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4 February 2011

Mrs Caroline Holcombe  
The Acting Headteacher  
Offa's Mead Primary School  
Beachley Road  
Sedbury  
Chepstow  
Gloucestershire  
NP16 7DT

Dear Mrs Holcombe

### **Special measures: monitoring inspection of Offa's Mead Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 1 and 2 March 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2009. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. 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.

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 the interim executive board and the Director of Children's Services for Gloucestershire.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2009:**

- Raise standards and accelerate pupils' progress, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and ensure teachers use assessments effectively to match tasks more accurately to pupils' needs.
- Improve the quality of target setting and marking so that pupils know their targets and understand more clearly the next steps in their learning.
- Ensure school leaders use the outcomes of self-evaluation more rigorously to identify weaknesses and implement measures tenaciously to secure improvements.

### **Additional areas for improvement from the first monitoring visit:**

- Implement a training programme for senior and middle leaders to improve their monitoring role and ensure all staff are clear about what they need to do to raise standards and achievement.
- Ensure more opportunities are created to develop pupils' basic skills, particularly in literacy, across the curriculum.

## **Special measures: monitoring of Offa's Mead Primary School**

### **Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 March 2011**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, acting deputy headteacher, senior teacher, class teachers, a group of parents, representatives from the interim executive board and the Challenge and Development Adviser from the local authority.

#### **Context**

Since the last monitoring visit, a new consultant headteacher has supported the school and one new teacher has joined Key Stage 1. The interim executive board and local authority are continuing to consider options for the longer-term leadership of the school.

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

Since the last monitoring visit, the school's work has rightly been on improving pupils' writing and this was the main focus of this monitoring inspection. The school now has the feel of a school where writing is important and valued. Pupils' writing from Reception to Year 6 is on display throughout the school and good writing is celebrated in various ways, including newsletters, a special folder at the school's entrance and assemblies. Parents are pleased about the extra attention to writing and the more regular homework in both English and mathematics. They are now better informed about the progress their children are making, the levels they have reached and where the teachers want them to be by the end of the year.

The pupils also recognise that they are becoming better writers. In Year 6, for example, four were proud to read some well-written excerpts from recent work that they felt they would not have been able to write a few months ago. This is because daily writing sessions have been introduced in all classes to improve writing skills. Teachers have also benefited from support from visiting consultants, to broaden ways of approaching and stimulating pupils' writing.

These amendments in the school's provision are beginning to have an impact on pupils' achievement in writing. The school's tests and assessments indicate almost all pupils have made progress during the autumn and many have moved on considerably during this time. On this basis, attainment is predicted to rise this year and the school expects more pupils to reach the expected level at Year 6. However, despite their better progress, there is still further to go before the majority of pupils in other year groups are working at the expected standards. Many pupils still have weaknesses in basic writing skills, such as spelling, structuring sentences and

handwriting, and their recent improved progress has to be sustained in order to address the legacy of underachievement stemming from past years.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards and accelerate pupils' progress, particularly in writing and mathematics – satisfactory.

### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

Pupils continue to show positive attitudes to school life, and behaviour in lessons and around the school was good during the monitoring visit. Parents report their children enjoy school. Attendance is showing some signs of improvement. Pupils are encouraged to come to school regularly and are rewarded for doing so through certificates, for example. This has led to increasing numbers of pupils with 100% attendance. The Learning Zone provides a calm environment for pupils who require additional support and continues to benefit pupils' social and emotional development. A few pupils continue to present challenges in terms of their behaviour and some temporary exclusions have been necessary since the last visit.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

Teaching is continuing to improve and, once more, no inadequate teaching was seen on this visit. This is an important factor in pupils' improving learning and progress. Teachers' planning has become more consistent and all teachers are now providing more detail as to what they expect from the different ability groups in their class. All classrooms have displays which provide ideas and prompts to help pupils with their writing as well as displays of their work. Marking is now more consistent and helpful for pupils. The pupils particularly like having a list in the front of their writing and mathematics books to show them how well they are doing in relation to the National Curriculum levels and what they need to concentrate on next. In all classes, pupils were clear what was being expected of them. They are becoming increasingly involved in checking their own learning during lessons and, on occasions, reviewing how well other pupils have done.

All teachers have used information from assessments to draw up a list of pupils who they need to target, but it is generally not clear in the teachers' plans how these pupils will be supported in lessons and what specifically will be expected of them. Teachers are not always drawing upon a range of strategies for supporting these pupils, for example through targeting their questions, working in depth with them for short periods, or indicating in their marking what they need to work on over the next few lessons. There is a tendency for lessons to follow a predictable format, with a whole class introduction, independent work and then a period when pupils are gathered together at the end. Teachers are not necessarily using their or the teaching assistants' time flexibly and creatively to provide varied learning opportunities, based on what is best for individuals or groups.

