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Mr M Harris
The Headteacher
The Pines Primary School
Hanworth Road
Bracknell
Berkshire
RG12 7WX

Dear Mr Harris

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Pines Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 3 and 4 November 2010, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is 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 be appointed, if guidance and support is provided by staff from the partner school.

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 for Children, Young People and Learning for Bracknell Forest.

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching and pupils' progress by: adopting strategies that engage pupils so that they take greater responsibility for their learning; making better use of time in lessons to increase the pace of learning; having higher expectations of pupils and ensuring that more-able pupils are consistently challenged in lessons; improving the quality of marking and increasing pupils' involvement in evaluating their own progress.
- Improve standards of boys' writing and basic skills by providing meaningful writing opportunities in all subjects.
- Increase the capacity for sustained improvement by: introducing a cycle of self-evaluation involving all, including parents; focusing planning on specific actions and measurable targets to eliminate inadequate teaching and raise pupils' achievement; checking the progress pupils make towards challenging targets more regularly so that action can be taken rapidly to eliminate potential underachievement; identifying where teachers' expertise needs improving and providing tailored professional development.

Special measures: monitoring of The Pines Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 3 and 4 November 2010

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the deputy headteachers and other members of teaching and support staff, the chair of the governing body and two representatives of the local authority. All teachers were observed jointly with the executive headteacher.

Context

The headteacher retired at the end of the summer term. The governing body is in the process of appointing a new headteacher and the school is being led in the interim by the headteacher of a successful primary school in Bracknell Forest. He spends half of his time at The Pines. One new member of teaching staff joined the school at the start of this academic year.

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

The pupils are clearly enjoying learning. In lessons pupils are interested and enthusiastic, and apply themselves well to their tasks. They are keen to talk about what they are doing and proud to show their work. This renewed enthusiasm, together with improvements in teaching, means that pupils are making at least satisfactory progress in lessons.

Last year's Year 6 made very good progress and almost all reached the level that is expected by the age of 11 in English and mathematics. Following this positive outcome, targets for the current Year 6 were revised upwards. These targets are very challenging when current levels of attainment are taken into account, and some pupils will have to make exceptional progress in order to reach them. Nevertheless, aspirations are high and urgent action is being taken to ensure that weaknesses in pupils' basic skills in English are rectified.

The school's information on pupils' attainment shows that, in many year groups, their performance in writing is further behind national expectations than in reading or mathematics. Action to enthuse boys about writing has been successful; in lessons during this inspection boys set about their writing tasks with as much enthusiasm and application as girls. This is not so much because 'boy friendly' topics are chosen, but that teachers make sure written tasks are relevant and follow stimulating input which engages everyone. For example, pupils in Year 5 were keen to write following well-led discussion of an atmospheric poem and pupils in Year 2 were captivated by the story of the Gunpowder Plot. The introduction of a new

handwriting scheme and the incentive of earning a handwriting pen have also encouraged pupils to present their work more neatly. It is as yet too soon to gauge how much these initiatives have speeded up pupils' progress in writing.

Further work has been undertaken to make sure that assessment information is accurate and provides a secure baseline from which to measure progress.

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

- improve standards of boys' writing and basic skills by providing meaningful writing opportunities in all subjects – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

As at the last monitoring inspection, pupils were well behaved and polite in lessons and around the school. They work well independently, in pairs and in small groups. Pupils have responded very positively to the recently introduced policy for encouraging best behaviour; many were keen to show how many 'smilies' they have earned this term. It was noticeable that when teachers drew attention to positive behaviour in lessons by awarding a 'smilie', the rest of the class sat up straight, and tried to earn one too.

The effectiveness of provision

There has been a clear improvement in the quality of teaching since the last monitoring inspection. There is an energy and greater sense of urgency in lessons now, which is having a positive impact on the pupils' responses and the progress they make. Teachers are regaining their confidence and self-assurance.

There is an increasing number of good features to lessons. Objectives are usually clear and focused on the intended learning. Teachers ensure that pupils think about what they have learned before, so that lessons are put into context. They also make sure that all pupils are actively involved throughout the lesson, using techniques such as talking in pairs or asking everyone to write on mini-whiteboards. They ask open-ended questions to encourage pupils to express their ideas and opinions and give explanations to others. Tasks are usually matched to the pupils' learning needs, or support is provided for certain pupils where everyone is engaged in the same work. Teaching assistants work well with specific groups of pupils, supporting their learning.

There are still some aspects of teaching that need to be worked on, but these are relatively minor. In discussions, teachers do not always follow an idea or topic through to its conclusion and divert from the main teaching point, and on occasion they do not make the most of the pupils' contributions to reinforce the learning. For example, when younger pupils were discussing the properties of two-dimensional shapes, one suggested that shapes might have two sides. The full potential of this

challenging hypothesis was not exploited. Opportunities are sometimes missed to challenge higher-attaining pupils even further. Plenary sessions at the end of lessons are not always given sufficient emphasis, which means that the evaluation of what pupils have learnt is rushed and the next steps are not clearly highlighted.

The school's marking policy has been revised and is being followed in all year groups. Pupils are given detailed feedback on pieces of work. It is too early to evaluate the impact on pupils' progress.

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

- improve teaching and pupils' progress – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive headteacher has quickly made a positive start at The Pines; the pace of change has accelerated markedly. He has brought energy and rigour and is rapidly establishing the structures, systems and climate required to underpin rapid improvement. He is rightly emphasising the need to build capacity within the school and for everyone to be accountable for pupils' learning and progress. Much has been implemented in a short time. Procedures for the performance management of teachers have been strengthened. The formal and informal monitoring of aspects of provision and pupils' outcomes is becoming a matter of routine. The findings are being used to hold staff to account but also to inform their future professional development. The executive headteacher is highly visible at the start and end of the day and is becoming well known to parents and carers. He has also made his expectations of parents quite clear. The policy for governors' involvement in school life has been revised and individual governors will be linked to year groups. Governors are starting to establish a relationship with their particular year group through regular visits. This will help them develop a good understanding of what it is like to be a pupil at The Pines. The school's staffing structure is under review and there are plans to distribute responsibilities more widely and to provide scope for all staff to develop their leadership skills.

Information about pupils' attainment and progress is gathered systematically and analyses produced. This is enabling the governing body to ask informed questions.

The governing body, the executive headteacher and the local authority understand that a smooth hand-over to a newly appointed headteacher will be critical in ensuring that the school is not knocked off course. Teachers are understandably anxious that another change of leadership might result in a change of direction. All parties are committed to ensuring that this does not happen.

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

- increase the capacity for sustained improvement – good.

External support

The local authority has provided good support to the school since the last monitoring inspection. Its actions in securing the services of the executive headteacher have led to the faster rate of progress that is now evident. Some support is rightly being scaled back so that the school can demonstrate its increasing capacity to move forward on its own. The management intervention board continues to keep a close watch on the school's progress. Its evaluations are accurate and helpful to the school.