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16 June 2011

Mrs Tracey Hannon
The Executive Headteacher
The Chestnut Centre
Magnolia Avenue
Exeter
Devon
EX2 6DJ

Dear Mrs Hannon

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Chestnut Centre

Following my visit to your school on 14 and 15 June 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2010. 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 – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Exeter.

Yours sincerely

Mike Burghart
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2010.

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring senior managers and all staff are fully trained in the Early Years Foundation Stage by December 2010
 - ensuring senior managers and all staff are sufficiently trained and able to use the school's assessment, monitoring, recording and tracking systems effectively by December 2010
 - improving systems for checking the quality of teaching and learning to ensure there is a clear identification of aspects that need to improve
 - improving systems for analysing data about children's progress to identify the areas for development for learning and ensure equality of opportunity
 - improving the effectiveness of the governing body in monitoring and challenging the school to improve.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and children's achievements by:
 - improving planning of activities to ensure provision is tailored to meet the children's interests and needs and is clear about the skills and knowledge they will gain
 - improving assessment to more accurately record the skills and knowledge children have gained.
- Ensure that the progress and achievement of all children is at least satisfactory by December 2010.
- Raise the level of teaching and learning so they are at least consistently satisfactory by October 2010.

Special measures: monitoring of The Chestnut Centre

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 14 and 15 June 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the new chair of governors and her predecessor. He spoke on the phone with a representative of the local authority and met with the acting head of teaching and learning, the head of teaching and learning elect and the advisory headteacher.

Context

There have been some notable changes since the last monitoring visit. The school has completed its federation with a local primary school, whose headteacher has now become the executive headteacher of the nursery. A temporary head of teaching and learning is responsible for the nursery's day-to-day running this term. In September, she will be replaced with a permanent appointment of a teacher who is currently leading Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the federated primary school. The nursery governing body has been disbanded and replaced with a new one common across the federation. Representatives from both previous sets of governors feature as part of the new group. The four nursery nurses (FtE 3.5), who were previously notified of redundancy, no longer work in the nursery.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning and other relevant pupil outcomes

Nursery records and direct observation during the inspection matched against national expectations indicate that most children, regardless of ability or background, continue to make good progress. Nevertheless, the progress of a small minority of children remains at best static and this is a major area for further improvement.

Records show that rates of progress are accelerating in all areas of learning but most obviously in personal, social, emotional and physical development. Developments to mark-making, judged as strength in the last visit, are now well established. Least improvement is evident in rates of progress in emergent writing and children's ability to calculate and solve simple mathematical problems. Both aspects are central to the school development plan and feature as part of staff training. Attainment is below what is expected nationally when children move on to the primary school, the most notable weaknesses continuing to be in communication, language and literacy. This is as much to do with low starting points as weaknesses in progress made and there is evidence that children's achievement is satisfactory overall. Children whose first language is not English, and those with

special educational needs and/or disabilities continue to make good progress because they are well supported.

Children continue to enjoy learning. Most are keen to talk about what they are doing and respond well to the notion of play activities being about learning. Typical of good attitudes and how children find learning fun was the squeals of delight when they discovered and captured insects and spiders. The great care they afforded minibeasts and the intensity of observation were a credit to the way the experience was orchestrated by staff. Children demonstrated a good level of independence in the ways in which they self-resourced hand lenses and collection dishes and sorted creatures by characteristics, such as number of legs and tentacles.

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

- ensure that the progress and achievement of all children is at least satisfactory – good.

The effectiveness of provision

Since the last monitoring visit, there have been a variety of changes in the teaching staff. Improvements noted at that time have been consolidated despite a reduction in the number of teaching assistants. The quality of teaching overall is consistent and continues to be supported by planning securely based on Early Years Foundation Stage practice. Good use is made of the excellent facilities and good resources to provide children with a curriculum that covers all areas of learning. Planning to ensure that afternoon children are involved in similar activities to those who attend in the morning is effective. Staff are careful to provide extension work for those children who stay all day. An area for further development is in establishing a workable system that will track children's involvement and success during each session. Currently, some children do not have full equality of opportunity and, through their own choices, have too little experience of a variety of areas of learning.

Teachers' use of questioning is good and frequently results in children's better understanding, after they have had to consider and explain their answers. Good attention to phonics (letters and sounds) gives children the tools which will underpin future reading and writing skills, particularly spelling. Rhymes and simple songs successfully encourage not only much fun but effectively reinforce numeracy and sequencing.

Staff know children well and very effectively promote personal, social and emotional development whilst taking good care of everyone. They have a secure awareness of who the potentially more able children are and challenge them accordingly. Developments in the use of assessment information, started before the last monitoring visit, have been sustained. The introduction of an electronic recording

and analysing system, although in its infancy, appears to be having positive effects on how information is collected and stored.

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

- improve the quality of teaching and learning, improving planning and making better use of assessment – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The good improvements recorded in the last monitoring visit have been built upon. The very recent changes in personnel and the leadership and management structure, and those changes which are imminent, underpin good progress in the way the nursery is run and on children's achievement. Some initiatives have yet to be fully proven and this is a time for reflection and consolidation with new leaders (staff and governors) taking stock ready for the next stage of the nursery's development. The enthusiasm of the new governing body do governors credit, but it is too soon for this commitment to have had a measurable impact on the quality of learning and children's progress. However, there is evidence of good progress in self-evaluation, rooted in much improved assessment of children's performance, enhanced insight and a common commitment to making things even better. Staff morale is much improved. Parents and carers spoken to are confident about the way the nursery is run and this goes further than appreciating that children are happy, safe and well cared for. Some comments about how well their children are learning are a good indication of improved links between home and school. They are a positive reflection on how far Chestnut has come since it was put in special measures. The school remains, as it was at the last monitoring visit, on the right lines.

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

- improve the quality of leadership and management – good.

External support

The nursery continues to benefit from the good support of the local authority. Staff training is based on expert educational and managerial advice. The intention to reduce this gradually is appropriate as the nursery becomes more established within the new federation. The commitment to preserve the support of the assigned adviser and the school's improvement adviser is a good example of the way the local authority exercises its duty of care for Chestnut.