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Mrs De Wolf
Headteacher
Elmhurst School
Dunsham Lane
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Buckinghamshire
HP20 2DB

Dear Mrs De Wolf

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Elmhurst School

Following my visit with Paul Edwards, additional inspector, to your school on 16 and 17 February 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 July 2009. 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 – 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 Interim Executive Board and the Corporate Director of Education and Young People for Buckinghamshire.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2009

- Raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensure that middle-ability and more able pupils are set work that challenges and extends them.
- Focus leaders' monitoring on the progress that pupils make in lessons and over time, on rigorously analysing performance and on identifying where provision can be improved.
- Ensure that in all lessons pupils have a clear understanding of what they are expected to learn and that they all know their targets for improvement.

Special measures: monitoring of Elmhurst School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 16 and 17 February 2011

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior and middle managers, a group of pupils, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the School Improvement Partner and the link school community worker.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, several changes in staffing have taken place. A full-time permanent assistant headteacher has been appointed to lead the Additional Resourced Provision when the current staff leave at the end of the term. Two long-term supply teachers remain on the staff; one has been replaced to cover the Year 1 class during the long-term absence of the permanent teacher. The school population remains stable with similar numbers of pupils leaving or joining at different times during the year.

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

In all lessons observed during the monitoring inspection, pupils rose to the challenges set and displayed good levels of engagement and willingness to work. Pupils' enthusiasm to learn is closely linked to their better progress reported in the previous monitoring letter; this has been sustained. This is because increasingly there is a strong focus on learning. Analysis of the school's latest tracking and assessment data, which have been moderated, shows that pupils' learning and their progress are satisfactory with most year groups exceeding their targets in English and mathematics. In particular, attainment data are closer to the expected predicted grades in Years 5 and 6 and for those pupils attending the Additional Resource Provision. Targets for the current academic year are adjusted and increased based on improvements in pupils' progress.

Focused strategies, including recently individualised tuition, half-termly tests, and emphasis on guided and private reading, booster sessions, progress review meetings and regular meetings with pupils to review their targets are used well to help pupils meet or exceed their predicted targets. In addition, the rate of pupils' progress is increasing because the school is making better use of assessment information to identify gaps in their knowledge, some of which is very basic. For example, knowledge about seasons and months of the year and nursery rhymes. As a result, the school is increasingly taking steps to develop pupils' vocabulary as well as their knowledge and understanding of simple cultural information, which forms a part of the bedrock of their education. However, pupils' enthusiasm to learn is not conveyed

in their presentation; these skills are undeveloped. The school has still to develop its own distinct handwriting style. While pupils are very keen to undertake research work and present this neatly, the same effort is not transferred to their class work. This is littered with basic errors, which pupils do not readily recognise unless they are brought to their attention. Pupils are beginning to engage in peer marking but proofreading and editing skills are at the early stage of development.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils understand how to stay safe and describe basic rules about their personal safety. Pupils' positive attitudes and behaviour are good as are their relationships with each other and adults. They work well in groups by taking turns and showing high levels of cooperation and the ability to listen well and follow instructions. In lessons observed, they worked very well and their willingness to learn is demonstrated in their independent learning logs. Pupils use the set homework to interpret and research a range of different tasks, which they each manage to give an individual twist.

Since the start of the academic year, attendance is broadly in line with the average for primary schools. The school has identified the issues affecting attendance and has rightly taken steps to tackle it by employing a part-time community worker to engage the parents and carers in dialogue about the costs and impact of low attendance on their child's progress. Currently, the school is considering further strategies to improving attendance through the careful timing of in-service training days to coincide with specific observances celebrated in the wider community.

The effectiveness of provision

The changes to develop the quality of teaching and learning have been sustained since the last monitoring inspection. Planning for improvement is established and teachers are drawing on the concept of 'Quality First Teach' to review and refine their approaches to accelerating pupils' learning. As a result, there is a sharp focus on sharing, developing and applying good practice. Team work, including coaching, joint teaching, as well as training and advice from the consultant and School Improvement Partner, contribute to the teachers improving further the quality of their teaching. Although expectations of pupils' work are increasingly high, leaders and managers recognise that the more able pupils are not always stretched.

