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Ms J Klimek
Interim Headteacher
Holne Chase Primary School
Buckingham Road
Milton Keynes
MK3 5HP

Dear Ms Klimek

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Holne Chase Primary School

Following my visit with Gillian Smith, Additional Inspector, to your school on 5–6 July 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 March 2012. 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

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 Milton Keynes.

Yours sincerely

Ken Bush

Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2012

- By December 2012 improve the quality of teaching and learning so that all pupils make at least satisfactory progress in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - raising expectations of what all pupils can achieve, particularly boys and pupils with special educational needs
 - using assessment information to plan work that closely and consistently matches the needs and abilities of all groups of pupils
 - providing pupils with clear and regular verbal and written advice to help them improve their work rapidly
 - updating teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching phonics and in developing reading and writing skills across the curriculum
 - giving staff more opportunities to share and build on good practice.

- As a matter of urgency, generate greater capacity for sustaining school improvement by:
 - improving the skills of senior and middle leaders to rigorously monitor and drive improvement in the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress
 - developing the skills of the governing body to promote rapid school improvement and to hold the senior leadership team to account.

Special measures: monitoring of Holne Chase Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 5–6 July 2012

Evidence

The inspection team observed the school's work and scrutinised documents including the local authority post-inspection action plan, minutes of the most recent review meetings and relevant safeguarding documents. The school's most recent monitoring records and assessment data based on the school's tracking of pupils' progress were also considered as were other strategic documents. Learning sessions covering all year groups in the school were observed, some undertaken jointly with the interim headteacher. In addition to the interim headteacher, inspectors met with: senior and middle leaders; a group of pupils from Year 6; the Chair of the Governing Body; a senior local authority officer responsible for monitoring and evaluating the school's progress.

Context

Since the previous inspection in March, an interim headteacher has been appointed (initially on a two-term contract until December 2012) to replace the previous substantive headteacher, who left at the end of the Spring Term. In addition, an existing member of staff has been appointed as Assistant Headteacher on a temporary basis. The current substantive deputy headteacher will be leaving at the end of the Summer Term. There have been some changes to the membership of the governing body since the previous inspection; there is currently a vacancy for the Vice-Chair position.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Since the previous inspection there have been improvements in pupils' attainment both in Year 2 and Year 6. In the 2012 end of key stage assessments, pupils in Key Stage 1 reached standards which were at least broadly in line with national expectations and in some cases, exceeded them, including in reading. This reflects school tracking data and evidence from lesson observations which indicate that progress is strongest in this key stage. The, as yet, unvalidated Key Stage 2 results indicate an overall rise in standards compared with the very low attainment in 2011, albeit with some considerable variation for different groups. Attainment in mathematics at the national age-related expectation of level four and above remains broadly average, but in English, despite a marked improvement on the previous year, attainment is still below average in this measure. Boys, together with disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, attained better than in 2011, including at the higher level five. However, girls' attainment declined markedly in

both English and mathematics and is currently well below average compared to their counterparts nationally.

First-hand observation during the monitoring visit, scrutiny of pupils' work and evidence from the school's own data show that rates of progress across the school are steadily improving but vary markedly between year groups and, in some cases, classes within the same year group. Children continue to make at least satisfactory progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and there is evidence of improvement in their acquisition of knowledge about letter and sounds, a concern raised in the previous inspection report.

The quality of teaching

Observations undertaken during the monitoring visit, together with scrutiny of pupils' work suggest that over time, teaching is beginning to improve. This is most noticeable in Key Stage 1 where examples were seen of appropriate challenge and high expectations. On the second day of the visit, pupils were observed undertaking well-focused guided writing based on their trip to 'Gulliver's World' theme park the previous day. Given the opportunity to produce authentic writing for a specific purpose, pupils wrote with engagement and a good level of age-related technical proficiency, especially about the many types of dinosaur they had encountered. Pupils' confident use of features such as time connectives seen across three different classes indicates that secure teaching of writing is developing steadily.

