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Mrs Rowland
Headteacher
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Kent
TN29 0LE

Dear Mrs Rowland

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Dymchurch Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 and 16 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 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 Managing Director of Children's Services for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Browning
Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Dymchurch Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 September 2010

Evidence

I observed the school's work, including 13 lessons, and scrutinised documents and pupils' work in Years 1 to 6. I also met with the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, the middle leadership team, teachers and pupils, and had a discussion with a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous inspection there have been adjustments and appointments, both permanent and temporary, throughout the school and to the middle management structure. In April 2010 an executive headteacher was appointed; in September 2010 she was appointed substantive headteacher. The previous headteacher, six teaching staff and several teaching assistants left in August 2010. Two new teaching staff have been appointed. The school roll has decreased to one-form entry. Building work has been completed in the Early Years Foundation Stage with the construction of a covered outdoor learning area. The school is currently undergoing substantial refurbishment.

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

Pupils' attainment in Year 2 for 2010 shows a further dip in performance in reading and mathematics. In writing there was a slight rise in attainment but too few reached the expected or higher National Curriculum levels in writing. Provisional Year 6 results for this year show attainment rose slightly in English to broadly average, but remains below that found nationally in mathematics. In contrast, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in English and mathematics rose this year. Writing, however, remains the most significant weakness. The school exceeded its target for pupils making two levels of progress in English, but fell short in mathematics and when English and mathematics results are combined.

Lesson observations and assessment information show that pupils' achievement from their below average starting points in Year 1 remains inadequate. Pupils' current rates of progress are still too variable to overcome the legacy of previous underachievement. Pupils' attainment and progress are still too hampered by gaps in their knowledge, understanding and confidence to use basic computation skills. In science, improvements in teaching and planning of the curriculum have led to greater opportunities for practical and investigative learning, as when Year 3 pupils tested gravity by dropping different objects in the playground. Nonetheless, the impact of these changes is too soon to be measurable and there is more to do to

provide pupils with consistently good opportunities to explore their scientific skills first-hand and make links with other subjects.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise attainment in English, mathematics and science; by extending pupils' use of vocabulary in their writing across the curriculum, increasing opportunities for pupils' to use calculations to solve mathematical problems in real-life situations, strengthening the depth of pupils' knowledge across the science curriculum and ensuring that they use this knowledge to help explain the conclusions they have made during investigations – inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour has improved and they have a more positive approach to learning. This is due to the concerted efforts to improve the learning environment and reinforcement by teachers to consistently share their expectations of pupil behaviour. Behaviour management strategies are effective and these, combined with improvements in the quality of teaching, are resulting in generally better behaviour in lessons by the vast majority of pupils. Pupils say they are pleased to have contributed to the school and class rules and like being consulted on such matters.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is improving and any previous inadequate teaching has been tackled. There are more instances of good classroom practice and teaching is more consistent overall. Improvements are still very new and the school has rightly focused on prioritising the quality of pupils' learning as the most significant factor to drive and improve teaching. However, the quality of learning in lessons is better than that seen in the last inspection due to improvements in the quality of teaching. This has resulted in better levels of pupil motivation and engagement. Some good use of questioning by adults was seen to extend pupils' thinking and use of vocabulary in literacy and across the curriculum. The teaching of blending letters and sounds and talk in preparation for writing is beginning to build on pupils' literacy skills. Year 5 pupils improved their autumn poems by sharing their ideas and editing their work, resulting in sentences such as, 'some creatures hibernate and wake up very late' and 'animals pack their bags for their winter holiday'. At this early stage of the term evidence to indicate whether or not pupils are making sufficient progress from their starting points is limited. Spelling is weak as seen in current work. In mathematics, pupils have greater opportunities to use calculation and problem solve in real-life situations. Year 6 pupils eagerly used their calculation skills to solve monster riddles and Year 2 estimated the size of a birthday cake needed for an imaginary birthday party. Some teaching is too much teacher-led, with the class teacher doing most of the work, resulting in insufficient challenge for pupils to take a lead in their own learning which in turn limits their independent learning skills and

swifter progress. While the school has begun to track pupils' progress this is not yet sufficiently developed to enable teachers to match work closely enough to the needs of all pupils in their class. The planned staff training for assessment procedures and practices has yet to take place. Consequently, pupils do not have and are not aware of their academic targets. The school is making better use of information about pupils' learning to plan the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, although it is too early to assess the impact on improving their progress.

The curriculum is under review with a focus on making it more creative with themes such as 'The Seasons'. Information and communication technology is specifically planned for in different subjects and gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills are beginning to be tackled more methodically. However, while staff endeavour to use information and communication technology, this is constrained by inadequate hardware. The quality of care, guidance and support pupils receive is satisfactory. Levels of support and academic intervention are under review to better meet the needs of individuals.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring teachers take more responsibility for checking how well pupils are learning and use this information more rigorously to plan work that meets pupils' differing needs, making sure that pupils are consistently challenged throughout lessons so that learning moves forward swiftly – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has responded positively to the issues from the previous inspection. She has changed class responsibilities and teaching assistants according to their expertise and pupil needs. She is successfully establishing a secure staff base and building on existing strengths and nurturing staff talents. Staff training is focused on specific and generic skills to develop teachers' expertise. She has put in place short stepped improvements and systems to enable the school to improve provision. The headteacher demonstrates a strong sense of direction to drive improvement and this is shared with the teaching staff and governors. Information on pupils' progress is being used to set targets, monitor rates of progress and identify areas of underachievement. This has the potential to ensure teachers are held more rigorously to account for the progress pupils make and standards reached. The school's raising attainment plan is clearly focused on the areas for improvement. It clearly indicates actions to be undertaken and how these are to be measured in terms of rising attainment and pupils' progress. Middle leaders are beginning to work together more coherently. Most have produced subject action plans and are receiving professional development and training to help them broaden awareness of their roles and responsibilities. Monitoring and evaluation are at very

early stages although middle leaders have a clearer view on what needs to be done in their subject areas. As yet, there has been insufficient time for any measurable impact on pupils' outcomes and it is early days in terms of their impact on provision.

The restructured governing body has settled down and governors are more aware of their statutory responsibilities. They have formed a strategy group, produced an action plan and are reviewing policies. Governors are involved in the building and refurbishment programme and are seeking to improve resources for information and communication technology. They have received training on knowing about pupils' attainment and are due to train on how to monitor and evaluate the school's work. While linked to subjects and areas of the school's work, these developments are recent. Though tangible changes are evident and beginning to take effect, the governors' involvement in driving improvement is embryonic.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Increase the impact of subject leaders and governors on pupils' learning by ensuring that leaders have a sharper understanding of provision and progress across the school and greater involvement in driving improvement – satisfactory.

External support

Following the last inspection, the local authority produced a satisfactory statement of action, indicating the actions it would take to support the school to bring about improvement. The local authority has provided the level of support it said it would and its effectiveness has been satisfactory, especially in literacy. Provision is improving as a result of the support and guidance staff have received.