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Mrs A Wilson
Headteacher
Heathfields Infant School
Saxon Close
Wilnecote
Tamworth
B77 5LU

Dear Mrs Wilson

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Heathfields Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 13–14 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 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 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 Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Ceri Morgan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management in securing ambition and driving improvement by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders adopt a clear, united and consistent approach to all aspects of school improvement
 - developing the knowledge and skills of the governing body to enable closer scrutiny of the school's work, so that weaknesses and inconsistencies are resolved
 - developing the role of subject leaders in order to improve the quality of self-evaluation and extend opportunities to model good practice.

- Raise pupils' levels of attainment in reading and writing and accelerate the rate of their learning and progress by:
 - ensuring greater consistency and quality in the teaching of letters and sounds (phonics), reading (comprehension) and writing
 - improving pupils' attendance levels to at least the national average.

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better in all classes by:
 - ensuring that teachers swiftly identify, within lessons, when pupils are ready for the next steps in their learning
 - ensuring teachers' marking and feedback clearly identifies the next steps pupils need to take in their learning in order to improve
 - sharing best practice to eliminate inconsistencies between classes in the pace of learning and the level of challenge provided to pupils.

Special measures: monitoring of Heathfields Infant School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 13–14 March 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed teaching in all classes and the school's work, scrutinised documents and held meetings with the headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, the consultant headteacher working with the school and representatives from the local authority. The inspector also conducted a review of pupils' work and spoke with children throughout the school to seek their views.

Context

Heathfield continues to be bedevilled by staffing changes, often unavoidable. The senior leadership team now consists of the headteacher and acting deputy headteacher but the remaining member, the special educational needs coordinator has recently resigned. There have been several other changes to teaching personnel and three out of the seven classes are currently being taught by temporary staff. There is more change to come as appointments are planned to secure permanent posts and as staff return from maternity leave in the near future. The Children's Centre on site is independent from the school and was not inspected. A local Leader in Education, a headteacher in a nearby school, continues to work alongside the leadership team at Heathfield to offer greater capacity until staffing settles.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Attainment remains low and achievement of pupils inadequate but both are improving rapidly, particularly in reading and mathematics but less so in writing. The progress made by pupils is improving cross the school but with some variation between classes and year groups. The variation reflects the quality of teaching in each class. Where teaching is stronger, almost all pupils make at least satisfactory progress and often good.

The school predicts that around 75% of pupils will reach the nationally expected levels in reading and mathematics but only 65% in writing by June 2012. This would meet national targets. The now accurate tracking and assessment arrangements provide confidence in these predictions. There are some gaps emerging, however, as the school improves. Boys underperform slightly compared to girls, progress in writing is less successful than in reading, speaking or listening skills, and core number work remains fragile. Few pupils reach the higher levels of attainment.

The fresh emphasis on teaching language skills through a careful phonics programme is proving to be a considerable success and, as a consequence, pupils

can read aloud with confidence, attempt unusual spellings and successfully sound out words they do not recognise when reading new texts. Due to the limited data available, it is unclear how well disabled pupils and those with special educational needs do compared to their peers. Pupils now use a richer vocabulary, and a focus on developing spoken language skills is paying dividends. This is helping to improve standards of reading, which is itself aided by some imaginative use of physical actions to support the text. For example, pupils loved acting out the story of *Speckle the Spider* whilst spinning a story about what he might do next.

There is now a satisfactory use of full sentences by older pupils when writing. Letter formation by younger pupils is improving due to careful attention to presentation which is helping with both clarity and legibility. There is now support for counting and number recognition for younger pupils and those who need extra help and, as a result, fluency in calculation with number is improving. Despite this, basic mental arithmetic is weak in some classes. Pupils can add two digit and one digit numbers accurately in Year 2 and show a good knowledge of bar charts and other graphical representation, but many struggle to apply their knowledge whilst solving problems.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are supported well, usually via extra help, but the school is unable to show clearly the progress of these pupils because records are not fully completed or up to date.