During the monitoring inspection, of the 14 parts of lessons and/or tuition sessions observed, most were at least good. This is a further improvement since the last monitoring inspection and is linked to teachers having high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Based on pupils' lower than average starting points, they made at least satisfactory and often better progress in lessons. The main features of the lessons seen included: structured planning; teachers using time well to explain and discuss the skills being developed; brisk pace; active learning and use of open-ended

questions to assess pupils' learning; feedback using the visualiser to discuss, develop and edit pupils' work; and selecting and matching resources to the aims of the lesson. A few lessons were satisfactory because they lacked pace, planning did not provide opportunities to accelerate learning or for pupils to take control of it, resources were not carefully matched to the set work and additional activities for the more able pupils were not included.

Systematic monitoring and evaluation of work have led to the school identifying the Early Years Foundation Stage as an area requiring strengthening. Extensive training, monitoring and support, internally and from the local authority, are leading to improvements in provision and to considerable emphasis on developing children's language, mathematical and social skills.

The quality of marking has improved further. It is detailed: strengths are highlighted and detailed comments help pupils to know how they can improve their work. Assessment data are established and used analytically to plan schemes of work and lessons, track pupils' progress, identify underachievement and put into place action to help those requiring additional support.

Much work is being done to develop and trial the International Primary Curriculum. A team of middle leaders keeps the International Primary Curriculum under review, and ensures that there is emphasis and clarity on developing a range of skills across subjects, in particular language to help pupils read and interpret questions and information accurately. The new approach to teaching well-selected themes, topics and activities engages pupils and invigorates their interests in learning. However, at this stage of developing the curriculum, it is not possible to evaluate the full impact on pupils' progress. Science is taught as a discreet subject to ensure full coverage of topics in the National Curriculum. A good range of enrichment activities extends the curriculum and learning beyond the classroom. Pupils recognise the changes in the curriculum and say they are enjoying the 'hands on activities', the group work and extended homework.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensure that middle-ability and more able pupils are set work that challenges and extends them – good.
- Ensure that in all lessons pupils have a clear understanding of what they are expected to learn and that they all know their target for improvement – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has increased the capacity of the senior leaders and managers at all levels to sustain the improvements. There is now a firmer grip on what

constitutes good or better quality teaching and learning and the headteacher is ably supported by the deputy headteacher. There is commitment and a strong focus on driving teaching and learning. As a result, systems have been simplified further so that the staff can maintain a tunnel vision and hone in on developing pupils' basic skills. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning are firmly in place and the drive on developing teaching further is central to the school's progress in raising attainment to at least the national average.

There is clarity about direction, which is clearly spelt out in the well-written Raising Achievement Plan. As a result, the middle leaders, as part of the wider senior leadership team, have demonstrated that they have the skills to take full control of their responsibilities. More than ever before, they perform as managers and leaders and use assessment information analytically to drive planning, and improvement. Additionally, while these leaders are sharpening their skills to become experts in their fields, they spread the benefits of their professional development through coaching and monitoring. Overall, improvements made since the previous monitoring inspection have been sustained. Importantly, the school recognises that improvement is a continuous process and complacency has to be consigned to the past.

The Chair of the Interim Executive Board has a very good handle of the school's work and enables the Board to hold the leaders and managers to account. The clear vision for improvement and the no-nonsense approach mean that the leaders and all staff are challenged to meet targets within a limited time. Close work with the school has resulted in the Chair of the Interim Executive Board producing informative research work on attendance as a key priority requiring immediate improvement. Work with the parents' and carers' forum has improved communication between the home and school. Feedback from the school's parental and carer questionnaire shows a positive response to the school's work. Safeguarding requirements are fully met.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Focus leaders' monitoring on the progress that pupils make in lessons and over time, on rigorously analysing performance and on identifying where provision can be improved – good.

External support

The excellent support from the local authority has helped to steer the school's actions and enabled the leaders and managers to take control of managing change without constant supervision. The local authority's clear systems of accountability and the regular evaluation of the school's work have ensured that the school is on track to make the improvements, as outlined in the statement of action. Consequently, the local authority is in the process of rolling out its exit strategy by considering arrangements for the shadow governing body and further support for the school, as necessary.