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Ms Sally-Anne Crowther
Headteacher
Thameside Primary School
Cotman Close
Abingdon
OX14 5NL

Dear Ms Crowther

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Thameside Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 26 and 27 March 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in January 2008. 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 not be appointed, with the exception of the temporary dispensation granted to help overcome short-term staffing difficulties in the Year 4/5 class.

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 Principal Administrative Officer for Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Mike Thompson
Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Thameside Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 March 2009

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work; scrutinised documents; and met with the headteacher, members of staff with leadership responsibilities, the chair of governors, a group of pupils and the chair of the local authority's task group. The inspector observed teaching and learning in all classes and looked through samples of pupils' work, teachers' planning, monitoring records and tracking data.

Context

For the third successive term, there continue to be changes in the organisation of classes and teaching personnel. There are still five classes but, because of a larger than expected number of January admissions to the Early Years Foundation Stage, it has been necessary to move some of the older and most mature reception-age children (Foundation 1) from the Early Years class into the Year 1 class. The mixed-age groupings in the other three classes, for Years 2/3, 4/5 and 5/6, remain unaltered. The secondment of the part-time consultant headteacher ended in December. To some extent, her role in supporting the headteacher is now undertaken by a temporary senior teacher, who is not class-based and is employed for two days per week. The school has experienced great difficulty in arranging cover for the maternity leave of its Year 4/5 class teacher. To help ensure continuity of teaching in this class, permission has been given for the school to employ a newly qualified teacher on a temporary contract for the summer term. At the time of the monitoring inspection, the class was being taught by supply teachers to cover for the illness of the class teacher.

Achievement and standards

The weaknesses in pupils' knowledge of letter sounds, sentence construction and grammar, noted at the time of the last monitoring visit, are being steadily addressed. The clear modelling of good spoken language by teachers is more evident, though this is not always the case with teaching assistants. Initiatives, such as the school's Rainbow Writer award, designed to celebrate pupils' successes as writers, are beginning to have an impact. Increasingly, pupils are showing pride in their written work. However, the senior leaders acknowledge that the school has a long way to go before handwriting and presentation are of a uniformly acceptable standard. The recent clear focus on improving the teachers' expertise in assessing pupils' writing and giving pupils very clear targets to achieve is having a beneficial effect in all classes in Key Stages 1 and 2. Since the last monitoring inspection, pupils have made at least satisfactory progress in writing in all year groups. The improved quality of writing lessons was commented on by pupils who judged them to be 'much more exciting'. In mathematics, there is progress but it is not as well embedded as it is for English. Pupils are becoming more familiar with mathematical



operations such as multiplication. However, there is no corresponding improvement in their ability to do calculations accurately. This is because teachers lack expertise in assessing pupils' skills in calculation, and have yet to drive improvement in the same way as in writing, by setting pupils clear targets for improvement based on secure assessment.

Data relating to pupils' attainment and progress show that there is considerable inconsistency in the rates of progress between classes and between different subjects within the same class. These inconsistencies are largely explained by variations in teachers' subject knowledge and the continued adverse impact of staffing difficulties. Standards in Year 6 remain a concern because the overall progress made by pupils is not rapid enough to significantly erode the backlog of underachievement from previous years. Current data, confirmed by observations and scrutiny of pupils' work, show that attainment remains very low. Attainment in Year 5 is also a cause for concern. In comparison with their peers nationally, these pupils are working at levels that are well below those expected at their age. In Year 4, attainment is slightly better but is, nonetheless, below average. However, in Years 1 to 3 pupils' attainment has improved and is broadly average.

Teachers' marking of their pupils' work continues to improve and is contributing to the pupils' satisfactory progress in learning. The 'Tickle Pink and Green to Grow' marking system is better embedded and the developmental comments, made in green, provide useful pointers for pupils. Teachers are now making better use of corrections as a tool for improvement.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards and improve progress in English and mathematics in Years 1 to 6 by identifying precisely what pupils need to achieve to advance to the next stage of learning – satisfactory

Quality of provision

The impact of work by senior leaders to improve teachers' use of a range of teaching techniques is increasingly evident in lessons. For example, teachers are better at developing pupils' skills as independent learners and routinely make use of feedback from their pupils when determining how well they have understood what has been taught. In writing, teachers are more skilled in assessing their pupils' day-to-day learning and less reliant on data from periodic testing when planning their lessons. The display of the targets to be achieved in writing helps pupils to focus on what they need to do next to improve their work. Where the teaching of writing is most effective, the criteria for successfully achieving each lesson's learning objectives are clearly linked to the pupils' overall writing targets. This practice needs to be the model for improvement in mathematics.

