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Mrs Gill Gillett
Southmead School
Wrafton Road
Braunton
Devon
EX33 2BU

Dear Mrs Gillett,

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Southmead School

Following my visit with Charlotte Roberson and Paul Rushforth, additional inspectors, to your school on 9 and 10 December 2009, 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 June 2009. 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, the Director of Children's Services for Devon and the additional inspectors.

Yours sincerely,

David Edwards
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Southmead School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 9 and 10 December 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met the headteacher, senior leaders, and pupils, individually and in groups, teaching assistants, vice chair and the chair of the governing body.

Context

The local authority has recently appointed an additional governor to support the governing body in fulfilling its statutory duties. Currently two members of the teaching staff are on long-term absence.

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

Standards achieved by pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 were lower in 2009 than in the previous year in English and mathematics. Although systems have been established to track pupils' progress, data are not being used swiftly enough to inform teachers' planning. Initial indications from the school's tracking data suggest some pupils in Key Stage 2 are not making fast enough progress in English and mathematics. Lesson observations indicate that teaching is improving and lessons are becoming more interesting and enjoyable for pupils. In lessons where pupils' learning needs are accurately provided for, pupils make good progress. However, some inadequate teaching remains and in those lessons pupils do not make the progress expected in their learning.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making faster progress because the teacher has a better awareness of children's differing abilities and learning needs and makes accurate use of assessment to guide children's next steps in learning. As a result, children's attainment is rising quickly as they make rapid progress in all six areas of learning.

Progress since the last inspection:

- Improve pupils' achievement and raise standards in English, mathematics and science by:
 - establishing robust processes to check the ongoing progress of individuals and groups of pupils and use information gathered to set challenging performance targets – inadequate.



Other relevant pupil outcomes

- Pupils say they feel safe and are happy in school. Pupils new to the school say they get a warm welcome and settle quickly. They are aware that the school is improving and particularly appreciate the improvements in resources at playtimes. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. A series of assemblies to promote good behaviour has been well received, and pupils say they all get on well with one another and their teachers. Attendance is satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

The majority of lessons seen were satisfactory and some were good. However, some inadequate teaching remains in the core subjects. Pupils settle quickly to their work and display positive attitudes to learning. Occasional lapses in concentration are as a result of unimaginative teaching that does not challenge or meet the learning needs of pupils. In the best lessons, pupils display a real sense of enjoyment in learning. They are aware of their targets which help them to focus on how to improve their work.

Planning is detailed but not consistent throughout the school; neither does it identify clearly how work will be matched to individual pupils or groups. The pace of learning in too many lessons is slow and, as a result, pupils lose focus. When explanations are clear and expectations are high, pupils make better progress in their learning. Teaching assistants work closely with teachers and provide good support to pupils. There is an effective system in place for teaching assistants to record pupils' progress and report back to teachers.

While there were no particular issues relating to the Early Years Foundation Stage at the previous inspection, provision continues to improve. Assessment information is used with precision to plan what the focus of learning activities will be. There are good opportunities for children to make choices about what they do, which promotes their independent learning well.

Progress since the last inspection:

- Ensure that targets and the assessment of pupils' progress are used to inform teaching so that it is well matched to the needs of all pupils – satisfactory.
- Improve the quality of lessons to provide stimulating activities that engage and challenge all pupils and ensure that time is used effectively both in whole-class and small groups sessions – satisfactory.



The effectiveness of leadership and management

The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is effective and has established a secure process for self-evaluation; as a result, the quality of learning has improved. Systems to monitor pupils' progress have been established throughout other key stages but are complicated and time consuming to administer. Consequently, leaders have been slow to analyse assessments and implement actions to improve teaching and learning. Subject leaders have received good support and training to improve the quality of provision. Intervention strategies for those pupils identified as requiring additional support are well led and managed. However, leaders have yet to make effective use of assessment information to shape the curriculum and meet the precise learning needs of all groups of learners. As a result, opportunities to accelerate learning are being missed and pupils' progress is being held back.

The governing body has undertaken training to strengthen its role in providing the necessary support and challenge to the school. School leaders provide accurate and timely information which is helping governors gain a better understanding of the progress pupils are making and the challenges facing the school. However, continuing communication difficulties between some governors means the governing body is not effective in holding the school to account, nor is it providing the strategic direction necessary to ensure rapid and sustained improvements.

Progress since the last inspection:

- Improve the effectiveness of leaders at all levels by:
 - developing more rigorous procedures and processes for self-evaluation, particularly focusing on pupils' performance – satisfactory.
 - ensuring that all subject leaders, especially for English and mathematics, have the support, skills and opportunities to monitor and improve the quality of learning – satisfactory.
 - ensuring that governors are kept well informed, enabling them to provide effective support and challenge to the school and fulfil their statutory duties – inadequate.

External support

Actions taken by Devon Local Authority in response to the school requiring special measures have been swift and appropriate. The resulting Targeted Intervention and Support Programme (TISP) is appropriately focused on challenging the leadership of the school and providing additional support. This support was particularly valuable in the weeks immediately following the previous inspection. The Local Authority has provided regular and accurate assessments of the school's progress and suggested useful actions for improvement through visit notes.



Priorities for further improvement

- Streamline assessment procedures to better inform planning and provision.