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

- raise pupils' levels of attainment in reading and writing and accelerate the rate of their learning and progress – satisfactory.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is satisfactory but with some that is good. During this monitoring visit no inadequate teaching was observed. Similarly, however, no outstanding teaching was seen. There were some common strengths observed in teaching which included very strong relationships between adults and pupils, good use of resources and effective planning and helpful support from other adults in the classroom. A significant improvement is in the way teachers now question pupils, allow them time to reply and then respond appropriately. Questions by teachers and other adults are frequent and open in nature, requiring pupils to speak at length to reply. This is helping to develop oracy.

However, some weaknesses remain. Many teachers are new and do not yet know their pupils well. Some teachers move too rapidly from one activity to another, thus capping opportunities for pupils to work at length and in detail, especially in writing. As a consequence, pupils do not have enough time to write and the continued over-use of mini whiteboards makes it difficult for pupils who are in the early stages of writing to write at length or legibly. Similarly, some teachers dominate sessions too

much, thus limiting pupils' opportunities to speak or respond. Pupils respond well to higher expectation and challenge but this is infrequent and inconsistent between classes. In too many classes, activities and expectations are routine rather than ambitious and exciting. Marking is up to date and linked to lesson objectives but is often less of a judgement about how well objectives have been achieved than a description of what has been covered. Some introductions remain too lengthy, thus limiting the amount of time spent on the main purpose of the session.

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

- improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better in all classes by – satisfactory.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is satisfactory and pupils show enthusiasm for their work. They support each other well. Standards of behaviour reflect the quality of teaching. A small number of pupils who show challenging behaviour affect the learning of others. This is the exception, as most are keen to learn, work hard and show responsibility for their learning, even at a very young age. Pupils say there is no bullying. This is a caring school where the safety of pupils is given a high priority.

Attendance levels, currently at 95%, are satisfactory. There are twelve pupils with low attendance, due mainly to illness but four showing cause for concern for high levels of persistent absence. The school has worked hard to increase attendance through a variety of initiatives, including assemblies and rewards. Recently, a class and their families enjoyed a night out bowling as a reward for the good attendance of the pupils.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

A lack of capacity, partly through absence and personnel changes and partly through a slow response to the need to change, has meant that senior leadership has struggled to implement the monitoring and strategic activity required to ensure rapid improvement. The improvement that has been achieved owes much to the hard work and attention to detail of the acting deputy headteacher. She has completed an accurate analysis of pupil performance whilst leading developments in mathematics, English, teaching, assessment and school improvement. This is in addition to a full-time teaching commitment and the role is unsustainable despite working on all fronts with energy and aplomb. She has also implemented a helpful system of monitoring pupil performance.

The contribution of others has been mixed, including that of the governing body. Despite recent training and the addition of extra governors with expertise, it is unable to act as a critical friend because the information it receives is incomplete.

Not all its members are able to fulfil a hard commitment to school activities such as interviewing potential candidates. Monitoring has been patchy and infrequent and is not converted to action planning. As a result, leadership at the most senior level has been unable to implement rapid change despite an accurate awareness of what is required. Strategic plans seldom come to fruition; planned activities lack clarity and specific timelines. As a consequence, school improvement is driven by improved classroom practice rather than any strategic vision and drive. This lack of capacity is exacerbated by recent staffing changes. The senior leadership team is minimal in membership, and meetings and monitoring remains overly informal although classroom observation and work sampling does take place. The wider leadership team is under strength and the development of potential subject leaders is delayed.

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

- improve the effectiveness of leadership and management in securing ambition and driving improvement - inadequate.

External support

The school receives very good support from the consultant headteacher but improvement is delayed due to the lack of capacity at the most senior level. Beyond this, support from expert teachers and consultants have proved effective. As a consequence, the impact of external support is satisfactory.

Priorities for further improvement:

- Add additional capacity at the most senior level as a matter of urgency.
- Strengthen the monitoring programme and report on outcomes to staff, parents and the governing body with clarity.
- Ensure progress by all disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are monitored effectively.
- Increase the levels of challenge and expectation in all classes to increase the pace of improvement.