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22 March 2012

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 with Anne Pitt, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 20–21 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 third 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 – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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 third monitoring inspection on 20–21 March 2012.

Evidence

HMI observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and the pupils' books, reviewed the school's assessment database, and heard pupils read. The inspectors met with the headteacher, nominated staff, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and representatives from the local authority.

Context

The school has appointed two new staff to support the expansion of the school in September 2012. The acting headteacher was appointed to this permanent post on the 20 February 2012

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils in Years 1, 2, 4 and 5 are now making good progress from a low baseline. Many pupils are now working at or, in some cases, above the level expected for their age in English and mathematics as a result of the improvements secured in teaching. HMI cross-referenced the quality of the work in the pupils' books with the assessments recorded in the school's evidence base and found an accurate match to support the school's progress data.

Pupil progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage is being hindered by ineffective teaching of phonics (letters and sounds). Pupils are making strong progress in their social and oral skills due to notable improvements in the work of learning support staff.

HMI heard pupils from across the ability range and from all year groups read in a number of contexts. Lower achieving pupils in each year group were hesitant when reading words with two or more syllables. However, all pupils were able to 'sight read' a wide range of familiar words. Few pupils displayed any phonic decoding skills or searched for visual clues in the text.

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

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

The quality of teaching

HMI observed nine lessons or parts of lessons, noted the support and intervention work of teaching assistants, and conducted joint observations with the senior management team. Teaching was good or better in just over half of the sessions observed and outstanding teaching was seen on three occasions. In the best lessons, tasks were well-planned, questioning was skilful and learning was driven forward at a brisk pace by precise instruction. The use of assessment and the quality of marking evident in the pupils' books were notable features of these lessons. Behaviour management was skilful and staff expectations high.

In an outstanding Year 2 English lesson, pupils were making strong progress because very clear guidance was provided; good one-to-one support and short sections of drama moved the lesson forward. Excellent use was made of the achievements of two recently arrived pupils who spoke English as an additional language. This celebration of progress had a clear social and cultural emphasis and drew spontaneous applause from the whole class.

In those lessons where pupils made only satisfactory progress, outcomes could have been better if the pace and challenge provided had facilitated opportunities for higher level speaking and listening, and greater independent learning.

A great deal has been done to improve the Early Years Foundation Stage learning environment and, as a result of support staff training by the local authority, considerable progress has been made by the learning support staff in nurturing the children's speaking and listening skills. However, in the last two monitoring visits despite significant support from the school leadership team, teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage has been unable to demonstrate the ability to deliver an effective literacy session.

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

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

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is good and the pupils' attitudes to learning are positive features of all lessons. Attendance is rising and is currently close to the national average. The school has made significant efforts to improve this figure but the international travel required of families from the local horse-racing industry presents constraints. In an effective Year 1 lesson, the teacher made exceptionally good use of role play to nurture the pupils' questions and comments on staying safe.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher has forged an ambitious and hard-working leadership team with a clear focus on school improvement. The quality of teaching is rising and thoughtful appointments have been made for September 2012. Young teachers are developing rapidly under the headteacher's energetic guidance. Good progress has been made on improving teaching and achievement, although further governing body and local authority support is needed to address the outstanding issues in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The headteacher's monitoring and self-evaluation are accurate. HMI invited senior staff to join them in the evaluation of teaching. The views they expressed matched the judgements recorded by the inspectors. HMI reviewed the lesson observations completed by the new senior team and noted their high expectations of teaching.

Notable steps have been taken to improve the curriculum with the regular teaching of science, the use of drama to support English lessons, and some impressive artwork developed in all classes, and a notably in Year 3 – 4 class.

Some vacancies remain on the governing body and governors' monitoring visits are yet to develop that important 'critical friend' aspect.

The organisation of provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs has improved significantly. Learning support assistants are providing effective support and pupils are making progress. For example, the school admitted a child this term with notable learning difficulties and, as a result of very effective support, the child has made, what visiting health care professionals, consider exceptional progress. Relationships with parents and carers are a positive feature enhanced by regular communication at the start and end of the school day.

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

- improve leadership and management – good.

External support

The support provide by the partner school has been particularly effective and often a key component of the improvements secured. The headteacher manages the support available effectively. However, a recent local authority review contained inaccuracies and contradictions that have not been helpful and could not be supported by the outcomes of this inspection.

Priorities for further improvement:

- Ensure that teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage can secure good pupil progress.