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Mrs P Murley
The Interim Headteacher
Balksbury Junior School
Floral Way
Salisbury Road
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Hampshire
SP10 3QP

Dear Mrs Murley

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Balksbury Junior School

Following my visit with Robin Thelwell, additional inspector, to your school on 26 and 27 January 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in July 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 – satisfactory.

Additional 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 governing body and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment across the school so that a very large majority of pupils make good or better progress each academic year, through:
 - improving the quality of teaching so that 80% of it is good or better, particularly with reference to pace and challenge and providing clearer direction to pupils on how to improve their work
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to talk about, use and apply their skills, knowledge and understanding.

- Increase the effectiveness of the school's leaders and the governing body in driving school improvement by ensuring:
 - self-evaluation is more frequent, rigorous and realistic
 - the school development plan gives a clear sense of direction, identifies exactly what steps are to be taken and has identified points at which the impact can be measured
 - the governing body plays an active role in challenging the school regarding pupils' outcomes and routinely evaluates its policies; the quality of teaching is monitored more rigorously and frequently, and that staff training is targeted on the precise improvement areas.

Special measures: monitoring of Balksbury Junior School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 January 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, deputy headteacher, a group of middle managers, the school council, the chair of the governing body, a parent governor, the district manager for the local authority and the school's primary phase inspector. All teachers and thirteen lessons were observed.

Context

The former substantive headteacher left the school in the summer term 2010. The headteacher from Balksbury Infant School is currently working as the interim headteacher for the school. A working party has been formed and a consultation paper is due to be presented to the governing bodies. This is with a view of further discussions taking place with stakeholders to consider the possible federation of the Balksbury Infant and Junior schools.

The deputy headteacher from the infant school teaches in the juniors one day a week. One member of staff is currently on maternity leave. The school has employed two additional members of staff on a part-time basis to provide additional one-to-one support for pupils with their writing and mathematics.

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

Pupils say they enjoy coming to school more, especially since the behaviour in the school has improved. Published data for 2010 show that the progress pupils make is slowly getting better. The learning and progress observed during this monitoring inspection support this improving trend.

The published data also highlighted that boys make better progress than girls in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6. The school has yet to compare the performance of these two groups to see if this continues to be the case. Higher expectations of all, staff and pupils alike, are leading to most pupils making at least expected progress. Good progress is currently being made in mathematics in Year 6, in reading in Year 3 and in writing in Year 4. The least amount of progress being made in mathematics is in Year 3, in reading is in Years 5 and 6, and in writing is in Year 5. Although still too variable, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are also beginning to make more rapid gains in their learning because of improved leadership in this area and also because their needs are being identified sooner and are being more appropriately met. The group of pupils making the least amount of progress is the more able.

In the lessons observed, pupils were usually well engaged, motivated and willing to participate in class discussions. Pupils now have a better understanding of the aim of lessons and what they are expected to learn. They are improving their knowledge and understanding of grammar and they are making better use of punctuation to improve the quality of their writing. Too few opportunities are provided for pupils to produce extended pieces of writing in English as well as in other subjects. In a good mathematics lessons in Year 6, pupils were developing their understanding of algebra by finding the rule of a sequence of numbers.

In most lessons there are now more opportunities for pupils to discuss and apply their skills, but pupils still struggle to use new and unfamiliar key words correctly. The quality of pupils' spelling, handwriting and the presentation of their work in Year 4 to Year 6 all require improvement.

Pupils know their targets and this helps them to take responsibility for their progress and the next steps in learning. However, not all targets are always sufficiently challenging, such as for the more able pupils in reading and writing.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise attainment across the school so that a very large majority of pupils make good or better progress each academic year – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The school improved the consistency with which behaviour is managed. Staff now have higher expectations of how pupils should behave and feel well supported by senior managers in implementing the revised policy. As a result, the behaviour of most pupils in and around the school is generally good. However, a few pupils still lack self-discipline and also struggle to behave when not under adult supervision. A small minority have also yet to learn what constitutes good manners.

Pupils told the inspectors that they feel safe in school. They do not think there is a problem with bullying in the school and have the confidence that staff will deal with any concerns they may have. The school has ensured that pupils know how to use the internet safely. However, pupils' access to information and communication technology (ICT) is too limited because of the unreliability and unsuitability of old ICT equipment in classrooms. This is severely hampering pupils' ability to use ICT to support and enhance their learning. This is also limiting the development of important skills that pupils require for their future. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of what constitutes healthy and unhealthy food, the benefits of taking regular exercise and the importance of personal hygiene.

