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Friday 21 September 2012

Ms Elizabeth Caldwell
The Headteacher
New Road School and Nursery Unit
Bryant Street
Chatham
Kent
ME4 5QN

Dear Ms Caldwell

Special measures: monitoring inspection of New Road Primary School and Nursery Unit

Following my visit to your school on 19 and 20 September 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 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 the 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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Medway.

Yours sincerely

Melanie Knowles
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the leadership and management of the school by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders provide relevant and timely information to the governing body so that governors are better prepared to challenge and interrogate performance, and so make informed decisions
 - making sure that middle managers are proactive and rigorous in their roles, have a clear focus on pupils' progress and are held more to account by senior leaders
 - ensuring that the senior team maintains an overview of all that happens in the school and a much sharper insight into pupils' learning and progress.

- Enhance the rate of pupils' progress, especially in Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics, by:
 - improving the systems for tracking pupils' learning so that underachieving individuals and groups are identified quickly
 - intervening promptly to support pupils who are falling behind in order to raise attainment.

- Raise the quality of teaching to 75% good or better by July 2012, by:
 - providing a pace of teaching that is rapid enough to secure a good pace of learning for pupils in each class
 - making sure that teachers use assessment information effectively to pitch work at the right level to challenge all pupils in their class
 - improving the consistency of good marking and use of targets in order to ensure that all learners know how they can improve.

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 19 and 20 September 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed 13 lessons jointly with the headteacher, scrutinised documents and met with members of staff, a parent or carer, two members of the Interim Executive Board, a representative from the local authority and a group of pupils from Key Stage 2.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the reorganisation of the leadership team has taken place as planned and three key stage leaders are now in post. Two of these staff are new to the school. Two other new teachers have joined the school, replacing staff that left at the end of the summer term. Pupil groupings have been rearranged so that there are now four classes in Key Stage 1 and six classes in Key Stage 2. Building work to enhance the outside areas has been completed. There is a new outdoor classroom for Key Stage 2 pupils and a landscaped outside play area for the Early Years Foundation Stage unit.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The outcomes of the end of year assessments in the Early Years Foundation Stage were disappointing and were below those that had been expected. When the school's assessments were moderated by the local authority, the adviser found that teachers did not always have enough evidence to support their judgements and some of their evidence was presented in a confused way. The headteacher and the new phase leader have acted quickly to address weaknesses in assessment procedures and in teaching. Both are confident that this situation will not be repeated. The local authority is supporting the training of staff to ensure that the assessments made as children start in the Nursery or in Reception are accurate.

Elsewhere in the school, teachers' assessments indicate that many pupils made accelerated progress last year. Scrutiny of pupils' work by a local authority adviser at the end of the academic year validated the school's judgements. Work seen during the monitoring inspection also confirmed that teachers' assessments were broadly accurate. Attainment in Year 2 improved last year, particularly in reading and the proportion of pupils attaining Level 2 or above in writing rose by a fifth. However, although the gap narrowed, overall outcomes for pupils at the end of Year 2 remained below the national average. In Year 6, the proportion of pupils who attained the higher Level 5 in English and mathematics rose. The vast majority of pupils made expected progress from their starting points and many made good progress.

Pupils' achievement was not consistently good in the lessons seen during the monitoring inspection because the pace of learning sometimes slowed. Teachers rightly spent time reinforcing high expectations of behaviour with their new classes. They insisted on a quiet working atmosphere and did not tolerate pupils shouting out answers to questions or interrupting each other.

Revised performance management procedures ensure that teachers understand their accountability for pupils' progress. Key stage leaders have oversight of pupils' progress data for their phases and have regular discussions with staff at weekly team meetings. Any underachievement is spotted quickly. The deputy headteacher has introduced a new system to track the progress of any pupils receiving additional targeted support. She also has plans to visit lessons this term to monitor additional provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs in class.

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

- Enhance the rate of pupils' progress, especially in Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics – satisfactory

The quality of teaching

There has been considerable change to the teaching staff this term. Five new teachers have joined the school and some existing staff have changed to different year groups. All are settling well and building good working relationships with their pupils. Although fewer consistently good lessons were seen on this occasion, there were many positive features to the teaching seen during the monitoring inspection. For example, teachers know the level of attainment of all pupils in their new class. As a result, in most of the lessons seen, teachers planned activities that were pitched at the right level for pupils. The presentation of work in pupils' books also showed improvement. Marking continues to be of a high standard. All teachers, including those who are very experienced, were keen to seek feedback on the quality of their teaching during the monitoring inspection and all were reflective and self-critical about their practice.

