and in Early Years Foundation Stage. The rate of pupils' progress in lessons is, however, beginning to improve, particularly as there is an increasing focus on 'pitching' the work to match individual needs. Although progress is improving, it is not fast enough to narrow significantly the gap between the national average and pupils' current level of attainment. In lessons observed during the monitoring visit, the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities was often similar to their peers because of the intensive support and attention given to developing their basic skills. This was especially so in Years 1 and 2 where teaching assistants worked with pupils by questioning them, explaining instructions and demonstrating worked examples. When these pupils are supported



in small nurture groups, as in Year 6 for literacy and numeracy lessons, their progress is good because work is tailored very closely to their needs.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils who attend regularly feel safe and are happy. They enjoy lessons and most work engagingly and participate well in paired or group discussion and are keen to take part in question and answer sessions and feedback. Pupils listen well to each other, take turns and show a good deal of respect for other cultures. For example, in assembly, they listened well to raga music and watched a pupil perform a traditional South Asian dance. Positive relationships with each other and their teachers contribute well to the majority not wasting time, as teachers respond quickly when there are signs of inattentiveness. Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They display good attitudes when following instructions, for example lining up outside before entering the classroom or going into and leaving assembly. However, a very small minority of boys with behavioural difficulties disrupt lessons. While pupils are tolerant, and say that the 'headteacher has made a difference, behaviour is better', they would still like the 'irritating behaviour to stop', as the 'naughty pupils take up too much time of the teacher's attention'.

There are good opportunities for pupils, including those in Reception, to take on responsibilities, such as buddies, monitors or form representatives. The school is inclusive and pupils say that 'it is now like a family'. This is shown in the sensitive and serious way in which buddies and mentors behave towards others with a physical disability or medical need. Pupils understand that healthy eating helps them to 'grow and become stronger and tougher'.

Senior leaders with the support of education welfare officers work hard to improve attendance. The cold weather conditions at the start of the spring term had an adverse impact on the school attendance. Although stringent actions are taken and a wide range of procedures are in place to encourage parents to send their children to school regularly, attendance remains below the average expected for primary schools. Consequently, the school is on the persistent absence project. A small minority of pupils with medical conditions do not always find it possible to attend. However, the school seeks information to verify the circumstances of such pupils.

Progress since the last inspection in November 2009

- Take more urgent action to raise pupils' achievement – inadequate progress

The effectiveness of provision

There has been a rigorous drive to improve the quality of teaching and the inspection findings fully validate the school's evaluation that it is at least satisfactory



with a small number of good lessons. There are, however, not enough lessons that are good or better, and as a result, pupils do not make fast enough progress to close the attainment gap.

Teachers know their subject well and monitoring, training, coaching, team planning and the opportunity to work alongside consultants have contributed to them developing their planning. These help teachers to understand how to meet the needs of pupils in lessons and to ensure that pupils know the skills they are learning. As a result, expectations, the learning objectives and success criteria are usually explained and reviewed during the lesson. In effective lessons activities are well timed; expectations of work and behaviour are explicit; teachers make good use of information and communication technology to explain and develop ideas; feedback is regular and there is constant checking of how well pupils understand the work. Above all, talk is used well to explore work and teachers use practical or written activities to demonstrate what pupils are expected to learn. Where the teaching is well informed and provides pupils with opportunities to talk back, they make good progress because they are sufficiently challenged to develop and articulate their views in a confident manner. However, too many lessons are satisfactory and do not reflect all of these features. These lessons do not ensure that pupils give their best and new concepts are not consolidated sufficiently. Although teachers manage behaviour well, occasionally silly behaviour and inattentiveness affect the flow of learning and teaching. Additionally, work is not always matched well to the needs of all pupils.

The school has begun to build up a new database with accurate assessment information on pupils' attainment and progress over time. New approaches to assessing and recording pupil progress are being trialled in each year group. The assessment data and recorded information enable teachers to have a better understanding of pupils' strengths and what they need to do to improve gaps in their knowledge. However, this information is not always used well in lessons to ensure that work is closely matched to the needs of all groups. Marking is much improved, though it is not always consistent. Pupils, in discussion with inspectors, indicated that their work is now marked regularly, and marking includes targets and comments which help them to know what they need to do to improve. However, they would like their homework to be marked regularly. Regular tests, assessment days and use of tracking sheets are steadily becoming useful tools to improve learning and involve pupils in self-assessment. These help teachers to begin to set clear targets for pupils and those who are falling behind with their work. Further work is planned to develop the new assessment procedures. At this stage it is too early to evaluate the impact of the new assessment system on outcomes.

