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Mr John Dean
Interim headteacher
Highbury Primary School
Dovercourt Road
Portsmouth
PO6 2RZ

Dear Mr Dean

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Highbury Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 July 2011 with Bradley Simmons 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 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 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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Portsmouth.

Yours sincerely

Ann Henderson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place on 12 and 13 October 2010

- Ensure the governing body meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management so that leaders at all levels know how to analyse progress data and use challenging targets to eliminate pupils' low attainment and raise standards.
- Ensure that governors rigorously challenge and support leaders and managers, holding them to account for tackling underperformance and improving the achievement of all pupils to at least satisfactory.
- Provide a rich curriculum which is designed to meet the needs of all pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to at least consistently satisfactory or better, ensuring that:
 - teachers' subject knowledge and use of assessment strategies are secure
 - planning is differentiated to meet the needs of all pupils
 - pace and level of challenge in lessons enable pupils to make progress
 - other adults supporting learning are involved at all times
 - expectations of pupils' learning behaviour are consistently high
 - lessons encourage active learning and are enjoyable.
- Improve attendance to broadly average, reduce the number of authorised absences and put measures in place to follow up pupils' first day absences.

Special measures: monitoring of Highbury Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 5 – 6 July 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of staff, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The interim headteacher, two permanent teachers and two teachers on temporary contracts will leave the school at the end of the summer term. A new headteacher and two experienced teachers have been appointed to take up post in September 2011. During his two terms in post, the interim headteacher has effectively dealt with a number of complex personnel and finance issues.

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

Since the previous monitoring visit, the quality of pupils' learning has begun to improve because the curriculum is more engaging and interesting for pupils. However, standards of attainment remain low and progress is variable in all subjects and across classes. Unvalidated end of Key Stage 2 test results for the current Year 6 cohort confirm that statutory targets were not met. Assessment systems are now more secure and pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics are closely monitored by senior leaders. Teachers are now more accountable for the progress of pupils in their class and regular meetings identify underachievement. Attainment in Year 2 is rising and is close to the national average in reading and mathematics, but remains well below average in writing. The attainment of boys is lower than girls'. Writing is the weakest area in all year groups.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils say lessons are enjoyable and they have a better understanding of what they are learning. They say they feel safe and trust adults to sort out problems should they arise. Behaviour in lessons and around the school has improved since the last monitoring visit and pupils have positive attitudes to learning. The good systems to tackle poor attendance which were in place at the previous monitoring visit have been sustained. As a result attendance has significantly improved and is now broadly in line with the national average. The interim executive board is closely monitoring attendance and recognises the need to provide opportunities for pupils to catch up with learning following absence.

Progress since the first monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement.

- Improve attendance to broadly average, reduce the number of authorised absences and put measures in place to follow up pupils' first day absences – good.

The effectiveness of provision

During this monitoring visit good teaching was observed, which was characterised by effective planning, good pace and perceptive questioning. In one Year 6 class pupils were discussing the possible characteristics of The Paperbag Prince, from the book by Colin Thompson. Effective questioning by the class teacher generated an extensive and thought provoking discussion. As a consequence pupils made good progress in their learning and produced some detailed descriptive writing. However, weaknesses in teaching persist in some year groups. Although inadequate teaching has not been fully eradicated, there are clear signs that the school has acted to remedy deficiencies since the previous monitoring inspection. Good practice is being shared and learning walls in classrooms support learning during lessons, particularly in writing and mathematics. However, inconsistencies remain, especially in teachers' planning. Although learning objectives are planned and shared with pupils, there is insufficient depth in planning to stretch the differing levels of ability within the class. Success criteria, for example, are not always matched effectively to the varying capabilities of pupils. As a result, the rate of progress in lessons remains too slow to accelerate learning and have a positive impact on raising attainment. There is, however, greater consistency in the marking and feedback to pupils. As a result pupils have a clearer understanding of how to improve their work.

The school has developed a more creative and enjoyable curriculum which is particularly engaging for pupils. Long-term plans are now in place with more meaningful links with a range of subjects across the curriculum. Nevertheless, there is a need to produce a whole school plan covering all areas of the curriculum to ensure a progressive development of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in all subjects from year to year. In addition, the assessment of individual pupils' phonic knowledge is too imprecise to ensure pupils make the progress of which they are capable in reading, spelling and writing.

Progress since the first monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement.

- Provide a rich curriculum that is designed to meet the needs of all pupils – satisfactory.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to at least consistently satisfactory or better – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Decisive and effective action by the interim headteacher to address weaknesses in teaching and secure effective financial management has resulted in the restructuring of staffing within the school. Regular and accurate monitoring identifies strengths

and areas for development in teaching and learning. Senior leaders are developing their monitoring roles and provide targeted support to improve individual teachers' skills. Assessment data are now more secure and the progress of groups of pupils is being closely monitored by senior leaders. However, class teachers are not using assessment data precisely enough to accelerate learning in lessons. Teachers are benefiting from training and support and are more rigorously held to account for pupils' progress. However, teachers' questioning skills are generally not sufficiently developed to ensure that pupils are effectively challenged during lessons. Teachers therefore miss opportunities to ensure that pupils' understanding is probed and extended in order that they make consistently good progress.

Systems to monitor the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are under review. There is evidence to suggest that, historically, teachers have confused the underachievement of pupils and categorised these pupils as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. There is a need to precisely identify the causes of underachievement to enable accurate records of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to be maintained and to plan suitable intervention strategies to support underachievement and accelerate pupils' progress. The interim executive board recognises the need for more regular monitoring of the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and of ensuring that suitable provision targets the individual learning needs of these pupils.

The interim executive board is effectively monitoring progress against areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. A clear direction for improvement has been established and the interim executive board is now monitoring the impact of actions on pupils' attainment and progress and holding the school to account. Safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements and staff and members of the interim executive board have accessed up-to-date training to ensure the safe recruitment of staff.

Progress since the first monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement.

- Ensure the governing body meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding – good.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management so that leaders at all levels know how to analyse progress data and use challenging targets to eliminate pupils' low attainment and raise standards – satisfactory.
- Ensure that governors rigorously challenge and support leaders and managers, holding them to account for tackling underperformance and improving achievement of all pupils to at least satisfactory – satisfactory.

External support

Effective guidance and challenge from the School Improvement Partner have raised the awareness of the interim executive board and senior leaders. This has enabled

them to sharpen their focus on school improvement. The local authority continues to provide a range of effective support and has supported senior leaders to implement school improvement strategies to move the school forward.