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Mrs Gill Gillett
Southmead School
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Braunton
Devon
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Dear Mrs Gillett,

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Southmead School

Following my visit with Jo Pike, additional inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 March 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may 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 and the Director of Children's Services for Devon and the additional inspector.

Yours sincerely,

David Edwards
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Southmead School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 March 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, and pupils, individually and in groups, teaching assistants and representatives from the governing body. Her Majesty's Inspector also held a telephone conversation with a local authority representative.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, one member of staff has left the school and the deputy headteacher is currently absent because of ill health. A new chair and vice chair of the governing body have recently been elected. Further, one additional governor has been appointed by the local authority.

Achievement and standards

More pupils are now making expected progress, although attainment remains below average. This is because teachers are routinely tracking pupils' progress at the end of lessons and adjusting their plans accordingly. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson, for example, pupils made good progress in understanding prime factors because the teacher pitched the learning accurately. However, some teachers are still not monitoring pupils' learning closely enough during lessons. As a result, they miss opportunities to correct pupils' misconceptions or provide more challenge to those who need it. Data taken from tracking pupils' progress are now acted upon more swiftly to inform planning and intervention programmes to support those pupils who need additional help.

Progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage remains a strength within the school. This is because leaders use thorough assessment procedures to quickly get to know children and their learning needs and to plan their next steps in learning.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- 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 – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils are articulate and polite to each other, staff and visitors. They are proud of their school and their achievements. Their attitudes to their learning are keen and positive. Behaviour is routinely good in and around the school. They are appreciative

of the efforts teachers have gone to in making lessons more lively and which engage their interests.

Pupils' overall attendance remains below the national average. However, the school does all it can to encourage regular attendance and is working closely with support agencies to improve this.

Quality of provision

The majority of teaching seen was satisfactory and similar to the previous visit. There is still not enough consistently good teaching to accelerate pupils' progress. Where good teaching was seen, teachers gave clear explanations and took time to demonstrate exactly what pupils needed to do. This led to pupils confidently grasping new ideas and making good progress. More opportunities now exist for children to explain their thinking to each other through talking with partners, which keeps them actively learning and on task.

Where teaching was less successful, pupils remained passive for too long and their learning was not monitored closely enough by teachers to provide appropriate support or challenge.

Teaching assistants have a positive impact on pupils' learning through the targeted support they provide during intervention sessions. They are careful to record pupils' progress following lessons. However, teaching assistants are not always used to best effect. For example, they are not always sufficiently well briefed to manage the learning of children in their focus groups, and some lack secure subject knowledge.

Curriculum provision continues to strengthen, helped by the support provided by an external specialist. Consequently, planning is more focused on the learning needs and interests of pupils. However, some teachers still lack confidence in teaching. This is seen through an absence of rigour in lessons, not being flexible in addressing the learning needs of pupils, and a failure to consolidate pupils' learning effectively before moving on to new topics.

Changes within the EYFS have been managed most effectively and provision continues to be strong. For example, parents and children are greatly enthused by the current 'Space' project which included an 'unforgettable' star-gazing evening recently. Children continue to benefit from the good opportunities to choose their own activities as well as more focused work with an adult.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- 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.

- 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-group sessions – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Middle leaders are now playing a more significant role in monitoring pupils' progress and in improving provision within their subjects. This is because their confidence has improved and systems to gather pupil data are now streamlined. The Early Years Foundation Stage is secure and embedded in best practice.

Further changes to the structure of the governing body have resulted in a clearer understanding of what needs to be done to bring about more rapid improvement. Governors are now beginning to ask more probing questions of the leaders, which is helping them to support and challenge the school more effectively.

The improvements that have already been identified have largely come about because of the headteacher's tenacity and resilience for driving improvements forward despite some considerable recent setbacks. She has successfully managed to develop the confidence in middle leaders, simplify the assessment procedures and maintain the high morale of her staff. As a result, she is developing a highly motivated team of professionals who are beginning to rise to the challenges facing the school. However, the headteacher has yet to secure a corporate sense of urgency and establish systems that will allow her to step back from everyday matters and take a more strategic role within the school.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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

External support

External support continues to be helpful, timely and succinct. In particular the local authority has provided leaders with good support in planning the curriculum and has suggested appropriate actions for improvement through visit notes.