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Mrs Sarah Sadler
The Headteacher
Highbury Primary School
Dovercourt Road
Portsmouth
PO6 2RZ

Dear Mrs Sadler

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Highbury Primary School

Following my visit with Veronica Young, Additional Inspector, to your school on 20 and 21 June 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2010. 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 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 Portsmouth.

Yours sincerely

Ann Henderson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2010

- Ensure the governing body meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management so that leaders at all levels know how to analyse progress data and use challenging targets to eliminate pupils' low attainment and raise standards.
- Ensure that governors rigorously challenge and support leaders and managers, holding them to account for tackling underperformance and improving the achievement of all pupils to at least satisfactory.
- Provide a rich curriculum which is designed to meet the needs of all pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to at least consistently satisfactory or better, ensuring that:
 - teachers' subject knowledge and use of assessment strategies are secure
 - planning is differentiated to meet the needs of all pupils
 - pace and level of challenge in lessons enable pupils to make progress
 - other adults supporting learning are involved at all times
 - expectations of pupils' learning behaviour are consistently high
 - lessons encourage active learning and are enjoyable.
- Improve attendance to broadly average, reduce the number of authorised absences and put measures in place to follow up pupils' first day absences.

Special measures: monitoring of Highbury Primary School

Report from the fifth monitoring inspection on 20 and 21 June 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, observed 20 lessons and looked at a range of pupils' work. The inspectors talked with pupils, staff and parents and carers during the visit and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, another member of the governing body and the education improvement officer.

Context

There have been no staff changes since the previous monitoring visit. The school is supported by a different education improvement officer.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' learning and progress continue to improve. The most recent assessments show that, for all year groups, attainment is rising and is now broadly in line with the national average, although inconsistencies remain in some classes and year groups. Pupils make better progress in writing, particularly in Key Stage 2. Nevertheless, attainment in writing remains lower than reading and mathematics. At Key Stage 2, progress in mathematics is weaker. There are no significant differences in the attainment of groups of pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, although boys' attainment remains lower than girls' in reading, writing and mathematics.

The whole-school focus on improving reading, through the introduction of a more systematic programme of teaching phonics (the sounds that letters make), is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress in reading. Since the previous monitoring visit, phonics is also systematically taught in Year 3 and Year 4. Most pupils throughout the school show an awareness of how to decode words. However, due to its recent introduction, some pupils have not benefited sufficiently well from this programme to date and this sometimes limits their ability to tackle unfamiliar words. Nevertheless, the benefits of this programme were evident in a Years 1/2 class, where pupils used their phonic skills well to spell words with the suffix 'ing'. Clear explanations and the teaching of effective strategies enabled most pupils to make good progress. Since the previous monitoring visit, the school has implemented more opportunities for pupils to practise their handwriting skills, which is beginning to take effect in the presentation and quality of handwriting across the curriculum. In addition, the use of targets for pupils in reading, writing and mathematics is more evident across the school. Pupils have a better understanding of their levels of attainment and use their targets well to monitor their own progress.

The marking and feedback to pupils are more consistent and have improved, particularly in mathematics.

In lessons, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage, children make better progress. Paired talk and the use of small whiteboards for each pupil enable them to be more actively involved in learning, particularly during the whole-class teaching at the start of lessons. Pupils are given tasks that more closely match their learning needs, and expectations are higher. As a result, pupils display positive attitudes to learning and behave well in lessons.

The quality of teaching

The increased use of assessment information and regular tracking of pupils' progress have resulted in teachers having a much clearer understanding of the levels of ability of the pupils in their class. Planning for different groups of pupils is improving and pupils are encouraged to actively engage in learning through group work and discussion. The curriculum engages pupils well through 'Wow' days, which enthuse and excite pupils within the themed, cross-curricular provision. Visits and visitors are a key feature of this enriched curriculum. The current Olympic theme across the school, where each class is focused on a different country, enlivens learning. During the inspection, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage thoroughly enjoyed their Spanish theme and engaged excitedly in the opportunity to take part in flamenco dancing with a Spanish flamenco dancing expert.

