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Mrs N Kandola
Headteacher
Avenue Primary School
Avenue Road Extension
Leicester
LE2 3EJ

Dear Mrs Kandola

Special measures monitoring inspection of Avenue Primary School

Following my visit with Edgar Hastings, Additional Inspector to your school on 16 and 17 January 2013, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

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.

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.

Two newly qualified teachers (NQTs) may be appointed for the start of the next school year in September 2013 provided that:

- the headteacher establishes a structured induction policy for new staff
- a member of the senior leadership team takes responsibility for the supervision of NQTs
- each NQT works in partnership with a member of staff who is a good teacher
- the governors and local authority pay close attention to the progress of the NQTs.

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 Leicester.

Yours sincerely

Tim Bristow

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching and accelerate the progress made by all pupils, but particularly for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils in Year 2, by:
 - making effective use of assessment data to set suitably challenging targets and activities for all groups of pupils
 - checking on pupils' learning more frequently during lessons so that activities can be adapted to their individual needs
 - ensuring that teachers' marking clearly shows pupils what they need to do to improve their work and meet their targets
 - ensuring that teaching assistants contribute to pupils' learning in lessons.

- Ensure leaders and managers at all levels, including members of the governing body, accurately evaluate and rapidly improve the quality of education pupils receive and their achievement by:
 - urgently improving the systems used to manage and monitor teaching and learning so that more teaching becomes good or better and underachievement is eradicated
 - collating and analysing information about pupils' attainment and progress more effectively so that any underachievement is quickly identified and addressed
 - improving teachers' understanding of pupils' performance data so that they identify the most important areas for improvement and use assessment information confidently to plan the next step in learning for individuals.

- Ensure that attendance improves further by carefully monitoring and promoting the attendance of all pupil groups.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 16-17 January 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the governing body, groups of pupils, a parent, staff, local authority representatives and the headteacher of a local school who provides mentor support.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection the deputy headteacher has left the school. The assistant headteacher has been appointed as deputy headteacher. Another teacher has also left the school. Currently there are four teachers working on temporary contracts to replace teachers who have left the school or are absent for other

reasons. New leaders have been appointed (who have responsibility for Key Stage 1 and Years 3 and 4) on a temporary basis. The special educational needs coordinator and the coordinator for pupils who speak English as an additional language are also recent appointments.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Year 4 has accelerated in reading, writing and mathematics and more closely matches the better progress made by pupils in Years 5 and 6. In Year 2, assessment information shows that standards are much closer to average than last year. This is because teaching overall is improving. In Year 3, progress remains slow. In some Year 3 lessons, pupils benefit from good teaching. However, too many of their lessons are weaker than this and because of poor teaching when they were in Year 2 they are not making the progress necessary to narrow the gap between current standards and those expected for their age.

One impressive change since the last monitoring inspection is the improvement in the quality of learning for children in all Early Years Foundation Stage classes. Children are learning and playing very well together. They concentrate for long periods on a broad range of exciting and stimulating activities. Social, speaking and listening, literacy and numeracy skills are developing well.

Since the last monitoring visit, well organised phonics lessons (reading lessons where pupils learn how to link letters and sounds) for all pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 have been developed. These are contributing to the acceleration in pupils' progress.

A significant minority of pupils speak English as an additional language. They make similar progress to other pupils because of the general improvement in teaching. However, because of their lower starting points they are making insufficient progress to narrow the gap between their standards and those expected nationally. This is because the additional help provided at Key Stage 2 is ineffective. Work is not tailored specifically to meet the needs of these pupils.

The quality of teaching

The headteacher, ably supported by governors and the local authority, has driven improvements to teaching. All the teachers who have been on the staff since the inspection are demonstrating strengthened teaching. The proportion of lessons where teaching is good or better is growing. Some teachers have left the school. Until permanent appointments can be made the school has understandably had to make some temporary appointments. These appointments are recent and the quality of teaching is weaker than across the rest of the school. Plans are in place to support these teachers, but they have yet to have an impact.

Teachers demonstrate a greater understanding of how to use information about pupils to plan lessons that are more challenging and better meet the needs of pupils of different abilities. The groups that benefit the most are those of lower or average ability. More-able pupils receive less attention from teachers and teaching assistants when they are working by themselves. This means that they are not challenged enough to improve the quality of their work.

In some lessons, teachers have not yet got the balance right between the time pupils are expected to listen to instructions and the time they have to do their work. Often in the lessons where this occurs, too much time is spent giving pupils instructions that are not relevant to the work they will be doing.

There is an increasing proportion of good marking. The marking policy ensures a greater consistency in the praise and advice offered to pupils. For example, in a Year 4 class, pupils are also given time in lessons to respond to the teacher's comments. This helps them to consolidate their learning. They also benefit from opportunities to take responsibility by judging the quality of their own work. In some classes it is not yet as useful as it needs to be because the advice is not linked to the targets that all pupils have. This means that while pupils know what their targets are the advice given does not help them to understand what it is they have to do to achieve them.

Teaching assistants are now much more effective than they were. The support that pupils receive when they work with them is making a strong contribution to the improved quality of learning in lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

In most lessons pupils behave well, they work hard and try to do their best. In some lessons the behaviour is very impressive. For example, in a Year 6 philosophy lesson where the teaching and behaviour were outstanding, pupils sat in a circle listening to each other's extremely thoughtful views attentively. Not only was the promotion of pupils spiritual, moral and social development outstanding, but they were developing reasoning and debating skills to a very high standard.

Attendance continues to improve and is now just above average. Administration, leadership and governance of attendance are effective.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and deputy headteacher demonstrate effective leadership skills. They have eradicated all the inadequate leadership. The challenge they are currently facing is developing the skills of the new leaders who demonstrate enthusiasm and an understanding of what they have to do, but are inexperienced. They have all made a promising start. For example, the special educational needs coordinator and

the coordinator for pupils who speak English as an additional language have carried out a check on the additional activities to support these groups of pupils. They have scrutinised the assessment information so that they have accurate plans in place to improve teaching and learning.

The school development plan and the procedures to improve the quality of teaching and to check the progress of pupils are now much more useful management tools and are underpinning the improvements in leadership. Procedures to check pupils' work and the quality of teaching are carried out regularly, but they are not sufficiently well coordinated so that all leaders involved in this work link the steps to improve teaching with the priorities in the development plan.

Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage has strengthened. The local authority has given very effective help here. Plans are in place to reduce the level of this support so that the school can demonstrate that it can now sustain further improvements unaided.

The curriculum for English in particular is improving. However, some new aspects are being introduced, such as the new spelling strategies, which could distract leaders and teachers from the priority to improve the teaching and learning of the existing curriculum.

The governing body is becoming a strength of the school. Governors demonstrate a competent understanding of the measures that indicate that the school is improving. They offer the headteacher and other leaders a good balance of support and challenge. Plans are now in place to check how well the funds provided for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals are used. They regularly scrutinise the school improvement plan, but are not yet involved in the first stages of planning. This means that they are less involved in the strategic direction the school is taking because they are unable to challenge the headteacher at the start about the reasons for her priorities for school improvement.

External support

Leaders in Key Stage 1 have benefited from the advice and support from the headteacher of a partner school in particular in the development of phonics teaching. The local authority has also improved the quality of its support. The main success has been in the teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The headteacher has benefited from the visits made to check the progress of the school. Recommendations made after these visits are useful. The school is dealing with some difficult staffing issues and the human resources department is giving effective support.