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8 March 2012

Brett Holden
Acting Headteacher
Catshill First School
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Dear Mr Holden

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Catshill First School

Following my visit with Helen Griffiths, additional inspector, to your school on 6–7 March 2012, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 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 – inadequate.

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 Worcestershire.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment and rapidly accelerate progress for all pupils in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - making more effective use of assessment information to identify patterns of progress and underachieving groups or individuals
 - ensuring that all pupils understand their learning targets and how to achieve them.

- Improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching by:
 - eliminating weaknesses in teaching and ensuring that the large majority of teaching is at least good or better by autumn 2012
 - sharing good practice across all key stages by coaching staff to improve their practice and improving teachers' use of assessment information to plan lessons.

- Develop leadership expertise across the school to drive improvement by:
 - holding staff to account for pupils' learning and progress through rigorous monitoring and evaluation
 - ensuring that school improvement planning and monitoring are sharply focused on improving outcomes for pupils.

Special measures: monitoring of Catshill First School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 6-7 March 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, the leadership team and Chair of the Governing Body. The lead inspector met with the local authority's School Improvement Adviser and inspectors spoke to some parents and carers and met with pupils, including representatives of the school council. Inspectors visited all classes and inspected 13 lessons, including the Early Years Foundation Stage. The lead inspector also met with a group of pupils to hear them read and to check their progress in both reading and writing. Pupils' assessments were scrutinised, along with their workbooks. Inspectors also checked the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures.

Context

There have been significant staff changes and temporary appointments to cover staff absence or long-term leave since the inspection. The substantive headteacher and deputy headteacher are on long-term leave and the Chair of the Governing Body stepped down soon after the inspection. The local authority arranged for the temporary appointment of an acting headteacher who was recruited from another Worcestershire school. The acting headteacher worked part-time in November 2011 and has been leading the school full-time since January 2012. A governor has recently been appointed as Chair of the Governing Body. In addition, there has been considerable staff turnover, resulting in supply teachers covering staff absence. The acting headteacher has reorganised the leadership structure and classes. Most classes are now single-aged, and both assistant headteachers, one appointed in February 2012, are now based in classes with full teaching commitments. Three new governors have recently been appointed.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 2 is still in line with the national average and, by the end of Year 4, most pupils reach age-related levels. Although attainment is similar to that found in the last inspection, pupils should be achieving a great deal more. There remain significant pockets of underachievement amongst groups and individuals because the teaching is not sufficiently ambitious in all classes to accelerate learning and raise standards. The number of pupils reaching higher levels, that is, Level 3 for Year 2 pupils and Level 4 for Year 4, remains too low. From Year 1 onwards, many pupils have the potential to reach or exceed the levels expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the legacy of disrupted or ineffective teaching, high levels of staff absence and the use of supply teachers, have resulted in pupils making inadequate progress over time. Pupils are not

building on the good start made in the Early Years Foundation Stage. As at the time of the last inspection, Nursery and Reception children make good progress.

The progress made by pupils in some classes is improving but there remains too much variability, particularly in Key Stage 2. Groups making satisfactory progress include those with disabilities or who have special educational needs, and those who are known to be eligible for free school meals. All groups and individuals make inadequate progress where the teaching is not ambitious or consistent. The most effective teaching of English and mathematics, for example, in the mixed-age class for Year 1 and Year 2 pupils, is ambitious and adapted well to pupils' needs. There is some good teaching in other classes but this is patchy and depends on the consistency of practice. Pupils whose learning is disrupted by variations of practice due to the use of supply or cover staff do not make enough progress over time.

Pupils make accelerated progress in their writing when the teacher is more vigilant as pupils write, rather than correcting their work after they finish. When pupils are given more opportunities to self-correct during lessons they improve the accuracy and structure of their writing, and this has a lasting effect on their learning. In mathematics, some of the work that pupils do is undemanding or confusing because it does not match pupils' abilities. In one lesson, for example, pupils used inefficient methods to count squares inside simple shapes to calculate area. Workbooks show that pupils do not have specific or individualised targets to work towards and the objectives and expectations set for their learning are sometimes too low, so they make slow progress.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- raise attainment and rapidly accelerate progress for all pupils in reading, writing and mathematics – inadequate.

