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Mrs Judith Barratt
Acting Headteacher
The Grange Primary School
Avocet Way
Banbury
Oxfordshire
OX16 9YA

Dear Mrs Barratt

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Grange Primary School

Following my visit with Sheila Boyle, Additional inspector, to your school on 27–28 September 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures. Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed. Following required amendments, the Statement of Action provided by the local authority is fit for purpose.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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 Oxfordshire and as below.

Yours sincerely

James Henry

Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment and improve pupils' progress in English and mathematics by:
 - ensuring that pupils are more actively involved in lessons, rather than spending extended periods listening to teachers
 - making sure pupils are provided with more opportunities to practise and apply their basic skills of numeracy and literacy across the curriculum
 - improving the teaching of phonics, so adults model the sounds correctly, insist that pupils do the same, and make sure the pace of activities is brisk and lively
 - improving the use of the outdoor areas to promote the communication, language and mathematical skills of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

- Improve teachers' use of assessment to ensure teaching is at least good by:
 - using accurate data on pupils' progress to provide tasks and activities that are specifically tailored to the needs of individual pupils and groups, and which address any gaps in learning
 - checking regularly on pupils' learning during lessons, to tackle any misconceptions and focus on what pupils need to learn rather than on tasks to complete
 - having a consistent approach to marking and feedback
 - setting clear targets to identify the next steps for individuals and groups
 - tracking pupils' progress more frequently and setting ambitious targets for what pupils can achieve each year and by the end of the key stage.

- Ensure that the school's leaders at all levels, including the governing body, take concerted action to speed up the pace of improvement by:
 - providing a clear structure of leadership for senior and middle leaders, with clear roles and responsibilities for all
 - devising a sharply focused improvement plan which sets out explicitly what must be achieved and includes clear means of measuring success
 - implementing a rigorous programme of monitoring and evaluation of teaching that is followed up with high quality support for all staff
 - checking that agreed teaching strategies are implemented in all classrooms
 - holding teachers closely to account for pupils' progress, including that of significant groups
 - ensuring that all safeguarding procedures are overseen, updated and monitored effectively.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 27–28 September 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, senior staff and a group of pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. They also visited 20 lessons or part lessons and observed 10 teachers.

Context

There have been changes in the leadership of the school since the last inspection. The substantive deputy headteacher is now the acting headteacher and a senior member of staff is the acting deputy headteacher. There is also a newly appointed Chair of the Governing Body. A new Early Years Foundation Stage leader from the local authority teacher advisory service has been appointed on a temporary basis. For the longer term, the school has appointed an experienced teacher to lead the Early Years Foundation Stage, who will take up the post on a permanent basis in January 2013. A new Key Stage 1 leader has also been appointed, as well as three other class teachers and a part-time teacher to be responsible for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.

The governing body is advertising to appoint a permanent headteacher.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Attainment in 2012 rose at the end of Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics and at the end of Key Stage 2 in reading and writing. However attainment in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 remained similar to the 2011 results which were in line with the national average. Results in 2012 also show an increase in the number of pupils achieving higher levels at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. This is beginning to narrow the gap between the proportions of the school's pupils achieving the higher levels of attainment at the end of each key stage and national figures. There is a trend of rising attainment across the school because all groups of pupils, including disabled pupils or those with special educational needs, are beginning to make accelerated progress. Lesson observations show that this is in part due to pupils becoming more actively involved in lessons. For example, in a mixed age class of Year 5 and Year 6 pupils mathematics lesson, pupils were working independently, discussing the method used to calculate number problems and making good progress through learning from each other. However, this is not consistent across the school. Too many pupils are passive in their learning, for example, through simply completing tasks based on worksheets, with missed opportunities for them to take responsibility for their own learning. School data show that pupils make better progress in writing and mathematics in upper Key Stage 2 than in lower Key Stage 2 classes.

Senior leaders have focused on ensuring that pupils improve their basic skills in discrete English and mathematics lessons. There are opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills in other subjects. However, the school is at a very early stage of developing a consistent and coordinated approach to giving pupils opportunities to practise their English and mathematical skills across the curriculum.

A new system to develop pupils' basic reading skills is set to be introduced. Lesson observations show that a positive start has been made in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 in teaching younger pupils sounds and early reading skills but this is not consistent across the school.