Levels of attendance are rising and are currently above national averages.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching in the school ranges from good to inadequate. Where teaching is best, teachers demonstrate not only a good knowledge of the subject they are teaching, but also of the different ways that help pupils to learn. In a good English lesson in Year 3, the teacher began the lesson by modelling to pupils how they might begin to write a story linked to their work about myths and legends, using compound sentences. She encouraged pupils to share their learning targets with each other so that they could each identify what they would do to improve the quality of their writing. Although the teacher was working with a group of pupils in the main part of the lesson, she took the time to check on the learning and progress of the other pupils as well. In another English lesson in Year 5, the learning support assistant provided particularly effective support to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities because she had a good understanding of the different needs of each of the pupils she was supporting. She was sufficiently knowledgeable to use a range of strategies to support these pupils so they could all be successful with their writing activity. Additional one-to-one support for pupils is also proving helpful, with older pupils, for example, learning how to identify and create subordinate clauses.

All teachers use whiteboard technology. While some do this well, others do not use the board in a way that is sufficiently interactive. All teaching is currently placed at a disadvantage because of the extent to which this technology has deteriorated. Teachers are getting better at using questions in their lessons. However, questions are not always used as well as they could be to check pupils' understanding and progress. Where teaching is less successful, there are missed opportunities of linking new learning with what pupils have been doing in other subjects. The reinforcement of basic skills, such as how to read and write new or unfamiliar vocabulary, is also at times overlooked. In these lessons, the pace of learning is slow because the teacher either spends too much time talking, while pupils sit passively for too long, or the teacher does not check well enough whether pupils have fully understood what they are supposed to be learning. Where subject knowledge is weak, planning and teaching do not promote a good progression of learning and skills.

The school has improved the quality of teachers' planning. There is now a greater degree of consistency with objectives being identified more clearly. Where planning is best, such as in Year 6, it identifies not only what pupils are expected to learn but how this will be taught and what resources will be used.

Self and peer assessment is developing, but has yet to become firmly embedded through the school. Most of the work pupils produce has been checked by their teacher. However, the quality of marking is still too variable. Although some teachers write a lot of comments, these are not always pertinent enough to what pupils need to know. Spelling mistakes, for example in mathematics, science as well as English books, are too often overlooked, although work looks as though it has been checked

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Staff say that the interim headteacher has helped them to feel valued and well managed. They are kept informed about important developments and what is going on in school. As a result, they are keen to work together and do their best to effect change and to help the school to improve. The school now has a strategic plan that communicates clear and high expectations of pupils and staff. However, this plan has yet to identify who will monitor progress at regular intervals. Although leaders and managers produce regular progress reports, self-evaluation tends to describe as opposed to evaluate the impact of activities. Senior leaders and managers now review the progress pupils make towards their targets every half term. This is enabling teachers, leaders and managers to gain a more accurate view of how well pupils are achieving in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders and managers are providing adequate additional support and challenge for staff where progress remains too slow. The role of the deputy headteacher, as well as that of middle managers, remains underdeveloped. They have yet to all contribute as well as they could to school improvements. However, the deputy headteacher is making a significant contribution to raising staff morale and is beginning to support the interim headteacher in the interrogation and evaluation of data. The leaders for mathematics, English, science and special educational needs are developing their roles well.

Middle managers feel more empowered in managing their areas of responsibility. A good example of this is with science where, as a result of the support and guidance provided to staff in this subject, pupils' workbooks show good evidence of pupils undertaking more investigative activities, such as learning about what happens to water when it is heated. However, the quality of subject action planning is weak for the following reasons:

- the plans do not specify how pupils are expected to benefit
- there is not enough focus on raising standards or accelerating progress, particularly for any specific groups of pupils
- there are not enough deadlines or interim milestones against which progress can be measured
- these important documents do not support the school's key areas for improvement well enough.

Although more frequent monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is still required, this is beginning to happen more regularly. This has enabled senior leaders to identify individual training needs for staff. Governors have attended training and are keen to do their best for the school, but too many still lack the knowledge and skills to provide the school with effective support or sufficient challenge. While governors have helped the school to review and improve some important documents, such as the marking and behaviour policies, they have yet to evaluate the impact of the school's work on pupils.

Links with the campus infant, primary and secondary schools have been developed to help provide support to some key aspects of leadership and management.

However, leaders and managers have yet to further develop links with the campus schools in order to build capacity more securely. This is especially the case for senior and middle leaders as well as the governing body.

The school continues to ensure the suitability of staff to work with pupils and health and safety remain a high priority.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- increase the effectiveness of the school's leaders and the governing body in driving school improvement – satisfactory.

External support

Although the overall impact has been satisfactory, the quality of the external support is good. There has been, and is still, much to do in the school. The governing body has been strengthened with the addition of a governor appointed by the local authority and an extensive package of support is in place to support staff as well as leaders and managers in the school. This is contributing to the improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, to the progress of pupils in English and mathematics and in supporting the interim headteacher as well as other leaders and managers.

The local authority has amended its statement of action and this document now meets requirements. The actions identified in the plan have led to many of improvements mentioned above. Furthermore, the plan also identifies many of the extensive improvements required in relation to ICT. Although governors have received training about accountability, this is not yet having sufficient impact on improving their effectiveness.