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Mrs L Harrison
The Interim Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Harrison

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Broadlands Primary School

Following my visit with Peter Kemble, Additional Inspector, to your school on 24 and 25 March 2009, 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 October 2008. 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 be appointed to the Early Years Foundation Stage only.

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's Services for Herefordshire.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Additional Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Broadlands Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, staff, a group of pupils, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority who is also the School Improvement Partner.

Context

Following the last inspection, the substantive headteacher resigned. The school was led by its deputy headteacher until January, when a headteacher from a successful school in the county was appointed to lead the school for a term on an interim basis. A new substantive headteacher has been appointed to lead the school from the start of the summer term. The school has been tackling a growing budget deficit through a process of staff redundancy.

Achievement and standards

While standards are broadly average at the end of Key Stage 1, they remain low by the end of Key Stage 2. In writing, there are still significant weaknesses in pupils' fluency and their accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar across Years 4, 5 and 6. However, pupils' books confirm the school's view that there has been some improvement in writing standards since the last inspection as result of actions taken to raise the quality of learning. Pupils enjoy their writing when it is set in interesting contexts and stimulating themes. In the top set in Year 6, for example, pupils used a rich variety of adjectives and similes to describe characters in a book and those from their own imaginations. Pupils respond well where teachers set out clear success criteria to improve the technical accuracy of pupils' writing. In mathematics, by Year 6, pupils have significant weaknesses in their recall of number facts and number bonds which impair their ability to solve problems they are set in class. The school acknowledges that there are important gaps in pupils' learning in mathematics by Year 6 and is not anticipating an improvement in national test results this year. A similar picture prevails in science, which has yet to be a focus for improvement in the school and where weaknesses remain in pupils' skills of scientific enquiry and their application of scientific skills and methods. Overall, improvements in standards and pupils' progress have yet to be sufficiently widespread and consistent.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards and increase rates of progress for all pupils, particularly in writing in Key Stage 2 – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Around the school, pupils are well behaved, courteous and friendly. The vast majority enjoy their learning and are happy to contribute to whole class discussions. Pupils are treated in a mature and respectful way by all staff and this is evident in the classrooms where relationships are good. Some pupils, however, become inattentive and lose concentration when tasks are too difficult or too easy or when the pace of lessons is slow.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection. One pupil commented, 'Lessons are much more interesting and much more fun than they used to be.' The information that some teachers gather about pupils' achievements is beginning to be used more effectively to plan the next steps in pupils' learning. Where this is done well pupils receive good levels of challenge and make good progress in their learning. However, the use of targets to set out clear expectations for pupils about the levels of attainment they should be reaching is not well established. Marking was previously reported to be inconsistent, but is now much more effective. Work is regularly marked, with most teachers writing developmental comments that help pupils see how their work could be improved. Pupils report that their teachers help them to make their work better. Expectations of what pupils can achieve in writing are now higher because teachers are sharing success criteria with pupils and giving clear guidance on how to meet these. Resources, such as interactive whiteboards, digital cameras and mathematical equipment are used more effectively and benefit the many pupils who respond particularly well to practical activities.

However, there are still inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, and there is still not enough good teaching to improve pupils' progress significantly. Less than half of lessons seen by inspectors were judged to be good or better, and a small minority of lessons were inadequate. Lack of sufficient pace and challenge in lessons are the key factors which prevent more teaching and learning from being good. In many lessons, too much time is spent in long introductions to topics or tasks by the teacher. There are still too many instances where work is pitched at the same level of difficulty for all pupils. When the work is too hard or too easy or moves at a slow pace, some pupils become restless and disturb the learning of others in the class.

The curriculum has adequate breadth in the range of subjects covered and in the provision of a very good number of extra-curricular activities which are very much appreciated and enjoyed by pupils. There is, however, a curriculum imbalance in the large amounts of the timetable allocated to physical education, often in very long sessions. There is now a more coherent approach to the planning of literacy, and literacy provision is developing satisfactorily. There are many effective schemes in

place to promote reading and there are signs that writing standards are beginning to improve.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is consistently good and better, making sure that assessments are accurate and that pupils' work is always matched well to their differing learning needs – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The interim headteacher has done much to improve communication through the school and to lift the morale of staff. As a consequence, staff are very receptive to ideas about how provision in their classes and in the whole school can be improved. This is evident in the satisfactory improvement in teaching since the last inspection. Teachers have been able to see good practice in other schools and readily share their findings with their colleagues. The leadership team as a whole is developing its capacity to evaluate the school's work and drive improvement through monitoring of lessons and the scrutiny of pupils' books. Such activities have led to a list of 'non-negotiables' being set out as a set of minimum expectations to guide teachers' practice in literacy. These heightened expectations are yielding improvements in writing standards.

However, the impact of the actions taken to improve provision cannot be evaluated adequately by the school because there is no system in place to measure improvements in pupils' rates of progress. Leaders and managers at all levels have no clear grasp of the targets pupils should be reaching in their subjects, or how well pupils' actual performance is measuring up to those targets. This makes it impossible for leaders to judge the effectiveness of actions taken, and to intervene swiftly where performance is falling short of expectation. The school has been concerned about the inaccuracy of teachers' assessments in the past, which threw into doubt the effectiveness of previous schemes to track pupils' progress. It has therefore been working appropriately to improve teachers' assessment by engaging in the national Assessing Pupils' Progress scheme. The school now urgently needs to reintroduce robust pupil tracking as a means of providing leaders at all levels with clear management information and a means of informing and evaluating their actions and interventions. The governing body in particular, which has established an effective system to monitor progress against the school action plan through its Children's Committee, needs clear information about the school's success in raising standards and improving pupils' progress. The action plan which the school is following to bring about improvements lacks a clear timeline to set out priorities for action, milestones against which to measure progress, and sharp deadlines to keep the school on track. This term in particular, focus on action plan priorities has been diverted as leaders have been forced to deal urgently with the deepening budget deficit through a programme of staff redundancy.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of leadership and management at all levels, establishing a greater sense of urgency and ensuring that actions are evaluated rigorously against pupils' rates of progress and the standards they achieve – inadequate.

External support

The impact of support provided through the local authority has been variable. The School Improvement Partner, appointed to the school shortly before the last inspection, was very quick and accurate in identifying the school's problems and has been very active in working with the school to address these. The appointment of an interim headteacher from a successful school in the local authority gave the school stable leadership and lifted the confidence of staff at a crucial time. The work of the literacy consultant has been effective in improving standards and the quality of provision in writing. Less effective, however, have been procedures to ensure that support is well coordinated and flexible enough to respond to the school's changing needs. There is no clear timescale to map out the sequence of the deployment of local authority support. The Project Team, established to bring together key local authority representatives and consultants with school leaders and governors to monitor progress and review support, has yet to meet.

Priorities for further improvement

- Urgently implement a system which gives all stakeholders a clear indication of pupils' progress against well-founded targets in English, mathematics and science.
- Establish a clear timeline for the actions required to meet the objectives in the school action plan.