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Mrs Hazel Fox
The Headteacher
Okehampton Primary School
Glendale Road
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Devon
EX20 1JB

Dear Mrs Fox

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Okehampton Primary School

Following my visit with Alan Jones, Additional Inspector, to your school on 29 and 30 September 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 third 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 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 third monitoring inspection on 29 and 30 September 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders, governors, teachers and groups of pupils. The school improvement officer was contacted by telephone.

Context

The deputy headteacher retired at the end of the summer term. An assistant headteacher, with oversight of teaching and learning, Key Stage 1 and the development of the curriculum, took up his post from the start of the autumn term. The process of appointing a second assistant headteacher to manage Key Stage 2 is underway. A temporary assistant headteacher has been appointed until this post is filled.

Two teachers have returned from maternity leave and another from long term sick leave so their temporary replacements have now left. One temporary full-time and one part-time post have been made permanent. The part-time special needs coordinator has been made permanent and full time. A part-time drama teacher has been appointed.

Four teaching assistants have left and not been replaced, although some current teaching assistant hours have been increased. One higher level teaching assistant is filling a new assistant special needs coordinator role, with responsibility for family liaison.

Improvements to the decoration of the building have continued. Accommodation in Reception has been reorganised to provide a shared resource area.

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

Standard assessment tests for Year 6 in 2010 showed that pupils' attainment in English was in line with national standards although, as anticipated, reading skills were better than writing. Attainment fell in mathematics, with mental mathematics the main area of underachievement. The school now has sufficient accurate tracking data to show that progress for pupils in the current Year 6 is accelerating, making up for previous underachievement, so in 2011 attainment is likely to be better, particularly in mathematics. These pupils, and some in Year 5, can now talk confidently about their learning and what they need to do in order to improve. However, in younger year groups, pupils are still lacking the necessary vocabulary and understanding. Progress in other year groups is also improving, especially in

writing, largely as a result of better teaching and monitoring, although progress was slower last year for the current Year 5. Pupils in Key Stage 1 are catching up a legacy of underachievement in writing during the Early Years Foundation Stage but Year 1 still have improvements to make in mathematics.

Assessment of children's attainment on entry to Reception is being carried out thoroughly this year for the first time. Support from the local authority has increased the rigour and accuracy of teachers' assessment of children's skills development but there is not enough data yet to judge progress accurately over time.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Attendance in 2009/10 improved on the previous year and is now average. The reduction in persistent absence has been maintained. Systems to ensure good attendance is robust and there has been a recent focus on improving punctuality, although it is too early to measure the impact of this initiative.

Good relationships between staff and pupils and a culture of kindness and consideration in the way in which pupils respond to one another were both evident during this visit. A new behaviour policy with a clear system of rewards and sanctions was introduced at the beginning this term and was seen working well during the visit. However, although pupils behave very well round the school and most behave well in lessons, the behaviour of some pupils in Key Stage 1 gets in the way of learning. As at the last visit, some pupils find it difficult to sit still, have poor listening skills, and a lack of awareness of the impact of their behaviour on others. Improving pupils' behaviour for learning in Key Stage 1 is starting to be tackled through a series of assemblies and classroom conversations called the 'Learning Rainbow'.

The effectiveness of provision

A higher proportion of good lessons was seen during this visit than at the last, with none inadequate. Pupils are now much more active in lessons. They are given plenty of opportunity to share ideas with one another, and teachers' good questioning helps the development of speaking skills and vocabulary. This means that pupils enjoy themselves, generally behave well, and are motivated to succeed. Many pupils, however, still lack the skills to maximise learning, for example listening attentively to one another and the teacher, and taking responsibility for their learning. This is much better in Year 6 where pupils can talk about the need to develop 'writing stamina'. In other year groups the pace of learning sometimes slows when the whole class activity changes and pupils need to work independently. This is because

the teacher's expectations of work output are not high enough, and the atmosphere is not sufficiently industrious. A strong focus this term on improving the presentation of written work is already having a positive impact.

