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10 February 2010

Mrs Julia Hamper
Headteacher
Ducklington CE VC Primary School
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Dear Mrs Hamper

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Ducklington CE VC
Primary School

Following my visit with Susan Thomas-Pounce, additional inspector, to your school on 2 and 3 February 2010, 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 September 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures has been 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, Oxford Diocese, the Chair of Governors and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Chris Nye
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Ducklington CE VC Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 February 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including 17 lessons or part lessons, scrutinised documents and pupils' work and met with the headteacher, the chair of governors, local authority representatives, staff and pupils.

Context

Since the school was placed into special measures, it has made some changes to staff deployment to make better use of individual strengths. The school development plan has been re-written so that it reflects the key issues for improvement raised in the inspection report. Security fencing has been erected around the site. There are no plans to close or amalgamate the school. Staffing and pupil numbers have remained stable.

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

Overall, satisfactory progress has been made in improving pupils' achievement. Although it is too soon to judge the outcome of the school's recently introduced strategies to raise standards and increase rates of progress, early indications are promising. This is more evident in Key Stage 1, where the school's own assessment data, confirmed by inspection evidence, indicate an improvement in pupils' progress and standards of writing and mathematics. In Key Stage 2 the impact of the school's work to raise standards is less evident in writing, although in Years 5 and 6, standards in mathematics are improving because of well-conceived strategies such as setting, which enables teaching to more accurately match pupils' needs. Standards in reading remain good throughout the school. Pupils say that they enjoy their lessons and observations carried out during the inspection confirm that teaching is more responsive to the outcomes of ongoing assessment. As a result, pupils, such as those who are more able, are being suitably challenged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are having their needs met more consistently.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils behave well around school and in class. They say that they feel safe and have a sound awareness of how to keep safe and healthy. They make a positive contribution to the wider community. Satisfactory progress has been made in developing pupils' workplace skills such as literacy and numeracy, and their speaking and listening skills are good. Attendance remains good.

The effectiveness of provision

Although there has not been sufficient time to evaluate their full impact, a number of well-planned strategies have been introduced to improve the quality of teaching throughout the school. Lessons are better planned to meet a range of needs. For example, learning objectives and tasks are now accurately differentiated to meet wide-ranging abilities, and this was a consistent feature of lessons observed during the inspection. In some lessons, however, the learning objectives were not written in age-appropriate language that all pupils can understand and the pace of learning was slower as a result. Although further training for teaching assistants is planned, they are already being used more effectively to support learning. For example, the introduction of feedback forms has meant that they are making a more consistent contribution to planning lessons. This has improved continuity and helps to ensure that the ongoing needs of pupils, particularly those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are suitably met from one lesson to the next. The best teaching seen during the inspection was characterised by effective questioning which accurately evaluated pupils' understanding and resulted in more flexible and focused teaching.

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, while now adequate, is improving at a slower rate. The school is aware of the need to improve this further, but plans to achieve this are at an early stage and have not yet had sufficient time to show impact.

There has been an improvement in the quality of feedback and guidance given to pupils about their work and how it can be improved. Pupils are aware of their targets and well-conceived strategies such as marking ladders and the use of self-assessment traffic lights mean that pupils are becoming more involved in evaluating their understanding and assessing their own progress against national curriculum levels. Teachers' written comments are detailed and evaluative, although sometimes they are not written in language easily understood by pupils. Written comments are more detailed in English and mathematics than in science, where there is less evidence of evaluative feedback to pupils. The school recognises the needs for higher expectations concerning the quality of presentation in exercise books.

Satisfactory progress has been made in ensuring that the curriculum promotes effective progress. With the support of the local authority, plans for a more structured curriculum which builds on prior learning and provides clear links between subjects are in the process of being developed. Potentially good quality support has been put in place to address weaker areas, such as planning improvements in the quality of pupils' writing, although it is too soon yet to judge the impact of this. There has been an increase in opportunities for pupils to develop writing and mathematical skills in different subjects.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensure teaching meets all pupils' needs so that their progress is accelerated and their achievement raised, particularly in mathematics and writing – satisfactory

- ensure that the curriculum promotes effective progress – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school has developed a rigorous cycle of monitoring which is starting to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. This is helping curriculum coordinators to become better informed about their subjects and their confidence has improved accordingly. They have a clearer understanding of their role, although the school recognises the need to clarify this in their job descriptions. The headteacher, governors and senior staff have been proactive in undertaking a rigorous evaluation of how the school will improve and the resulting school development plan is of good quality. This demonstrates that the school is now taking swift and appropriate action for improvement; there is convincing evidence that the headteacher, ably supported by senior staff and governors, is effectively leading the school in a determined drive to address the issues identified in the last inspection. Although it is early in the process, so that it is too soon to be able to judge the effectiveness of leadership and management in driving up improvement as being better than satisfactory, there are 'green shoots' which suggest encouraging signs of a whole-school commitment to improve.

The last inspection asked the school to ensure that statutory requirements for safeguarding were met by December 2009. Staff and governors have now received appropriate child protection training and site security has been improved. All requirements are now satisfactorily met, although the school recognises that the safeguarding policy, although compliant, needs minor changes to improve clarity.

Progress since the last inspection on areas for improvement:

- drive improvement and embed ambition by rigorously evaluating the impact of provision and ensuring that leaders are effective – satisfactory
- ensure the statutory requirements for safeguarding are met by December 2009 – satisfactory.

External support

Although the local authority's statement of action appropriately addresses the areas for improvement identified in the report, not all target dates and milestones are yet made sufficiently clear. It is too soon to judge the full extent of the effectiveness of local authority support, but there is early evidence that the school is deriving considerable benefit from the work of local authority staff such as the school improvement adviser. This is because support is measured, practical and relevant to the needs of teachers and senior staff.

Priorities for further improvement

- make certain that the recently introduced strategies to ensure that teaching is meeting all the pupils' needs is having a positive and measurable impact on progress and achievement, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in writing and mathematics throughout the school
- ensure that the emerging curriculum plans are well embedded and are effectively promoting pupils' progress
- check the maintenance of safeguarding systems to ensure continued compliance with requirements.