The quality of teaching

In some classes pupils are starting to make better progress but there remain significant gaps in progress between groups and classes. Some of the teaching is still inadequate. At the time of the last inspection, the most senior and experienced teachers were not deployed to teach a class and were mainly assigned management duties. Supply teachers were used too much to cover for senior staff or staff absence, disrupting pupils' learning because of inconsistent expectations. Since joining the school, the acting headteacher has acted decisively to deploy the most effective practitioners, including the recently appointed assistant headteacher, to teach full-time. In these classes, one of which is the mixed Reception and Year 1 class, pupils are making good progress. The teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage remains good and children thrive in stimulating and well-resourced indoor and outdoor learning environments. The Nursery classroom is a bit too small, although staff make good use of different work areas, for example, the quiet reading area and shared resources with Reception, to accommodate this.

Pupils are starting to catch up on lost ground in classes where there is consistently good teaching, although in other classes there remain significant shortcomings. They are not always being challenged enough in lessons and some of the work provided is either too easy or confusing for those who find learning difficult. Teachers are usually diligent in their marking and offer good teaching points for improvement. However, pupils are not always directed towards the next steps in their learning because there are no specific targets set. Some teachers have yet to establish an accurate understanding of the National Curriculum levels in reading, writing and mathematics. This accounts for inconsistent and sometimes generous assessments of pupils' progress. The acting headteacher has revisited all assessments to provide a more accurate picture of pupils' attainment. The scrutiny of assessment and pupils' work shows some pupils are behind where they should be, particularly in writing and mathematics, because lessons do not always provide sufficiently ambitious tasks. The teaching of phonics (letters and sounds) in Key Stage 1 is helping to raise attainment in reading. Nevertheless, in some lessons staff do not direct pupils or provide enough time for them to self-correct their writing.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching – inadequate.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils feel safe and trust their teachers and support staff. They say that it is easy to make friends and they enjoy coming to school. Pupils are usually well behaved and attentive in lessons, although they become inattentive when teachers talk for too long or do not challenge them sufficiently. Attendance is above average, although a small number of pupils arrive late for school in the morning. A recently introduced a reward system for good behaviour and learning is being used consistently. Pupils say it is a good thing because, as one rightly explained, 'It makes us work hard and do better in lessons.' There are good relationships between pupils and staff and amongst pupils, and the school continues to make a good contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leadership remains fragile because the substantive headteacher and deputy headteacher are not managing the school. However, the acting headteacher provides stability. He has made a good start in a short space of time to establish routines and systems to enable staff to evaluate their own performance and that of the pupils they teach. The deployment of both assistant headteachers into classes is having an immediate impact on the quality of learning in those classes. They are good teachers who are now better able to support other staff.

Some parents and carers spoken to are rightly concerned about the high rate of staff absence and the use of supply teachers. Their concern is understandable given that high staff turnover and uncertain leadership have weakened school effectiveness and pupils' achievement. The restructured leadership team provides a more cohesive and purposeful force for change. Since January, the acting headteacher has strengthened monitoring and development planning so there are more ambitious objectives which focus on raising pupils' achievement. More accurate assessments of pupils' attainment and progress with short- and long-term targets, together with accurate monitoring of teaching, provide a secure basis for further improvement. The cycle of monitoring and development planning gives staff a more coherent framework involving a wider leadership group, including governors, which evaluates and measures pupils' progress and staff performance. This is a more effective model of performance management than found by the last inspection because its purpose is to accelerate pupils' progress and improve the quality of teaching. Action plans, including those of the local authority, provide a route map for school improvement, but lack measurable milestones to evaluate how much progress is made.

The curriculum continues to provide a satisfactory range of topics and themes for pupils to study, as well as interesting visits that broaden pupils' learning experiences.

All forms of discrimination and incidents of bullying are managed well by the school. There are plans to provide a learning support unit to help the most vulnerable pupils or those who find it difficult to manage their own behaviour. Even though the staff increasingly provide opportunities for pupils to apply core skills, such as reading, writing and mathematics, and achieve well, the variability of expectations and teaching mean pupils do not have equal opportunities to succeed.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- develop leadership expertise across the school to drive improvement – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority arranged the appointment of the acting headteacher to provide stable leadership and support for the school. However, this is only temporary and, prior to the last inspection, inaccurate evaluations of the school's effectiveness meant the local authority was slow to recognise the school's difficulties and pupils' underachievement. Prior to being placed in special measures, the local authority's evaluations of the school's performance were too generous so the school was not receiving adequate support. A School Improvement Adviser has been appointed to work with the school. Together with the acting headteacher and governing body, they are refining action plans and starting to establish more robust and accurate self-evaluation. The local authority's statement of action was judged by Ofsted to be fit for purpose. Arrangements were made to meet parents and carers to discuss the

support required to help the school. Some parents and carers are disappointed with the support provided and the uncertainties about the future leadership of the school.