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Mr E Cottle
The Headteacher
Brenchley and Matfield CofE VA Primary School
Market Heath
Brenchley
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Kent
TN12 7NY

Dear Mr Cottle

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Brenchley and Matfield Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit with Julie Sackett, Additional Inspector, to your school on 21 and 22 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 inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. 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 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 the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Kent and the Rochester Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2010.

Increase rates of learning and progress in literacy and numeracy by:

- making sure that teachers have a shared understanding of the expectations and challenge required to ensure that all pupils make swift gains in their learning
- ensuring that support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is an established part of the school's provision
- using information from tracking pupils' progress, assessing and marking to match work consistently to pupils' needs
- ensuring pupils know their targets and how to improve their work
- planning the curriculum to build systematically upon pupils' prior experience and ensure pupils develop their computing skills
- increasing the rigour with which leaders, managers and governors monitor the school's performance in order to bring about sustainable improvements in the quality of provision
- ensuring that community cohesion is effectively promoted at local, national and global levels, fostering pupils' cultural awareness.

Special measures: monitoring of Brenchley and Matfield CofE VA Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 21–22 September 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including 15 lessons or parts of lessons and whole-school choral worship. Inspectors scrutinised school documents, pupils' books and assessment information and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, governors and representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the inspection in March, several teachers have left the school and new members of staff started at the beginning of this term. The number of pupils on roll has fallen and the school now has one class for each year group.

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

Despite very recent signs of improvements in the quality of pupils' learning, these have not yet had sufficient impact on pupils' achievement. Since the inspection, pupils' achievement has not improved rapidly enough. While the results for mathematics in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 remained stable, levels of attainment in English fell. In-school assessment records show that far too many pupils throughout the school, particularly in Key Stage 2, are not making sufficient progress and neither is the pace of improvement speeding up. Indeed, the gap between where pupils are and where they ought to be is widening. For example, over the 2009/2010 academic year, no pupils in the Year 3 class made satisfactory progress in reading and half fell further behind. In last year's Year 4 class, 10 out of the 16 girls made inadequate progress in writing. Although the picture improved slightly for older pupils, the school's expectations about what progress pupils should be making are too low, and these pupils are not making up the lost ground of previous years.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- increase rates of learning and progress in literacy and numeracy – inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour in class and around the school is satisfactory; however it deteriorates when pupils are not fully engaged or interested in their learning or when the work is too easy. At these times, younger pupils tend to engage in low-level disruptive behaviour such as chatting or fiddling with equipment, while older

pupils become listless and passive. In most lessons seen during the visit pupils were over-directed and had few opportunities for independent learning or for using their initiative and, as a result, in the few instances when pupils were asked to work independently they found this difficult.

The effectiveness of provision

There have been improvements in the structures and systems which underpin teaching and learning. Most lessons now have learning objectives and identified steps for learning. Lesson planning is more consistent and teachers plan different levels of work or additional support to match different abilities. There are improvements in teachers' marking of pupils' work and the very early signs, in a few classes, of pupils responding to marking and engaging in self- or peer-evaluation. Classrooms are well organised and interesting with displays that are relevant and used to support the current learning. Despite these positive signs, the quality of teaching and learning is not good enough and is not having sufficient impact on improving and speeding up the learning. Although there were a very small number of lessons where pupils made good progress, much of what was seen during the visit was mediocre and, in a significant minority of lessons, the quality of teaching and learning was inadequate. In most lessons there was far too little which sufficiently challenged or interested the pupils. Opportunities to extend the learning were missed and, in several lessons, although the planning indicated that activities would be matched to abilities, this was not happening in reality. Too many lessons had a lack of urgency; pupils were inactive for long periods and did not have to think for themselves. The use of assessment to support and inform planning is at a rudimentary stage and there is insufficient understanding of pupils' starting points and their targets for improvement. There is very little evidence at this stage that pupils have, or are aware of, their learning targets.

The school has just implemented a new curriculum to ensure that statutory requirements are covered. This is not yet good enough, or well enough balanced to meet the needs and interests of all pupils.

The organisation and management of provision to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved. Training of staff, including teaching assistants, is raising awareness and increasing understanding. Intervention and support work are now happening and, although it is very early to evaluate the impact, there are some positive signs with individual pupils.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders' lack of clarity, purpose and direction permeates the school and is an important contributor to the slow rate of improvement. As a result of this serious weakness the bullet point relating to leadership and management has been extracted from the first area for improvement identified by the section 5 inspection

and will be judged independently from now on. Self-evaluation has not been accurate in the past; however, the school's own evaluation of progress at this point is correct in that it identifies that targets for improvement have not been achieved and that progress is inadequate. Monitoring activities have been carried out but the quality and resultant understanding are not good enough. As a result, the focus of monitoring and support is not sharply enough focused on establishing priorities or embedding those changes which will make the most difference and accelerate pupils' learning. Expectations are too low and the assessment systems, although they generate a great deal of information, are not sufficiently clear to enable progress to be tracked from year to year. Targets for expected progress remain the same each year and do not take account of inadequate progress in previous years. This means that target setting builds on failure instead of seeking to achieve catch-up.

The school has done what might be reasonably expected in the time since the inspection to audit current activity and establish a plan to promote community cohesion. It has also made a start in providing activities to develop pupils' understanding of cultural and religious diversity.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- increase the rigour with which leaders, managers and governors monitor the school's performance in order to bring about sustainable improvements in the quality of provision – inadequate
- ensure that community cohesion is effectively promoted at local, national and global levels and foster pupils' cultural awareness – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has provided a great deal of advisory support; however, the impact of this has been diminished and improvements have not always been embedded due to a lack of systematic follow-up on the part of the school's leaders. In one important area external support has been successful. A senior special educational needs coordinator, seconded to the school on a part-time basis, has established much improved and better-organised provision. This is now being embedded and further improved through close working with the school's newly appointed special educational needs coordinator.

The local authority's Statement of Action produced immediately following the inspection was judged by Ofsted to fulfil the requirements. However, the authority has not upheld its commitment to hold monthly evaluation meetings. As a result, it has failed to evaluate the impact of its support, hold the school leadership to account or formally inform the Principal Advisor for Primary and the Head of Service for Standards and Achievement about the school's progress.

Priorities for further improvement

- ensure that senior leaders, including governors, and local authority officers work closely together, develop an agreed strategy and demonstrate their full agreement with and commitment to implementing the plan for improvement.