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Mr Bob Eastwood
Headteacher
Abingdon Primary School
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Dear Mr Eastwood

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Abingdon Primary School

Following my visit with Christine Millett, Additional Inspector, to your school on 23–24 June 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 February 2010. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

- Progress since being subject to special measures – 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, Families and Learning for Middlesbrough.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Abingdon Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 23–24 June 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents including a range of safeguarding policies and pupils' books. They also met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, groups of staff, pupils, two members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the inspection, a new mathematics coordinator and additional literacy coordinator have been appointed. A teacher who had been seconded to the local authority returned immediately after the inspection to replace a member of staff on long-term absence. Two teachers are currently on maternity leave and one due to commence maternity leave at the end of the summer term. An assistant headteacher has been appointed to strengthen the leadership team and will take up appointment in September 2010. The headteacher is retiring at the end of the summer term. Despite national advertising, the school has not managed to secure a replacement. For the academic year 2010 to 2011, the leadership of the school will be shared between the deputy headteacher, who will become acting headteacher for half of the time, and a headteacher from a local primary school judged outstanding following its Ofsted inspection. The staff and governors from both schools will work together from September.

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

Lesson observations, book scrutiny and teachers' assessments of pupils' work show that most groups of pupils are making satisfactory progress in their learning. Where the school has had a sharp focus, there has been more rapid improvement. For example, in mathematics, current teacher assessments indicate that over 75% of Year 6 pupils are making the expected gains in their learning, a much better rate than at the time of the inspection.

All staff have benefited from local authority training and advice. This has resulted in an increased focus on assessment and on the structure of lessons to ensure that these set out more clearly what pupils need to learn. However, there is inconsistent use of this information across the school and between subjects, particularly in Year 3. Pupils' progress in English has not been as strong as it was last year when it was good, and progress in this subject is now similar to that of mathematics. This is in part due to the improvements made in mathematics. Nonetheless, actions are being taken to tackle these inconsistencies and to increase the challenge for the more able pupils.

As a result of a better focus in Key Stage 1, the proportion of pupils attaining higher levels has improved, although this remains below that found nationally. Current teacher assessments of Year 6 pupils also show some improvement in science and they are closer to the school's own targets than previously.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise attainment and improve the progress pupils make in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils say that they feel very safe in this friendly, harmonious and caring school. Pupils behave well and are very polite and considerate of others. Attitudes to learning are generally positive and when teaching is good and teachers are enthusiastic, it makes a great difference to pupils' interest and enjoyment. However, where teaching is weaker, pupils' interest wanes, although they remain well behaved. Pupils say they enjoy school and this is shown in their increasing attendance. They talk positively about the celebration events for good attendance and the activities they can take part in outside the school day. They relish the school's healthy meals and their skills and abilities in dance and hoola-hoop classes are a joy to see. Effective actions are helping to use the successful enrichment activities, such as sports and dance activities, to promote pupils' well-being and interest in learning. For example, since the inspection, the Yorkshire County cricket team has come to school for ten consecutive Sundays to coach pupils; school attendance rates for these children have been boosted and teachers report their self-esteem and confidence has risen significantly.

No time has been wasted since the last inspection to develop a range of strategies to boost pupils' attendance. Improved communication with parents and carers through the work of the family support officer and a more focused response by the school and the education welfare service in following up non-attendance is making a positive difference. Furthermore, pupils at risk of not attending are encouraged to attend breakfast club. This is not only increasing their attendance but it is also helping to improve their attitudes to learning and their progress in lessons. Attendance rates were low at the time of the inspection; they have improved to broadly average.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve attendance to at least the national average – satisfactory

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is improving, with more good teaching observed than at the time of the inspection. However, although reducing, there is still too much teaching where children sit for too long, where there is too much teacher-talk and few opportunities for pupils to develop independence as well as collaborative and investigative skills. Some teachers still make too much use of published materials and work sheets. Joint observations between local authority advisers and managers are assisting the school to gain better knowledge of what good teaching is, which is helping to raise its quality. All are aware that the proportion of good lessons needs to continue to increase in order to tackle the previous underachievement and to ensure all pupils can make the most of their time in lessons.

