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Mrs S FitzGerald
Headteacher
Houldsworth Valley Primary School
Rowley Drive
Newmarket
CB8 0PU

Dear Mrs FitzGerald

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Houldsworth Valley Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 7 December 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in 27 January 2011. 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 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 Suffolk.

Yours sincerely

David Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2011

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - improving the effectiveness of the leadership team to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning systematically across the school
 - developing a programme of regular monitoring activities for all school leaders, to include time to evaluate evidence and feed the information back to teachers
 - increasing the governing body's role in monitoring the school's performance in order to challenge school leaders more precisely and secure rapid improvement
 - ensuring that the governing body maintains an up-to-date central record of risk assessments.

- Raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics and increase pupils' rates of progress by:
 - increasing teachers' knowledge and understanding of attainment levels in English and mathematics, as exemplified in the National Curriculum descriptors, to raise expectations and to know what to plan for the pupils
 - implementing a consistent approach to planning that identifies learning objectives and what pupils will know by the end of a lesson, linked to the National Curriculum levels appropriate to their ages
 - increasing the accuracy of assessments of what pupils are learning so that they know what they need to learn next and tasks are planned accordingly
 - setting learning targets that are realistic and challenging for all groups of pupils
 - establishing a whole-school spelling and handwriting policy and using this to improve pupils' writing and presentation skills.

- Improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - planning adult-led sessions that engage children for a suitable length of time for their ages and levels of development, in communication, language and literacy and problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy

- ensuring that opportunities are planned for children to independently explore and consolidate their learning but with adult support when appropriate.

Special measures: monitoring of Houldsworth Valley Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 7–8 December 2011

Evidence

HMI observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, nominated staff, groups of pupils, the Chair and members of the Governing Body, the headteacher of the partner school, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

An acting headteacher was appointed on the 1 September and a deputy headteacher took up his post on the same date. A new Chair of the Governing Body was appointed at the end of September. The special needs coordinator resigned her post recently and has left the school and the Early Years Foundation Stage teacher has returned to the school. HMI conducted a staff meeting to review the progress evident on the first day of the inspection and answer staff questions on how the new inspection framework (January 2012) would relate to their situation. The governing body intend to advertise the substantive headship in the New Year.

As part of the local authority's reorganisation of school places from a three tier to a two tier system, a new Year 5 class was formed in September. These pupils will be the first year group to take the Year 6 national tests at the school, in the summer of 2013.

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

The 2011 teacher assessment results of pupils at the end of Year 2 were disappointing. Outcomes in reading and writing were well below the national average. Similarly the results of the Foundation Stage profile, a measure of the progress the children make in the Reception class, showed notable weakness in the development of the pupils' communication, language and literacy skills.

The school is beginning to develop a robust assessment database and early indications suggest that most pupils' progress is broadly in line with age-related expectations. In lessons, most pupils make appropriate progress and some are now making good progress, albeit from a low baseline. Improvements in teaching are making a difference, although there is a considerable amount of work to do if the gaps in the pupils' prior learning are to be addressed. Older pupils in Years 4 and 5 and those in Year 2 are benefiting from the increased level of challenge now provided.

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

- raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics and increase pupils' rates of progress – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour has improved noticeably. HMI had lunch with the school council and they were particularly pleased to talk about the improvements in behaviour and their lessons since the arrival of the new headteacher. The pupils have been involved in the development of a rewards and consequences system and are enthusiastic about how they can show the progress they are making. Rehearsals for the school Christmas concert were underway during this inspection; the cooperation and positive attitudes evident were a credit to the pupils and staff. Attendance is rising, and is closer to the average for primary schools, although a small number of persistent absentees remain. School dinners are popular and provide a good range of meals.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching has been stabilised and some good teaching is now evident. HMI visited nine lessons or parts of lessons and all were judged to be at least satisfactory. Learning was most effective when clear guidance was provided on what the pupils were expected to learn, the tasks were planned to provide a continuity of concept and challenge, and time was managed appropriately. Satisfactory lessons could have been more effective if the use of time had been more carefully managed to enable the class teacher to provide an effective plenary, or if more had been made of the useful learning opportunities that emerged in the initial part of the lesson.

Learning support staff often worked effectively leading small groups. However, there were times when they were not deployed to best advantage. HMI will review the impact of the work of the intervention groups during the next inspection, correlating assessment data with the provision observed.

Staff have worked very hard to address the weaknesses in the special educational needs provision highlighted in the last report. Individual education plans are now up to date and pertinent to pupils' needs.

Assessment information is now a key part of lesson planning and, as a result, staff are beginning to address the gaps in the pupils' prior learning. As part of the next monitoring visit, HMI will review the accuracy of the school's assessment database and the assessments upon which it is based by scrutinising the pupils' work.

Early Years Foundation Stage provision has been reorganised into a new base and an experienced teacher has rejoined the team. Greater use needs to be made of the small learning opportunities the daily routine presents to enhance the pupils' literacy

and numeracy skills. During this inspection, some useful phonics sessions helped pupils with their letter shapes and sounds but not enough is done to coordinate this approach across the Reception class and Key Stage 1. Similarly, guided play opportunities did not display a sufficiently strong thematic approach to reinforce the pupils' language and numeracy skills.

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

- improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

A great deal has been achieved since the start of term. Teaching is having a positive effect on standards and behaviour, the school now presents an 'optimistic learning environment' to all who visit the school, pupil relationships with their peers and adults have improved, and all understand the school's rules and policies. A professional team approach is being forged and, although much remains to be done, the barriers to improvement have been removed. The acting headteacher has done well to bring the staff together in less than a term and to secure such important improvements.

Senior staff joined HMI in the observation of teaching and the evaluations they offered matched the judgements given by the inspector. The monitoring of teaching and learning has been an important part of the improvements secured.

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

- improve leadership and management – good.

External support

The local authority has brokered the support of a good local school and its headteacher, a local leader of education, who now acts as a mentor to the acting headteacher. This arrangement is working well. Staff from the partner school, with a range of skills and responsibilities, have all contributed to the support programme and this has been supplemented by effective local authority consultancy.