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24 March 2011

Miss Torrance
Place Farm Community Primary School
Camps Road
Haverhill
CB9 8HF

Dear Miss Torrance

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Place Farm Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22 March 2011 with Sue Smith HMI, 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 February 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 Suffolk.

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - tackling rigorously the key priorities identified in the school's recent improvement plan
 - providing leaders and managers at all levels with training and additional time to enable them to fulfill their monitoring roles rigorously and regularly
 - using the information gained from monitoring or analyzing data to pinpoint success or where more emphasis is needed
 - increasing all governors' awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in the school's provision so that they can hold the headteacher to account for the pace of improvement.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment to a consistently good level by:
 - rigorous and regular monitoring by the senior team
 - using the outcomes of this monitoring to provide support, training and challenge for individuals.
- Improve attendance to a satisfactory level by:
 - raising parents' and pupils' understanding of the need to come to school regularly
 - working closely with the local authority to ensure parents whose children have high levels of absence are made aware of their legal responsibilities.
- Raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - increasing teachers' and learning assistants' level of knowledge and skill in teaching and assessing early literacy, handwriting and numeracy skills
 - replacing outdated and shabby books with up-to-date reading material, particularly books that appeal to boys
 - using precise assessment to set realistic and challenging targets for pupils to attain
 - monitoring progress carefully and regularly and plan support for groups or individuals who have not made the expected progress.

Special measures: monitoring of Place Farm Community Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 22 March 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Head of School, the Principal of the Castle Partnership, teaching staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, and the school council. In addition, inspectors observed most classes and looked in detail at pupils' work and the school's assessment systems.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the transition to a two-tier school system has continued. The transition to a school for pupils aged 4 to 11 years will be complete in September. More new teaching appointments have been made. The school's collaborative working arrangements with partnership schools have developed well. Plans to gain academy status this year are well advanced but they have not been formally approved. Significant changes have been made to improve care, guidance and support.

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

The last visit reported results of national tests indicating an overall reversal of the decline seen in previous years. This improvement has continued and accelerated so that some classes are demonstrating attainment close to or in some cases above expectations. This reflects much improved learning and progress, especially for the older pupils. Classroom observations confirmed this acceleration, with further improvements evident in reading, writing and mathematics.

Pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 are quickly overcoming the legacy of underachievement. The school has set itself challenging attainment targets for them that are above national averages. Much-improved tracking data indicate standards that are on track to meet these by the end of the year. As at the previous visit, the attainment of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is lower than their peers. However, the school has now developed much more accurate assessment systems to track the progress of individuals and groups systematically. Because of this, the school is now able to use support with greater precision and, as a consequence, early signs are that these gaps are beginning to narrow. Differences in the attainment of boys and girls are small and decreasing.

The school has rightly continued to put much effort into the development and consolidation of the monitoring and assessment of pupils' attainment and progress. These systems are now well-developed and used throughout the school. Assessment of attainment is generally accurate, and this was confirmed by both observations in class and scrutiny of written work. It is now being used effectively to monitor the performance of different groups.

The learning of pupils has improved markedly since the last visit. Many pupils are now developing good learning skills, especially in year 5. This is largely because the school has put much work into raising expectations in this area, and questioning and productive group work are encouraged. In the previous visit this was done effectively in the lower school, however it is now seen much more widely as are consequent improvements in progress.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement.

- Raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics – good.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Attendance has improved since the last visit because the number of multiple absences by individual pupils has reduced. Overall attendance is close to national average for similar schools. Systems are effective because they identify those whose attendance is problematic, and prompt actions and liaison with families or agencies ensures that attendance improves.

Exclusions remain very low. Behaviour has improved markedly because pupils are now more effective learners. Pupils work collaboratively in many classes and often help each other to learn. They are confident and often articulate, questioning teachers when they are curious or have not understood something.

Progress since the last inspection on the area for improvement.

- Improve attendance to a satisfactory level – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

Improvements in teaching noted at the last visit have continued. The proportion of good or better lessons has increased. Most significantly, the learning skills that pupils demonstrate have improved markedly across the school. This is because of the extensive professional development work carried out in this and associated areas. The school is now well placed to ensure that standards accelerate further to meet the challenging targets that it has set.

The school has worked hard to embed assessment systems, and these are now used systematically to judge progress and attainment. Teachers are increasingly incorporating the results of these assessments into their classroom practice. In the best examples, it is used effectively to ensure that all pupils learn to the best of their ability, and activities and whole-class sessions are structured to challenge and maintain interest. This is developing well, and assessment is now well-established and accurate.

The school, together with the partnership schools, has further developed the lesson observation system. As at the last visit, it accurately identifies areas for development which are increasing well met. Peer observation is now increasingly common, and many specific whole-school development sessions have taken place on aspects of teaching and learning. The observation process now draws on accurate assessment information so that a much clearer view of standards and progress being made in class is obtained. It now places a much greater emphasis on learning. Overall, the professional development of teachers is proceeding well.

Care, guidance and support have improved because of many changes introduced since the last visit. Early indications are that these changes are beginning to have an impact on the progress of supported pupils, and this was confirmed by observations of pupils' improved confidence in class and in learning. The changes made include the appointment of a Care Guidance and Support team leader, additional child protection training, an additional nurture class and better coordination between schools to ensure that transition arrangements are smooth.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement.

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment to a consistently good level – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management has improved since the last visit. Staff have taken ownership for the performance of their pupils well. This has led to improved quality of provision, much improved learning, and accelerating progress. The school is on track to meet the challenging targets that it has set itself for this year. The post-inspection action plans are detailed and progress against them is monitored well by the governing body and leadership. For some aspects, the school is ahead of its improvement plan: for example, plans to develop the expertise of learning assistants are ahead of schedule. Similarly, the impact of target setting within year groups is driving up progress faster than expected. The school's self-evaluation is realistic and accurately identifies areas for development as well as emerging strengths.

The drive for improvement is now firmly established. It is based on the secure use of performance data that is enabling accurate monitoring and challenging target setting at all levels. The process is aided by the well-developed working relationship with the main partner school and the effective sharing of best practice. The governing bodies of both schools are now working much closer together and have a shared understanding of improvement priorities. They are monitoring progress and using their skills and experience well to drive the school improvement process.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement.

- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management – good.

External support

The local authority continues to provide effective support for the development of literacy and numeracy.