There have been very positive improvements in the physical environment in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Staff now use outdoor areas more effectively to support children's learning. However, this has not had time to make a full impact on promoting children's communication, language and mathematical skills.

The quality of teaching

There have been improvements in the quality of teaching since the last inspection. This is in part due to a consistent approach across the school in the planning and structure of lessons. For example, teachers always now share with pupils the purpose of lessons and provide guidance on how to achieve what they are expected to learn. Teachers are more regularly using data from assessments to identify different ability groups. Consequently planning is now more effective in ensuring that tasks meet the needs of different groups and this is beginning to increase the rate at which pupils learn in lessons.

As a result of lessons now being more clearly focused on pupils' needs, teachers are starting to use more effective question and answer sessions to assess pupils' understanding and correct misconceptions. While this is used with differing levels of success across the school, it is starting to address the legacy of pupils simply completing tasks rather than being involved in their learning.

Teachers mark pupils work regularly and with appropriate use of praise. There are examples in pupils' books of some good marking, with effective comments and feedback to help them take the next steps in their learning. However, this good practice is not embedded across the curriculum and the quality of marking is particularly inconsistent in mathematics.

Pupils have group targets to help them understand how to move on in their learning. However these are not consistently applied in different classes and are not regularly used to support pupils' learning in lessons.

The school has a comprehensive system for tracking pupils' progress. Using this tracking procedure, senior leaders have set ambitious targets for the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in 2013. School assessments and lesson observations of pupils' progress in Key Stage 2 show that, while they are on track to achieve these targets in reading and writing, all groups of pupils will have to make accelerated progress in Year 6 to achieve the target set in mathematics.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave well both in lessons and generally around the school. Staff manage pupils' behaviour well and in the lessons observed there was no disruption to learning through inappropriate behaviour. This was partly due to pupils being more effectively involved in lessons rather than spending too long listening to teachers. Pupils feel safe in school and those who spoke to inspectors said that bullying in any form is rare. They have confidence in staff to deal with any concerns that may arise.

Pupils are keen to learn. They are polite and courteous and respond well to staff when corrected.

Attendance continues to be high, with almost all pupils being punctual for school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, ably supported by the reorganised governing body, have brought a new drive and ambition to improve teaching and accelerate the rate at which pupils learn. Even though the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher are fulfilling their roles on a temporary basis, there are now clear lines of responsibility for senior leaders within the school, especially with the appointment of a permanent Key Stage 1 leader and a part-time teacher with responsibility for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. However there has not been sufficient time for all senior staff to embed their new roles in the school and show the difference they make to the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement over time.

There are clear-cut and measurable action plans based on accurate self-evaluation and that focus on addressing the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The acting headteacher, supported by the local authority adviser and acting deputy headteacher, has made a positive start in identifying the strengths and weaknesses in teaching through accurate monitoring and evaluation. Subsequent strategies to improve the quality of teaching and planning have been introduced and monitored to ensure they have been implemented in lessons. Consequently teachers' planning of lessons is now more consistently structured to meet the needs of different groups of pupils, including higher attainers and disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, so that their progress is beginning to accelerate.

While the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have been taking the lead, the process of senior leaders managing the performance of teachers and holding them to account for the progress of pupils in their charge is at an early stage of development.

The governing body has made a positive start in becoming involved in the school, through providing more strategic guidance and in beginning to hold senior leaders to account for pupils' achievement. Committees have been reorganised to utilise the experience and skills of individual members in order to support the school and to help ensure the pace of improvement is maintained.

The governing body has been effective in working with the acting headteacher to ensure safeguarding meets requirements. Appropriate senior staff have undertaken child protection training. Safeguarding policies and procedures have been reviewed and updated, with new staff being inducted into the improved safeguarding procedures. Arrangements have been made to refresh safeguarding training for all staff. There are also examples of the new safeguarding arrangements having been put effectively into practice, with the school working closely with outside agencies to support individual pupils and their families.

External support

The local authority is providing a valuable level of support through substantial extra funding to support improvement initiatives. These include employing English and mathematics consultants and an experienced Early Years Foundation Stage teacher to improve teachers' planning and the delivery of lessons. In addition, extensive support has been provided to develop the knowledge and skills of the governing body to enable governors to hold senior leaders to account for the pace of improvement in the school. These initiatives are beginning to have a positive impact on raising pupils' achievement and improving the quality of leadership and management in the school.