While the proportion of good teaching observed during the inspection has not increased since the previous monitoring visit, there have been improvements in lesson planning, the learning environment and in the security of assessment strategies. Key features of good lessons observed are tasks accurately matched, a brisk pace, good teacher subject knowledge, effective use of teaching assistants and questioning matched to the differing abilities of pupils, which challenge them and enable them to acquire new knowledge and develop independent learning skills. In these lessons, teachers check and constantly adjust tasks to extend pupils' learning. In all lessons, relationships are positive and pupils work well together, which makes a strong contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In the satisfactory lessons, teachers do not use the information on pupils' attainment sufficiently well to match tasks closely to the range of ability in the class. In addition, questioning is too limited and does not expand and develop ideas and responses from pupils to further accelerate progress.

A programme of training for teaching assistants has increased their skills and has contributed much to the effective and well-targeted support provided for specific groups of pupils, particularly underachieving pupils in reading. The needs of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are carefully assessed. The evaluation of the impact of specific interventions to support pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are at an early stage of development.

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

- provide a rich curriculum that is designed to meet the needs of all pupils – good
- improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to at least consistently satisfactory or better – satisfactory.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour has improved significantly over time, and parents, carers and pupils agree. They say incidents of disruptive behaviour and bullying are rare. Consequently, pupils feel safe in school; they are polite and behave well in lessons. Pupils are well mannered and courteous in corridors and playgrounds, where good relationships prevail.

Attendance remains broadly the same as the previous monitoring visit and continues to be monitored regularly. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced but, despite the school's best efforts, persistent absence for a minority remains too high. School data show that there is a direct correlation between the attendance rates of pupils and their progress and attainment.

The routines at the end of playtimes and lunchtimes have improved which enable lessons to begin promptly. However, punctuality at the start of the school day remains a concern. There is a significant proportion of pupils arriving late for school, which disrupts the start of the school day, not only for those arriving late but also for all pupils when the start of lessons is interrupted.

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

- improve attendance to broadly average, reduce the number of authorised absences and put measures in place to follow up pupils' first day absences – satisfactory.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders and managers, including the governing body, have been proactive and successful in the introduction of further measures to bring about improvement since the previous monitoring visit. The governing body has increased its effectiveness and holds the school to account through raising challenging questions and more closely monitoring the work of the school. Members of the governing body make regular focused monitoring visits to the school and provide informative reports to enable all members of the governing body to be well informed. The governing body meets its statutory requirement to safeguard children. All relevant checks on staff are carried out. Health and safety monitoring checks of the school premises are a regular feature of the work of the governing body.

The capacity for further improvement is being strengthened by developing the skills of subject leaders and phase leaders in self-evaluation. Self-evaluation includes the analysis of pupils' progress, the scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning, and involving some middle leaders in joint lesson observations. Teachers' assessments

are moderated by the school and the local authority and they are now more rigorous and accurate. Middle leaders develop clear action plans for their area of responsibility and have begun reporting to the governing body on the progress towards achieving their goals and objectives. This has significantly strengthened the drive for further improvement. Subject leaders have developed a skills-based curriculum and provided effective support to teaching staff to enable the progression of skills to be carefully monitored and assessed in all subjects.

The cycle of regular monitoring of lessons supports improvement in the quality of teaching. However, the quality of feedback provided following lesson observations is not sufficiently focused on the impact of teaching on pupils' progress, particularly whether activities are matched well enough to ensure all pupils can make rapid progress from their individual starting points. As a result, further development is needed to ensure that all teaching is securely good to enable all pupils to make consistently good progress.

School leaders and managers are developing and updating their strategic planning as a result of their evaluations. The school is aware of the need to ensure school development planning is sharply focused on the most important areas for improvement with clear milestones and measureable success criteria in order to further accelerate school improvement.

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

- ensure the governing body meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding – good
- improve the quality of leadership and management so that leaders at all levels know how to analyse progress data and use challenging targets to eliminate pupils' low attainment and raise standards – good
- ensure that governors rigorously challenge and support leaders and managers, holding them to account for tackling underperformance and improving the achievement of all pupils to at least satisfactory – good.

External support

The local authority continues to provide effective support, particularly through moderation and focusing on improving the quality of teaching, although the level of support has been reduced since the previous monitoring visit.