Changes to the curriculum have started and are beginning to lead to improvement in planning. For example, specific year groups plan together as a team with the aim of helping pupils to make a smooth transition as they move up the school. Senior and middle leaders have analysed assessment information to get a clear understanding of improvements needed, particularly in literacy and mathematics. Notably, the lack



of suitable resources, particularly in mathematics, has been highlighted, as well as weaknesses in comprehension, reading and writing. External support from the local authority is leading to a sensibly designed curriculum to raise attainment. As a result there is increasingly more emphasis on links across the curriculum, with a sharp focus on writing skills. The school recognises that more still needs to be done to improve reading and has made a start on developing this area of pupils' learning. In mathematics, investigation work provides pupils with more challenge, a point which more-able pupils in Years 5 and 6 welcome. The curriculum has broadened to provide pupils with an in-depth experience of different art forms. For example, specialist providers have worked with pupils in drama and music. However, the restructuring, which has been most sharply focused on developing basic skills, is not finished. Other subjects, such as science, have not been given similar consideration. Furthermore, it is still being developed to ensure that planning is consistently effective and meets the needs of all pupils.

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is well structured. Well-organised activities and good support and guidance from key workers enable children to enjoy their time in school, including in the Reception classes. Useful information is gathered about children's progress and contributes to staff knowing how to plan activities to stimulate and improve learning. The curriculum has been enhanced by developing further learning outside the classroom. For example, children's interests and fascination with ants has led to them working on a mini-beast investigative project. Similarly, the garden project is helping them to find out about plants. Overall, teachers build on children's curiosity and help them to develop an interest in learning.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement - inadequate

- Increase the proportion of good teaching and eliminate inadequate teaching.
- Ensure the curriculum promotes effective progress in each subject.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher provides very clear direction for the school and is well supported by an experienced and valued interim deputy headteacher. Together, they have spelt out the vision of improvement for the school. Self-evaluation is thorough and accurate, so the headteacher has a good understanding of where strengths and weaknesses lie. He is realistic about the enormity of the task and time scale required to bring about the changes that will result in better achievement for all pupils. He listens carefully to staff and has won their trust and respect. The headteacher has created a culture of openness and improvement, in which issues about professional development and improving the quality of learning and teaching can be discussed and tackled effectively. This approach has helped staff to understand the pace of change required and the importance of developing good management and skills to support the vision of improvement. The subject coordinators have varying levels of



experience but are clear about their role. They have welcomed initiatives to develop their expertise and are committed to the process of change. Overall, staff are positive and have been inspired by the headteacher to work together as a team. The school, previously in the intensifying support programme, has prepared a detailed and thorough raising achievement plan. It targets the right areas to bring about better outcomes for pupils. The productive partnership work with the local authority ensures that the challenges the school faces are reflected in the plan. The targets identified are realistic and set out over a period of time, so that the school can embed them in the day-to-day routine. The new standards committee and the curriculum working party usefully ensure that the raising achievement plan is reviewed and adjusted to take account of the improvements and next steps.

The governing body has been strengthened by the addition of three experienced members. As a result of the new culture of openness and improvement, sound systems have been put into place to brief the governing body on the raising achievement plan. Members of the governing body have moved quickly to reclaim their role and have undertaken training to develop their understanding of pupils' progress over time. As a result, there is a more strategic approach to meeting the needs of pupils. Through the standards committee, the governing body is now better placed to monitor progress on a monthly basis and is beginning to hold the school to account.

Senior staff and external consultants including advisers have given a high priority to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. This contributes to teachers improving their work. However, the work of teaching assistants in lessons is inconsistent and has not been evaluated rigorously to ensure that they are not partially passive but actively involved in accelerating the pace of pupils' learning. The school faces considerable challenges and although it is rising to them, the past difficulties with recruiting and retaining experienced and well-qualified staff persist. Currently, the school's ability to move forward at a quick pace has been curtailed because permanent key leaders and managers have not been appointed. The school therefore does not have sufficient capacity to move forward at a quick enough pace.

External support

The local authority is providing very good support for the school. It is promoting improvements in teaching and learning, leadership and management and is supporting the key areas for development identified in the raising achievement plan. The school improvement partner has brokered a deal with other partners to secure the support of the interim senior staff. Regular advice and evaluation of the improvement plan are contributing to the school focusing on the necessary steps needed to improve pupils' learning and achievement.

Good support from consultants and local authority advisers helps teachers to develop their planning and assess pupils' work and progress accurately. A



particularly good feature is the opportunity teachers have to experience good practice by working alongside consultants and advisers. This helps teachers to sharpen their practice and is evident in the improvement in teaching and learning, and assessment of pupils' progress since the last inspection. However, the local authority knows that difficulties with staffing impact on the school's ability to consolidate the improvements made to date. Furthermore, a replacement has not been found for the school improvement partner who is retiring at the end of the current term. Discussion is underway to ensure that sound solutions are found to stabilise staffing and improve capacity.

The local education authority's statement of action is satisfactory. It is adjusted to ensure that targets are raised over a two-year period to reflect the improvements in the quality of provision. The statement of action includes clear actions and identifies key staff and how progress will be monitored and evaluated.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop the school's capacity to build on the changes that have taken place by making suitable arrangements to appoint key senior and middle leaders and managers as well as a link adviser and/or school improvement partner by the start of September 2010.