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Mr I Evason
Headteacher
Beauchamp Middle School
Hawk Drive
Bedford
MK41 7JE

Dear Mr Evason

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Beauchamp Middle School

Following my visit with Michael Phipps, Additional Inspector, to your school on 29–30 May 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 on 29 September 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 only be appointed subject to prior discussion with HMI.

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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Bedford Borough.

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing the leadership skills of senior and middle leaders
 - revising the leadership structure and systems to ensure that staff are accountable for pupils' progress
 - ensuring the governing body provides effective challenge to the school in order to address weaknesses and bring about improvement
 - ensuring that teachers' assessment of pupils' attainment is accurate
 - improving the analysis and use of data to inform both strategic planning and teachers' lesson planning.

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - regularly monitoring lessons and providing teachers with specific feedback for improvement
 - sharing more effectively the existing good practice
 - ensuring day-to-day assessment is used successfully to promote progress and to enable pupils to share responsibility for their learning.

Special measures: monitoring of Beauchamp Middle School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 29–30 May 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of staff and pupils, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the leadership structure of the school has been reviewed and new appointments made where necessary for September 2012.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's system for recording information on pupils' progress is now established securely. Pupils' attainment and progress are evaluated against their targets for each year. The data for the spring term 2012 indicate that progress improved from autumn 2011. Achievement was stronger in mathematics than in English. Generally, pupils in Years 5 and 6 made better progress than those in Years 7 and 8. The school's current data show that Year 6 pupils are on track to improve on results for Level 4 in national tests, closing the gap with the national average. However, the improvement at Level 5 is less marked. Overall, pupils are still not making sufficiently rapid progress to compensate for previous underachievement, although the improvement in the quality of teaching is beginning to redress this, especially in Key Stage 2.

The intervention programmes introduced earlier this year, which occur during form time at the beginning of the school day, have helped improve the basic skills of a majority of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. However, this does not always show in their achievement when assessed broadly in tests and formal tasks. The recently introduced electronic reading programme has raised the profile of reading in the school, especially in Key Stage 2, but it is too early to assess its impact on pupils' interest and skills.

In lessons, pupils make mostly satisfactory and sometimes good progress. They generally settle to work promptly. They understand the school's new expectations for presentation and most follow the rules so that their books are better organised, learning objectives recorded and work laid out clearly. Pupils enjoy opportunities to work in pairs but they work less frequently in groups. They usually discuss and share ideas well. However, they are not always as effective when listening to others feed back to the class.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved. Almost all of the lessons observed on this visit were satisfactory and just under half were good. This matches the school's evaluation of teaching, which is based on regular, unannounced observations by senior staff. Since the last monitoring visit, senior staff have intensively coached and supported a group of teachers to develop specific skills. A recent visit from an external consultant found that the performance of these teachers had improved and that they were more confident in using approaches such as discussion or assessing pupils' progress.

The proportion of good teaching is improving though it remains less than half. In the best lessons, teachers set very clear objectives and ensure that pupils know exactly what they are to learn. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson, pupils developed their own criteria to assess whether they could calculate different fractions of whole numbers. Teachers set different expectations and adapt work for pupils of varying ability. For example, in a Year 8 physical education lesson, the teacher chose groups carefully, used different equipment and size of playing areas to vary the degree of difficulty for pupils in learning tennis skills. Teachers set high expectations and maintain the pace of learning. In a Year 5 English lesson, the teacher required pupils to show not only that they recognised the key features of persuasive writing but also that they understood how to apply them. In these lessons, pupils are engaged and good progress is made by all pupils, including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, because work and support are pitched accurately for them.

In the majority of lessons where learning and progress are satisfactory, teachers often talk for too long or answer their own questions rather than expecting pupils to extend or justify their ideas. They do not give pupils sufficient opportunity to think about questions and share ideas before answering and this limits the number of pupils who participate orally. Teachers do not encourage pupils sufficiently to learn for themselves and, as a result, pupils lack the confidence to work independently. In a small number of lessons, some pupils did not settle to work and teachers did not use the behaviour policy early enough or effectively to manage their behaviour.

Teachers' marking has improved as the school's marking policy has become more established. Teachers now mark pupils' work regularly, often encouraging pupils to use checklists or criteria to assess their own work. They usually provide clear 'next steps' to help pupils improve their work. In the best examples, these are linked to specific levels. However, marking still varies too much in quality and some 'next steps' are too vague or focus only on effort rather than learning.

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

- improve the quality of teaching – satisfactory.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils say that behaviour across the school has improved this year. They understand the behaviour policy and say that most teachers use it effectively to manage lessons. However, pupils also felt that there were occasions where low-level misbehaviour by a few of their peers affected their learning and this was confirmed in inspectors' lesson observations. Because teachers do not use the school behaviour policy to deal with these pupils, the lack of consistency adversely affects the impact of new school expectations. The rate of exclusions has increased this year as the headteacher emphasises what is and is not acceptable at school. However, very few pupils have more than one exclusion. Pupils' attendance is broadly average and there are no significant variations between year groups.

Pupils say that bullying is infrequent and most are confident that staff would deal promptly with any concerns they reported. Pupils generally move around the school calmly and sensibly, and treat others with respect. However, because some pupils visit locker areas between lessons, they are late arriving and, therefore, affect learning by slowing the start of lessons.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and senior staff set high expectations for staff and pupils. Since the last monitoring visit, they have reinforced key features in the new policies on teaching and assessment. Teachers report that the regular briefings have helped to develop their practice, sharing effective approaches and introducing new skills. The headteacher has a clear vision for the new leadership structure which commences in September 2012. The roles are closely linked to the priorities in the school's improvement plan and build on the expertise of those appointed.

The cycle for monitoring the school's performance is well established and rigorous, drawing on regular lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' books. Staff used a training day recently to review samples of pupils' books across subjects so that they could identify effective practice in marking and any issues concerning layout, volume and presentation of work. This activity has helped to improve pupils' presentation and teachers' marking, although there is still variation in both. Senior staff have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and, in joint lesson observations with inspectors, demonstrated that their judgements were secure. They have good awareness of which aspects of teaching require further development. They have recently introduced a record of where good practice exists in the school and teachers will soon have the opportunity to observe each other. Middle leaders now accept greater accountability and are beginning to develop the skills to drive improvement in their areas. However, this is at an early stage and many posts will not be

operational until the new structure comes into place in September. In the meantime, the impetus for improvement rests mainly with the headteacher and a small number of other leaders.

The interim executive board, which was newly formed at the time of the last visit, provides effective strategic direction for the school. Members have supported the restructuring of leadership roles sensitively but have ensured that the school is suitably staffed for the new academic year. They provide constant challenge for senior staff and make regular visits to review performance and progress directly. The school has improved teaching, marking, pupils' presentation and some aspects of their achievement since the last visit during a time of some uncertainty while leadership roles were redesignated and interviews took place. Despite the considerable time and effort required for this process, senior leaders have maintained their focus on developing the school.

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

- improve the effectiveness of leadership and management – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority provides effective support for the school. It has continued to support the interim executive board, providing expertise and brokering support and training for staff. Local authority staff provided specialist advice on personnel matters to aid the review of leadership roles. Teachers have received specialist coaching and support as well as more general training. An external consultant contributes to regular evaluation of the school's performance. The school has also worked effectively with other schools, improving liaison and beginning to share effective practice.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that all teachers use the school's behaviour policy consistently to establish high expectations of pupils and to improve pupils' ability to apply themselves to learning.