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16 November 2012

Miss J Klimek
The Headteacher
Holne Chase Primary
School Road
Buckingham Roa
Milton Keynes
MK3 5HP

Dear Miss Klimek

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Holne Chase Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 14 and 15 November 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 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.

Progress since 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 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 second monitoring inspection on 14 and 15 November 2012

Evidence

The inspector 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 documents. Learning sessions covering all classes in the school were observed, mostly undertaken jointly with the headteacher. In addition to the headteacher, the inspector met with the special educational needs coordinator, four key stage team leaders, the literacy coordinator, two members of the governing body and a local authority officer responsible for monitoring and evaluating the school's progress.

Context

Since the previous inspection in March, the previously interim headteacher has been appointed as the substantive headteacher from January 2013. The colleague appointed as temporary assistant headteacher is no longer in this role, but continues as literacy coordinator. There is currently no deputy headteacher nor assistant headteacher. The senior leadership team comprises the headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator. Other colleagues fulfil middle leadership roles but are not in receipt of specific remuneration for this work in terms of teaching and learning responsibilities. There have been some changes to the membership of the governing body since the previous inspection, although the Chair of the Governing Body is the same. The previous vacancy for the vice-chair position has now been filled.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The provisional results achieved by Year 6 pupils, as reported at the last monitoring visit in July, are now validated. This confirms that attainment in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 rose from the previous year. At Key Stage 1, all outcomes were at least broadly average when compared with all pupils nationally, and in several instances were better. At Key Stage 2, attainment was broadly average but well below average in English at the Level 4 threshold and in reading at the higher Level 5 threshold. Progress, however, in all subjects and, notably in English, was significantly slower than in the majority of schools. The progress of boys overall was not as fast as that for girls. While the rate of progress overall, therefore, represented a marginal improvement on the previous year, for many pupils it was still too slow.

The school's assessment tracking information shows that pupils currently in the school, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, continue to make better progress in reading, writing and in mathematics, when taken as a whole, than those in the recent past. However, there remain wide variations when comparing different classes and year groups. Progress is most rapid in Key Stage 1 as a result of consistently effective teaching. In Key Stage 2, the legacy of underachievement identified when the school went into special measures is still evident to some extent in most classes. Although, where teaching is stronger, pupils are beginning to catch up. Across the school, progress is notably weaker in writing than in reading and school leaders have rightly identified this as the key aspect in need of most urgent improvement, including in Year 6.

The quality of teaching

Evidence from the monitoring visit indicates strongly that teaching is improving in most classes and the specific areas identified as in need of improvement as a result of the inspection in March 2012 are being addressed. School leaders have succeeded in raising teachers' expectations and this is clearly evident in better planning, including for the needs of different groups. The expected learning is now routinely displayed in classrooms in a form pupils can readily understand, along with the factors pupils need to take into account in order to complete tasks successfully. Teachers are beginning to match work more closely to pupils' different abilities, although some are conspicuously more successful at doing this consistently than others.

The teaching of phonics (letters and sounds) has improved significantly and in the Early Years Foundation Stage is secure. This leads to pupils getting off to a good start in their reading skills, as seen in the encouraging results in last year's Year 1 phonics screening check. In Key Stage 2, most teachers are able to make effective use of phonic techniques in their teaching, where needed, to address gaps in pupils' decoding skills. However, for some pupils, the limitations in their phonics skills impede their literacy development, especially in writing.

The quality of feedback given to pupils is improving. At its best, marking provides pupils with clear guidance about how they should improve their work. However, there is still some unevenness in how well this is done in different classes. Opportunities for pupils to respond to marking are limited.

Guided reading continues to have a high profile in the school. All year groups have a well organised daily 30 minute session and have ample opportunities to develop their reading skills in a variety of ways. These include spending time reading and talking about books with an adult, and undertaking independent reading. Pupils spoken to during the visit, including a number of boys, were largely very positive about the impact of guided reading, stating that it helps them to become more confident and proficient readers and also that they now enjoy reading for pleasure more. The teaching of guided reading is improving, but there is still variability in how well different teachers ensure that the needs of all readers are securely met,

especially in Key Stage 2. During the monitoring visit, low ability readers made less progress than their peers in the guided reading session because they were allowed too much scope in how to spend their time, with insufficient direction. Consequently, some spent too much time drawing pictures or scanning book covers using tablet computers, rather than actually reading or developing other literacy skills.

- Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement relating to the quality of teaching – satisfactory.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave consistently well at Holne Chase, as was reported at the last monitoring visit. They have mostly very positive attitudes to learning, are keen to participate actively in lessons and take responsibility for their own actions in a mature fashion, even when teaching is less than good. Conduct around the school at play times and lunchtimes is routinely of high quality. Pupils are courteous to staff and visitors alike.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher continues to provide a clear direction for the school, which is making a positive impact in helping it move towards long-term sustainable improvement. Staff morale is high and the staff and leaders spoken to during the monitoring visit were unanimous in their view that the school has improved since the school went into special measures. Staff reported that their views and contribution to school life are valued. They also appreciate the opportunities that have been given to develop their leadership skills both in existing roles (such as being team leaders of different year groups) and new ones, such as in curriculum teams. However, while leadership capacity as a whole is improving, it is still limited.

The school has responded well to the additional priority highlighted in the previous monitoring visit to improve the breadth of the curriculum to enable pupils to be better prepared for the demands of secondary education. Foundation subjects now have a clearer place in the weekly programme for all year groups and the topic-based approach is proving popular with pupils. Since this change was implemented only at the start of term, its impact upon the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement is not yet evident, but the early signs are promising. Opportunities to use topic time to reinforce the development of literacy and numeracy skills are not yet being fully utilised.

Since the last visit, a new school improvement plan is in place. This is largely well conceived, aligns well with the school's main priorities for improvement and shows clearly who is responsible for ensuring that the required actions are undertaken. However, the criteria for measuring the success of these actions are not specified clearly enough in terms of outcomes; this is, therefore, an obstacle in enabling leaders and governors to monitor and evaluate progress with sufficient accuracy and precision. In a similar way, the school's tools for evaluating the quality of teaching

provide ample evidence of the process of teaching, but not enough about its impact upon learning.

In the immediate aftermath of the school going into special measures, it became apparent that the systems for tracking pupil progress were not entirely fit for purpose. These have now been overhauled and a more robust system is emerging. However, there is not yet a clear enough picture of how well pupils are performing over time and the extent of catch up needed in order for them to achieve in line with national rates for expected and better than expected progress.

The governing body has been too slow in getting to grips with its role in monitoring and evaluating how well the school is doing and specifically how rapidly improvement is occurring. This is partly because performance information was incomplete or inaccurate and the evaluative tools were not fully in place. However, inspection evidence indicates that this is now being addressed and there is a renewed vigour in the governing body. Clear and comprehensive protocols for monitoring visits have been created, the committee tasked with monitoring school performance meets more frequently and additional governing body training is planned to boost its capacity. The governing body is also aware that the current lack of leaders of sufficient seniority and experience is restricting the capacity for improvement to proceed more rapidly than is currently the case. This includes ensuring that consistently high quality teaching is in place to accelerate rates of progress, notably, but not exclusively, in Year 6. The local authority continues to provide useful support for the school and is also committed to ensuring that the school has sufficient leadership capacity to move forward as rapidly as it should.

- Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement relating to leadership and management – satisfactory.