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Mr Selby Thomas
Interim headteacher
The Mark Way School
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Hampshire
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Dear Mr Thomas

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Mark Way School

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 July, 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 July 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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Helen Barter
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - implementing the agreed interim management structure, with clear roles and responsibilities being understood by the team
 - establishing rigorous and robust systems to monitor all aspects of provision
 - improving governance through developing the management skills needed to hold the school to account.

- Improve students' progress by:
 - developing and implementing strategies to manage consistently students' behaviour
 - promoting good attendance through the development and implementation of effective strategies
 - developing and implementing effective systems to set targets which challenge students and give a clear picture of their progress.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that teachers' planning clearly identifies the needs of students and how these will be met in every lesson
 - making sure that feedback to students tells them what they need to do to improve their work and reach the next level or grade.

Special measures: monitoring of The Mark Way School

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

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, visited lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the previous, current and forthcoming interim headteachers, senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and one member, and representatives from the local authority.

Context

The two-term interim leadership by the headteacher of Norman Gate Primary School ended at Easter and a second interim leadership was secured for the summer term. Despite three interview rounds, the local authority has been unable to secure an appropriately experienced substantive headteacher for September 2011. As a result, a retiring headteacher from within the local authority will become the interim headteacher of the school for one year. The senior leadership team is back to full complement following the return from maternity leave of the Key Stage 3/English leader. The vice-chair of the governing body has resigned and the post is currently vacant. New appointments have been made to the governing body but vacancies remain for a staff and a parent governor. Since the previous monitoring inspection, one teacher has left the school and another has been dismissed. Another teacher is leaving the school at the end of this term. The school has successfully recruited two full-time teachers to start in September. A new finance officer joined the school at the start of this term following the retirement of the previous incumbent.

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

All Year 11 pupils have secured college placements for September but the school's data indicate that they have made unsatisfactory progress overall during their time at Mark Way and that their full potential has not been reached. Predictions are that a small minority of pupils will gain GCSEs in art and mathematics only. School data for the year show that over half of the pupils in the school made only limited progress in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). Performance in science was exceptionally weak with less than a quarter of pupils making at least the expected progress.

The school does not have sufficiently secure knowledge of pupils' progress to know whether individuals or different groups are achieving well enough. Assessment procedures are not sufficiently rigorous to support the setting of challenging targets and to help pupils make the best possible progress. Some improvement is evident however. Information is now collected about pupils' prior attainment from their previous school and from tests on arrival to set a baseline against which to measure

pupils' progress. Following the SEN Progression Guidance document, the school has set end-of-year targets based on expected two sub-levels of progress. However, the relevance of these targets is highly dependent on the accuracy of the assessment that has gone before and the system is still fragile. All pupils now have individual education plans which are linked to the annual review process but teachers are not making full use of these to plan lessons that precisely meet pupils' individual needs. The development of moderation activities in English and mathematics is helping subject leaders and teachers to better understand the National Curriculum levels at which pupils are working. The impact of this is not clearly seen, however, in the content of lessons, as these do not provide an appropriate match of work to pupils' needs.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

A small number of pupils continue to challenge the behaviour management systems and to test changes in leadership. This has resulted in a high number of fixed-term exclusions although, overall, these are fewer than for last year. Senior leaders are taking appropriate action to review the suitability of placement for some individuals whose behaviour causes significant disruption to the smooth running of the school and to other pupils' learning. Low-level disruption is dealt with well, particularly by teaching assistants, although it continues to be evident in lessons where the work provided fails to meet pupils' interest and is not well matched to their learning needs. The school recognises that there are still too many detentions.

The interim headteacher has taken a highly proactive role in establishing a 'minimum requirement for satisfactory behaviour' through four clearly stated school rules. Teachers are developing consistency in their use of reward stamps for three clear criteria for work and behaviour at the end of lessons. Pupils evidently understand these and most are prepared to discuss the reasons why they might have failed on any point. This helps them to understand how they need to improve their behaviour and attitudes to learning. The new all-weather facilities have been instrumental in improving behaviour at break times as pupils have more room for recreation. During the monitoring inspection, the inspector found evidence that behaviour of the majority of pupils had shown satisfactory improvement.

The school's strategies for improving attendance are effective. Attendance for the academic year is 92% overall, which is a good improvement on the previous year. A significant majority of pupils have very good attendance, including a few who have 100% attendance. The poor attendance of three persistent absentees lowers the overall figure. Appropriate agencies are involved with these pupils. Good attendance and satisfactory behaviour are positive building blocks. They demonstrate that pupils are increasingly ready to learn and to make progress.

