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Mr Tim Walters
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Walters

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF EASTOVER
COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Mary Usher-Clark and Peter Kemble, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 5 and 6 February 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in July 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Thank you for the help that you, your staff, pupils and governors gave when we inspected your school. Also for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services for Somerset.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Palk
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF EASTOVER COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 5 and 6 February 2008

Evidence

Inspectors evaluated the school's work, scrutinised documents, and held discussions with the headteacher, school improvement adviser, school leaders, teachers, pupils and two governors. Inspectors observed seventeen lessons or parts of lessons.

Context

An interim headteacher was appointed in September 2007 on a one year fixed term contract. Two recently qualified teachers, appointed before the school was placed in special measures, have taken up their posts.

Achievement and standards

At the time of the previous inspection, pupils were making inadequate progress over time and their attainment was found to be low. The school's 2007 national test results show that pupils made satisfactory progress in English, mathematics and science from low starting points and standards remained well below the national average. The proportions reaching the higher standard of Level 5 were average, but too many pupils fail to reach average standards in English and mathematics.

Standards of pupils' work seen during this monitoring visit were below average overall. Nevertheless, the progress made by most groups of pupils in reading and writing is improving rapidly as the result of a very focused approach towards the teaching of phonics. Overall, pupils are now making satisfactory progress, although this is not yet good enough to raise the standards of the less able. Good progress over time is not yet assured because the recently developed strategies are limited to the area of reading. Raising expectations in this area has been achieved, and work has now begun in mathematics to raise pupils' attainments.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in July 2007:

- increase pupils' progress and raise their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by raising teachers' expectations of pupils' capabilities – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' behaviour is good. Older pupils particularly have good social skills and respond to visitors very well. Behaviour in the playground is good and pupils express warm appreciation for the play facilities and equipment that is available to them. They make good use of their playtimes and look forward to making their choice between activities. Pupils are very positive about school. They commented that they enjoy the feeling of being challenged in their work, and were enthusiastic about their own target sheets. They were quick to explain where they felt they had made best progress. They enjoy phonics lessons. One Year 6 pupils stated, 'Phonics does boost

your confidence in writing.' Attendance is good overall. However, a small number of pupils are at risk of underachieving because of their poor attendance and punctuality. The school is tackling this issue rigorously. All systems are in place to keep pupils safe.

Quality of provision

At the time of the previous inspection, teaching and learning were inadequate. A sharper focus on the evaluation of the performance of all teachers has led to satisfactory improvements in teaching.

Satisfactory progress has been made in developing cooperative planning between year group and key stage staff to make best use of expertise. Well trained teaching assistants are used effectively to teach reading, including systematic phonics, to pupils who need to catch up more quickly than others. A minority of pupils have good quality individual learning plans and resources such as laptops to aid their writing skills. Levels of challenge are generally more appropriate. The new system for tracking pupils' progress is helping teachers plan work that is better matched to pupils' differing starting points. The reorganisation of teaching groups by ability for English and mathematics is helping teachers match work more closely to pupils' learning needs. The intervention programmes for teaching phonics and reading are beginning to chip away at the gaps in pupils' learning that act as barriers to sustained success. Staff are aware that there is more to be done in raising their expectations of what pupils can achieve and in consistently challenging pupils of all capabilities.

Whilst improvements are taking place, there are inconsistencies in the way that new initiatives are being implemented. For example, the pace of learning in lessons is sometimes too slow and many pupils remain too dependent on the help of adults in order to make progress. Higher attaining pupils sometimes work through activities with which they are familiar before they are set more challenging tasks. Sometimes the overuse of worksheets restricts opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills. Marking is used more effectively to help pupils understand what they need to do to improve, but practice varies from class to class.

Satisfactory improvements have been made to the curriculum that was inadequate at the time of previous inspection. New planning introduced in Reception classes in September 2007 places a strong emphasis on promoting children's communication, language and literacy skills, giving them greater confidence to read and write. The impact on children's progress is still to be evaluated as tracking procedures are at an early stage of development. The use of the outdoor provision has improved as it has become more structured. However, there is insufficient emphasis on the rationale behind each activity. Timetables for Years 1 to 6 show better balance and breadth and pupils in parallel classes now have equal access to provision. Pupils report that they receive a good range of lessons and that they are 'doing lots of writing', for instance in foundation subjects. Plans are in hand to revise the curriculum from September 2008.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in July 2007:

- improve teaching by assessing incisively the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding and address these gaps at a more challenging rate – satisfactory
- ensure that all pupils have equitable access to a relevant and balanced curriculum – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management have improved since the previous inspection. There is now a clear commitment to, and a coherent vision for, improvement demonstrated by senior leaders. Senior leaders are securely focused on raising pupils' achievement. They are strengthening their influence in whole school improvement. For example, they play a full part in monitoring standards in reading, evaluating teaching quality in their subjects and ensuring balance within the curriculum. The interim headteacher has worked sensitively and successfully to build leadership capacity across the school. For example, he has led training for all teachers in lesson observation skills, guided staff in the interpretation of data, and implemented more rigorous systems of accountability. As a result, leaders have a more realistic view of the quality of teaching.

The headteacher and administrators have worked diligently to tackle weaknesses in the use of financial resources. This financial year they have maintained and improved provision whilst securing savings. However, the school is without essential information to enable it to plan to balance the budget in future years.

School improvement planning is clearly focused on improving pupils' outcomes and is successfully translated into action plans that develop the roles of leaders. The challenge provided through regular review of the sharply focused plan has ensured that a realistic view of progress is maintained. The number of initiatives has been appropriately limited and well focused, appropriately resourced and regularly monitored. The action plan, however, is not sharp enough in establishing success criteria. In part this is due to the earlier lack of accurate assessment data. It is also because the local authority has not yet provided an overarching long term strategic framework to work within.

Governors display a good understanding of the current position of the school. They are receiving the information they need to hold the school to account. The appointment of new governors to supplement the commitment and expertise of some longer serving governors has yet to happen and consequently the governing body has not yet secured its ability to challenge, as well as support the school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in July 2007:

- as a matter of urgency, build the capacity of leaders at all levels so that they are able to focus relentlessly on remedying the school's weaknesses, and can evaluate the impact of their work – satisfactory
- devise and implement a financial recovery plan – inadequate.

External support

Support from the local authority's advisers and consultants is good at a school level and welcomed by the school. However, the local authority has no effective and overarching strategic plan, which is known and understood by the school, to inform improvement in a systematic way. This means that the school's action planning is not well supported by quantifiable success criteria and key milestones for judging progress in raising standards and improving teaching. The core group, led by the local authority, monitors short term goals but its effectiveness is limited in the absence of a good quality strategic plan to show how the local authority's plan links to the governing body's action plan. The work of the school improvement adviser, an experienced headteacher, has proved invaluable in building the confidence of senior leaders at the school in evaluating and monitoring school performance. She has provided professional challenge and consistency to the interim headteacher and leaders and ensured a rapid response to the key areas of weakness. Training by a team of consultants in literacy, numeracy and teaching in the early years has been effective in building capacity to sustain progress. Governors have received potentially useful training in establishing clear roles and responsibilities but have lacked support in seeing these through or in building capacity across the whole governing body, for example the provision of additional experienced governors who would contribute astutely to the improvement debate.

Priorities for further improvement

In addition to continuing to tackling the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in July 2007, the school should:

- with the support of the local authority, devise and implement a financial recovery plan.

The local authority should:

- produce a satisfactory statement of action and submit it to Ofsted.