In the lessons observed during the monitoring inspection, teachers were generally good at presenting their pupils with achievable challenges. However, data about pupils' progress show that this is not always the case. Sometimes, the challenge



provided for the more able pupils is inadequate because they are required to complete mundane tasks before moving on to activities more suited to their abilities. In subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics, there is little use of assessment to inform lesson planning. In science, for example, pupils' achievement is not systematically assessed. The consequence is seen in the work in pupils' books, which show that the tasks set for the pupils are often the same, irrespective of their ability. The more able pupils, in particular, are not challenged by this method of working.

The system used for carrying out day-to-day assessments in the Early Years class continues to be a good model for the other key stages because of the way in which information is gathered and collated. These assessments capture a picture of each activity well through notes of what the children say and do. However, they are not as effective in providing a clear evaluation of precisely how well the children achieve their tasks. The provision in the Early Years class is also effective in promoting children's independence in learning. However, the Early Years Foundation Stage children in the new Foundation 1/Year 1 class do not have easy access to the rich variety of activities that are routinely available in the Early Years class. This means that these children do not make as much progress in becoming independent learners. In Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils enjoy the homework that is now regularly set for them and which further helps promote independence. Overall, there is little evidence of the 'learned helplessness' of pupils that previously characterised the school. There is increased evidence of pupils developing the skills required to plan their work and choosing the ways in which they record their answers, and there are more opportunities provided for them to tackle investigations in mathematics successfully. However, in science, pupils need to have more opportunities to develop independence in constructing hypotheses, planning investigations and working out how best to record their results.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- use day-to-day assessment to set tasks that engage pupils and are well matched to their needs and capabilities – satisfactory
- provide pupils with the skills and opportunities to become independent learners – good

Leadership and management

The school has yet to develop the capacity to sustain improvement through its own resources. The middle managers are improving their effectiveness by developing their skills in analysing and evaluating data about pupils' attainment and progress. Currently, the action plans devised by these managers are not fully informed through detailed and rigorous analysis of the progress made by the different groups of pupils that characterise the school. The senior leadership team continues to focus strongly on raising standards and aims to provide consistently good or better teaching. It is making steady inroads towards achieving this aim, despite continued disruption to the continuity of pupils' education through staffing changes. Where the school's monitoring has identified areas for improvement, well-targeted support is

provided for the teachers concerned. This support is generally provided by the temporary part-time senior leader, who also has advanced skills status as a teacher. So far, there has been some improvement in teaching overall, which has been most evident in Years 2 and 3. Efforts to improve the quality of teaching in Years 4, 5 and 6 have met with mixed success because of the changes in staffing and the inconsistent response of teachers to initiatives. The work of the senior leadership team is beginning to have a marked difference on pupils' attitudes towards school by engendering in them a sense of pride in their work. This is helping to provide a secure platform for future improvement. For example, the Achievement Assembly observed gave very clear messages to pupils and their parents about the value of the work ethic. This was emphasised through the presentation of the Miles of Smiles certificates and the congratulations given to those pupils who had joined the Wall of Winners. Governance has improved. Governors are now better informed and more active in monitoring the effectiveness of the school. However, there are still a number of vacancies on the governing body, and responsibilities are not shared widely enough.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- build the capacity of leaders to evaluate accurately the work of the school and to pursue improvement rigorously – satisfactory

External support

The local authority is providing satisfactory support for the school and governing body. The authority is closely monitoring the progress made by the school and is contributing to its improvement through the support given by consultants. This support is helping to improve teachers' subject knowledge and is contributing towards the development of the role of middle managers.