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

- Improve students' progress – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

Lessons observed during this monitoring inspection were judged to be satisfactory with no serious inadequacies, but there is still very little teaching which is good. The school is falling far short of the July milestone target of 65% good quality teaching. The main failing is that teachers do not make sufficient use of assessment to ensure that the content of lessons is precisely matched to all of the pupils' needs. This leads to lack of challenge, low-level disruption and variable learning and progress from lesson to lesson.

Pupils most enjoy lessons where activities are stimulating, it is made clear what they are expected to learn, they are given clear feedback on their successes and told what they need to do to improve. This was demonstrated in an art lesson on animation where pupils were motivated to learn independently because they knew exactly what they were expected to achieve and were given regular feedback on how well they were doing in meeting their targets.

While lesson plans are now better focused on individual learning needs, work is often not challenging enough because pupils' starting points are not taken sufficiently into account. Teachers do not make enough opportunities during lessons for assessing the learning of pupils of different abilities. This is often because the learning objectives and success criteria are not specific enough and insufficient time is available in the 45 minute lesson for a meaningful plenary where pupils review their learning and are helped to understand their next steps. Plans to extend lessons to one hour from September to enable better consolidation of learning are well founded.

Books in most subjects are marked more regularly and the quality of marking is monitored by school leaders. Pupils receive better guidance on what they have done well, although there is little reference to their levels and the steps they need to take to reach the next. The quality of the learning environment within classrooms is improving, providing more opportunities for pupils to work in groups and for displays to support their learning, for example, subject specific vocabulary in the ICT room. The use of additional aids, such as signing and symbols, to support those pupils with communication difficulties is underdeveloped. Teaching assistants' morale has improved because they feel they now have a higher focus on supporting pupils' learning rather than managing their behaviour.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim headteacher has brought strong experience and expertise into the school and has provided a very good role model for leadership for all staff. Staff have responded well to the expectations placed on them, are gaining in confidence and morale is good. They say that they are in favour of the developments that are

taking place and recognise that the recent focus on improving behaviour has been necessary.

The senior leadership team is demonstrating improved cohesiveness. They are clear about their roles and responsibilities and are keen to drive forward on the identified priorities in the Raising Attainment Plan. They respond well to advice from the local authority and other professionals. They are effective in their own management tasks and are beginning to explain the impact of these in terms of school improvement, but their strategic leadership skills are less well developed. Action plans support development satisfactorily, but they do not contain enough measurable targets in terms of pupils' progress to help evaluate the success of actions taken. Data are not used sufficiently or effectively by the senior leadership team to gain a strategic view of achievement throughout the school or to account for the progress of different groups, such as girls or those with autistic spectrum disorders. The leadership and management skills of other staff are underdeveloped, particularly in relation to the leadership of science and ICT.

Since the last monitoring visit the interim headteacher and senior leaders have focused their efforts on re-establishing expectations for behaviour. As a result, little formal monitoring of classroom practice has taken place to ensure that pressure is maintained in raising the quality of teaching. However, senior leaders are realistic about the overall quality and are aware where the weaknesses lie. Robust action has been taken where inadequate teaching was evident and management support is beginning to iron out inconsistencies in the teaching of science.

The governing body has been strengthened well by the appointment of members with relevant expertise and experience. It has embraced training opportunities and acted positively on the findings of its effectiveness by the local authority's Governor Services. It is suitably focused on ensuring that the school meets statutory requirements, including arrangements for safeguarding pupils. Regular meetings, visits by a core team of governors and good communications with senior leaders are helping governors to be more knowledgeable about the school's work and its progress against the key priorities of the Raising Attainment Plan. However, they are still not sufficiently well informed through accurate data about how well pupils make progress during their time in the school.

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

- Improve the quality of leadership and management – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority gives good support and challenge to the school through regular monitoring visits by the special educational needs inspector and district manager and through the provision of specialist advice in English and mathematics. The growing

management skills of the English and mathematics subject leaders and their greater understanding of how to improve provision are evident although the impact is not yet seen in terms of pupils' improving progress in those subjects. Good links are being forged with a high-performing school in the local authority to provide further guidance and modelling for staff.

The local authority is acutely aware of the need to secure substantive leadership for the school. It has been proactive in securing the two interim headteachers since the start of this academic year and ensuring that there is some stability for the forthcoming year in the recruitment of a headteacher with suitable expertise and an established track record. Nevertheless, the local authority must focus its attention on developing the capacity of the senior leadership team over the forthcoming year while doing all it can to support the Governing Body to secure substantive leadership for the start of the academic year in September 2012.