Planning, although improving gradually, remains a key weakness, and consequently, tasks are still not consistently pitched at the right level for many pupils. Lesson plans generally make reference to work for different ability groups but this is rarely seen in lesson delivery and is often superficial. Planning also tends to be based on a narrow range of tasks and so opportunities for creativity and independent learning are limited. The use of marking as a means to stretch individual pupils is at a very early stage although there are promising signs in the greater use made of the 'Tickled Pink: Go for Green' strategy to provide more detailed advice for pupils about how to improve their work. Again, however, this is not yet applied consistently enough across all classes.

School leaders have rightly focused on responding to the shortcomings highlighted in the previous inspection report on the teaching of reading. All classes now have a daily 'Guided Reading' slot on the timetable and staff have received intensive training on how to deliver this in a coherent manner. This, along with special events such as the 'Reading Tea', has already had the effect of raising the profile of reading with staff, pupils and parents and carers. Leaders are aware that they now need to ensure that the raised expectations implicit in the 'Guided Reading' programme are consistently met as some unevenness of implementation was seen during the monitoring visit.

Progress since the previous inspection on the area for improvement relating to teaching—satisfactory.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils continue to demonstrate mostly positive attitudes to learning and to school life generally. They are typically courteous to staff, to visitors and to one another. This was exemplified during the monitoring visit in a very successful assembly. Conduct, both en route to and during the assembly was of a high standard and pupils enthusiastically showed their encouragement and support to recipients of the weekly awards system. Through such activities, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is securely promoted.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Early signs of improving teaching and better achievement show that the school has begun to move in the right direction under the effective leadership of the interim headteacher. She has used her extensive experience adroitly in assessing the school's culture since the previous inspection and correctly judged that staff needed time to regain confidence in their professional abilities after a period of instability in leadership and the resulting low morale. She has gained the confidence of staff, parents and carers and of the governing body rapidly. Her calm, reflective and purposeful approach has avoided 'quick fixes', but rather, has emphasised the need to work towards sustainable improvement through establishing clear routines and overhauling essential systems. Consequently, assessment and monitoring and evaluation procedures are now much improved.

A further key element of the well-conceived improvement strategy has been to identify and build upon existing leadership capacity. Newly appointed leaders such as the temporary assistant headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator are now beginning to get to grips with improving provision and are rising to the challenges being set for them. However, the governing body is acutely aware that it needs to ensure that current temporary leadership arrangements remain effective when the necessary task of increasing the frequency and rigour of monitoring and evaluation begins in the new academic year; this will be essential to accelerate the pace of improvement.

The governing body has begun the task of developing its capacity soundly through an intensive self-review process and the identification of clear improvement priorities. Consequently, it is now starting to hold the school to account more effectively. However, in order to accelerate this process, it recognises that as a matter of urgency there needs to be in place a robust monitoring tool to record emerging strengths more clearly and to inform further areas for development with greater precision.

Although it was not highlighted in the previous inspection report as a specific weakness, the curriculum at present is limited and offers few opportunities for the development of basic skills beyond discrete English and mathematics lessons. The Year 6 pupils spoken to during the monitoring visit were critical of the narrowness which they felt characterised much of their learning in the present academic year. Moreover, some reported that they felt under-prepared for the demands of the secondary curriculum, especially in foundation subjects such as history, geography and design technology, which have played only a minor part in the Year 6 programme of study.

Progress since the previous inspection on the area for improvement relating to leadership and management—satisfactory.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is comprehensive and fit-for-purpose. The local authority has also brokered a useful partnership with a Local Leader in Education (LLE) which contributed effectively to stabilising the day-to-day running of the school at a difficult time just prior to the school going into Special Measures. The school led by the LLE continues to support Holne Chase in the Early Years Foundation Stage and through provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. The ongoing challenge and support provided by local authority officers is well regarded and effective.

Further priority

- Improve the quality and impact of the curriculum so that:
 - basic skills in literacy and numeracy are taught more effectively in a wider range of subjects
 - pupils in all classes, but especially in Key Stage 2, are as well prepared for secondary education in foundation subjects as in key subjects.