Improvements have been made to the structure of planning to provide a whole-school approach. This has ensured that pupils working above or below age-related-expectations are identified, so that planning can be adapted to meet their needs better. This is making a difference in mathematics particularly, but there is variation in teachers' productive use of planning. Where lessons are good, a range of activities are planned that meet the individual needs of pupils and challenge them further. In such lessons the contribution of teaching assistants is also well planned and no time is wasted. The school is aware that there is still some way to go to ensure all staff are using the good approaches evident in some classes. Assessment information is gathered more regularly and this carefully tracks pupils' progress half termly against challenging targets. Recently developed pupil performance meetings between senior managers and staff use the assessment information to identify pupils who may be falling behind so individual or group interventions can be set in place to help them catch up. Senior managers are aware that more needs to be done to make sure this information is also used to challenge pupils' progress within lessons so that fewer pupils need additional interventions outside the classroom.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior managers, well supported by the local authority, took urgent action to tackle the safeguarding concerns found during the inspection. Safeguarding procedures now meet statutory requirements. All safeguarding and child protection policies have been rigorously reviewed by staff and governors and, where necessary, new policies have been developed so that procedures to guarantee the safety and well-being of pupils are clear to all. The designated teacher for safeguarding has completed the required training and all appropriate staff are fully trained in child protection procedures. Governors have attended training to increase their skills and they are now well placed to challenge and support the school and carry out their safeguarding duties more effectively.

Appropriate governors have attended local authority training on safe recruitment and child protection as well as on how to be a more effective governing body. A monitoring group of governors has been set up to challenge the school to improve the key issues identified for improvement. Such actions have not only strengthened governors' understanding of their statutory role in safeguarding, it has also ensured they are now in a much better position to hold the school to account. However, as yet there has been too little time to show the impact of their training and development in terms of improving outcomes for pupils.

Leadership of literacy has recently been strengthened by the appointment of an additional literacy coordinator so that responsibilities are shared across this large school: it is too early to see the full impact of this. The role of middle leaders in driving improvement in teaching and learning is beginning to develop. Local authority training and support is helping them to build more successful strategies to lead their areas of responsibility. For some time they have been involved in subject coordinators' meeting with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, observed teaching, monitored planning and conducted scrutinies of pupils' books. While this has helped to identify important weaknesses, there has not, until recently, been rigorous follow-up to ensure that actions are taken to eradicate these weaknesses. Since the inspection, middle managers conduct more focused observations of teaching. They have yet to develop their leadership roles in terms of whole-school priorities for improvement. Middle managers have also been involved in training to develop literacy and numeracy across the curriculum, but this too is still in the early stages of development.

Senior managers have worked very closely with the local authority to develop the local authority's action plan. This plan has provided a clear and timely focus on improvement; for example, on safeguarding arrangements and attendance rates. However, the ability of senior managers and governors to evaluate the impact of their work fully is limited because the school development plan is not aligned to the local authority's plan, particularly in terms of identifying how they will make sure teaching is consistently good enough to raise attainment at a faster rate. As a result, there is currently no mechanism for senior managers to hold everyone to account for the improvements required.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure safeguarding procedures fully meet government requirements – satisfactory

External support

The local authority has provided good, intensive advice and support to the school. Their statement of action was evaluated and judged to fulfil requirements. The

action plan provides a strong, measured, yet focused agenda for change and improvement. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements are clear but have yet to link to the procedures in the school's development plan. Support for mathematics has been particularly valued and this is making a difference to teachers' confidence and skills in planning and delivering more effective and interesting lessons. However, some teachers have yet to make full use of the training and advice provided.

Priorities for further improvement:

- Involve middle managers more directly in driving improvements across the school and in holding them to account for those improvements.
- Develop pupil progress meetings between senior managers and teachers further, to ensure teachers are held to account more effectively for the progress the children in their classes make.
- Ensure the school development plan for 2010/11:
 - aligns to the local authority's action plan
 - identifies clearly the actions the school will take to raise attainment and pupils' progress through improvements to the quality of teaching and
 - identifies how staff will be held to account for that improvement.