Teachers' planning is generally sound with a strong emphasis on good modelling and providing a wide range of activities. However, sometimes the independent tasks following the teachers' introduction are not focused sufficiently on pupils' learning and are not structured to guarantee systematic, sequential acquisition of skills. Through observation during lessons, regular marking and formal assessment of pupils' progress, teachers have plenty of data about individual pupils' strengths and weaknesses in both literacy and numeracy. This information is not consistently used to set personal targets or next steps in learning to maximise progress for each individual, although the work provided does cater for pupils of different abilities, and sometimes the teacher responds effectively to needs on a day-to-day basis. Many lessons lack challenge for the most able pupils.

The new marking policy is well understood by pupils and consistently used by teachers. Although feedback to pupils is regular and up to date, the quality and usefulness of comments are still variable, with 'next steps' often missing. Pupils say that they are now usually given time to respond to comments and this was evident in books during the visit.

The recently appointed special needs coordinator has carried out reassessment of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, with some reclassified and others removed from the special needs register. Teachers are now accepting more responsibility for the learning, assessment and progress of these pupils, supported by a generally able and well-trained team of teaching assistants. An audit of provision for pupils with special needs and/or disabilities is underway.

Schemes of work with clear skills progression are being used by teachers in mathematics and literacy, although reference to prior learning in teachers' planning is inconsistent. A whole school curriculum team is currently developing a new curriculum with a themed approach which will include foundation subjects. Implementation is planned from the start of the spring term. During the visit it was 'Money Week'. Year 3 pupils developed their skills of budgeting and understanding the meaning of 'value', culminating in a cake sale for parents. This creative approach to mathematics, design and technology and developing financial and planning skills generated huge enjoyment for the pupils and some excellent learning.

Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage is more structured and consistent than at the time of the last visit, with a good balance between adult- and child-initiated activities. However, planning sometimes lacks creativity. A start has been made to improve the transition to Year 1, so the pace of learning is maintained for all children, but this is still hampered by the lack of assessment data.

The school has strong sustainability agenda and pupils are very aware of 'green' issues such as the installation of solar panels and fair trade. An eco-champion group is very active and has visited the local Chamber of Trade to encourage them to make Okehampton a Fairtrade town.

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

New appointments, and very focused professional development for those already in post, are both contributing to increased capacity of both senior and middle leadership. But the impact of the new skills now in school is only just beginning to be evident. The headteacher's clear vision is shared by the whole staff team. There is a strong sense of mutual support and a 'can do' attitude, with everyone understanding their role in improving outcomes for pupils. Teachers are increasing in self-confidence, and are more willing to take risks. Particularly striking during this visit was their willingness to reflect their own practice and identify for themselves ways in which they could improve their pupils' learning.

Middle managers are increasingly involved in rigorous and systematic monitoring of pupils' progress and beginning to lead improvement. They are now regularly scrutinising teachers' planning and pupils' work, identifying priorities for further development and providing support for individual staff. They are not yet substantially involved in monitoring the quality of teaching.

Governors are asking more challenging questions and tackling some outstanding issues such as setting up a regular cycle of monitoring and reviewing policies. They are listening to, and acting on, advice both from the headteacher and the local authority. Increased involvement with the day-to-day life of the school means that governors' understanding of the challenges the school faces are realistic and based on secure knowledge. Several have taken on additional responsibilities, including leading committees and mentoring new governors. They are also strengthening community links. For example, the local community has been consulted about the key skills, knowledge and experience that children should have when they leave the school.

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

The local authority's analysis of the school's progress and its strengths and weaknesses is thorough and accurate. The impact of professional development is already evident in improvements to the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in developing pupils' writing skills where most support has been focused. As the school begins to use more in-house training, and the leadership capacity increases, the level of support from the local authority is reducing, and is now more tightly focused on areas of specific need, for example the development of literacy and mathematics teaching, and the skills of middle leaders.