The work of teaching assistants is starting to improve and become more consistent. Some provide very good support for pupils and have a clear impact on their learning. On occasions, teaching assistants do not work as effectively. They sit with groups of pupils and encourage them to work but miss opportunities to reinforce the main points, for example, or ask pupils relevant questions aligned to the teachers' expectations for the lesson.

The school's focus on writing has led to increased opportunities for pupils to write through subjects other than English and this is becoming a more integral part of the teachers' plans. Examples of writing were seen relating to science, history and information and communication technology. There are fewer examples of developing mathematics skills through other subjects but, while writing has been the main priority for the school since the last visit, this is entirely appropriate.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning and ensure teachers use assessments effectively to match tasks more accurately to pupils' needs – satisfactory
- improve the quality of target setting and marking so that pupils know their targets and understand more clearly the next steps in their learning – satisfactory.

Additional priority identified by HMI on the first monitoring visit:

- ensure more opportunities are created to develop pupils' basic skills, particularly in literacy, across the curriculum – satisfactory.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The acting headteacher continues to provide stability for the school and, together with support from the local authority, this is leading to greater consistency and improved teaching across the school. The inadequacies in teaching that were evident during earlier monitoring inspections have been tackled successfully and there is a sense of shared commitment to improving provision further. The acting headteacher has recently taken appropriate steps to improve the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff report that morale is good and they appreciate the good teamwork and the support they receive from one another and the senior leaders. Parents also sense this change in ethos and report that they find the staff more approachable and more accessible than in the past.

The acting deputy headteacher has worked with the consultant headteacher to improve the system for tracking pupils' progress now that more information is available from tests and teachers' assessments. This gives a clearer overview of how pupils are making progress. The writing assessments, carried out in January, show that around half of the pupils in Years 1 to 6 have already reached the target level

that was set for them at the start of the academic year. However, leaders have not yet revised these end-of-year targets to make them more challenging and to help teachers enable more pupils to reach the nationally expected levels by the end of this year. As yet, the school's leaders are not using targets to full effect to raise standards.

The senior leadership team has made a start on monitoring the performance of different groups in the school, but this is at an early stage. While the information from assessments in writing has shown clear improvements in pupils' learning and progress, not all pupils were assessed in mathematics in January. The school opted to assess only the groups of pupils who are being targeted. This means that the school does not have an overview of all pupils' progress in mathematics between September and January and is not in a position to identify any underachievement or to amend target levels where necessary.

The senior leaders have made some progress in gathering evidence on how well the school is doing. The headteacher and consultant headteacher have carried out a programme of lesson observations, for example, and the acting deputy headteacher and senior teacher have started to monitor teachers' plans and to observe lessons. However, the leaders' monitoring and evaluation are not yet sufficiently rigorous or focused. The use of monitoring and evaluation to analyse what is working well, and why, and to determine where any specific weaknesses lie is still at a relatively early stage of development. Prior to this visit, for example, no evaluation had been carried out to find out how well the targeted pupils had made progress in writing and mathematics since September. The literacy and mathematics leaders lack experience in monitoring teaching and learning, and scrutiny of pupils' books remains underused by senior leaders as a valuable way of checking pupils' learning.

Members of the interim executive board continue to monitor the progress of the school effectively and their expertise is used well to provide appropriate challenge for the senior leadership. The school's raising attainment plan has improved since the last visit. It is more specific about the actions that are being put in place and teachers are more involved in the plan, which is a positive development. The plan is reviewed at frequent intervals by the school's leaders to check how well the actions and responsibilities are being carried out.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- ensure school leaders use the outcomes of self-evaluation more rigorously to identify weaknesses and implement measures tenaciously to secure improvements – satisfactory.

Additional priority identified by HMI on the first monitoring visit:

- implement a training programme for senior and middle leaders to improve their monitoring role and ensure all staff are clear about what they need to do to raise standards and achievement – satisfactory.

## **External support**

The local authority continues to provide a range of support for the school. This has included a new consultant headteacher and an advanced skills teacher from another school who has supported developments in writing. This support has contributed to the improvements in pupils' writing and to raising the profile of writing across the school. It has also contributed to developing more consistency in teachers' planning. There has been more limited impact in supporting the senior leadership team's ability to evaluate the school rigorously so that all leaders can identify weaknesses and the next steps that need to be taken to improve the school further.