During the monitoring inspection, several teachers planned opportunities for pupils to work together in mixed-ability groups. On some occasions, the organisation of the activity or the arrangement of the group around a table inhibited good learning. All teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to write, but there is not always a clear purpose for writing. In the most successful sessions, teachers structure learning carefully and link work in literacy to other areas of the curriculum. This leads to increased enthusiasm for writing and high quality outcomes. For example, in a Year 6 lesson the teacher and teaching assistant acted out a humorous scene where a new dog owner asked for advice on how to care for her pet. The teacher emphasised the need for clear instructions and then gave pupils the opportunity to practise this themselves, working in pairs. By the end of 20 minutes, pupils understood exactly how they could succeed in writing precise instructions and were

ready to write. As one pupil said, 'The acting was really funny, but we always knew what we were learning.'

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

- Raise the quality of teaching to 75% good or better by July 2012 – satisfactory

Behaviour and safety of pupils

A single behaviour management system is now applied across the school, so that all pupils from the Early Years Foundation Stage up to Year 6 understand the consequences of any misbehaviour. Some pupils with statements of special educational needs for behaviour have designated support assistants working alongside them in lessons. These assistants are skilled at unobtrusively supporting these pupils, while encouraging independence and self-discipline. To supplement this good work, the school has recently recruited a new behaviour mentor who is timetabled to work with those pupils who have significant problems in managing their behaviour. It is too soon to judge the impact of her work.

Pupils are settling into their new classes and adjusting to the high expectations of their new teachers. During the monitoring inspection, there was some low level chatter and 'off task' behaviour in lessons and pupils needed reminders about listening to the teacher's instructions and to each other. This tended to slow the pace of learning in some lessons. All teachers, without exception, reacted quickly to the slightest disruption and were consistent in their application of the school's behaviour policy.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and the interim executive board have successfully managed a period of significant change to the school leadership team and organisation of teaching groups. Morale in the school has remained high and there has been no loss of momentum in the drive to improve the school. New members of staff are settling well and say they have found their colleagues and managers very approachable and supportive. Senior leaders have introduced a new system for the performance management of staff based on the new teaching standards. All teachers have clear performance targets appropriate for their role and experience.

The new key stage leaders have made an impressive start. They have swiftly built good working relationships in their teams and have accurately assessed the strengths and weaknesses in their phases. They have drawn up clear action plans to address the areas of weakness and have already begun to implement them. They have also assessed their own development needs and have been proactive in requesting support where needed.

The new school development plan for the current academic year continues to focus on improving teaching and learning and pupils' achievement and has clear priorities and measurable targets for improvement. Other subsidiary action plans drawn up by subject leaders are more closely linked to the main plan and most include strategies to measure the impact of actions. However, all plans lack clear timelines and so it is difficult to see when the planned actions will happen and how long it will be before they are completed.

The interim executive board meets regularly and minutes of meetings show that the board acknowledges and celebrates successes while maintaining its ongoing challenge to school leaders to secure further improvement. All members of the board are very knowledgeable and well informed about all aspects of school life and relationships between the headteacher and the board are clearly good. The interim executive board has begun to plan for the handover to an elected governing body. It is envisaged that this will take place in September 2013.

Senior and middle leaders have planned a wide range of monitoring activities. These include visits to lessons, discussions with pupils and scrutiny of pupils' workbooks and teachers' planning. New key stage leaders have already carried out some joint monitoring activities with an officer from the local authority. The headteacher has changed the way in which she records information during lesson observations. The new format ensures that any action points agreed with teachers are recorded so that they can be followed up later.

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

- Improve the leadership and management of the school – good

External support

Support from the local authority is effective because it is planned jointly with the school and responds flexibly to need. For example, joint monitoring with the new key stage leaders early this term built their confidence and ensured the momentum of school improvement was maintained. Staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage will be receiving tailored support over the coming term.