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Shirley Stapleton
Headteacher
The Ashbeach Primary School
Ashbeach Drove
Ramsey St Mary's
Huntingdon
PE26 2TG

Dear Mrs Stapleton

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Ashbeach Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20–21 February 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 June 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.

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 Cambridgeshire.

Yours sincerely

Michael Sheridan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment and ensure that all pupils make at least satisfactory progress in reading, writing and mathematics in Years 3 to 6 by:
 - improving pupils' skills in constructing sentences, punctuation and spelling and increasing opportunities for reading and writing at length, including when pupils use the outdoor learning facilities as a stimulus for writing
 - developing and consolidating basic calculation skills and their application to solving mathematical problems
 - ensuring that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are set challenging tasks that enable them to make faster progress
 - developing a whole school approach to teaching handwriting and correct letter formation in order to improve the neatness and legibility of pupils' work
 - ensuring that pupils respond to teachers' guidance when their work is marked in order to improve standards.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that none is inadequate and much is good or better by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils of all abilities can achieve, especially the more able
 - planning more opportunities for pupils to develop literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum
 - ensuring pupils have enough time in lessons to complete challenging tasks which take account of their different learning needs.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels by:
 - developing the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders and subject leaders so that they rigorously and effectively evaluate teaching, learning and the curriculum and play an active part in driving forward priorities for improvement
 - involving the governing body in evaluating school improvement and the impact of actions on raising achievement, ensuring that its members challenge and hold leaders to account.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 20–21 February 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, middle leaders, groups of pupils, members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and the headteacher from a local outstanding school who is providing additional support. The inspector also talked to several parents or carers after they dropped their children at school.

Context

One teacher has left the school and one teacher started work in January. The leadership responsibility for mathematics has moved and now lies with the deputy headteacher. The deputy headteacher was absent from work during this visit.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement is beginning to improve because teaching is getting better. Basic skills such as handwriting, spelling and number facts are practised much more frequently. The school day is better organised so there is less time wasted. This additional time is used to secure important skills and this is starting to have an impact on the quality of written work in books and on pupils' ability to solve problems in mathematics.

Rates of progress are increasing in Years 2, 3 and 4, where teaching was previously weak. Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage continues to improve so that activities are planned for children at the right level. Phonics teaching is increasingly effective and pupils are using their knowledge of the sounds that letters make to become better readers and spellers.

In Year 6, girls are on track to reach above-average standards of attainment overall but too many boys remain off track for reaching the levels expected for their age. This gap between boys and girls is most noticeable in writing, where the Year 6 boys are about two years behind the girls. The progress of Year 5 pupils has slowed since the last visit. Additional support has been brought in from another school to support these two year groups further. This additional support is very new and the impact of this will be determined at the next monitoring visit.

Work in pupils' books shows that many pupils are beginning to make better progress in writing. However, the progress of the most able is too often limited because they are not sufficiently challenged in lessons.

Pupils who need additional support, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, make variable progress because the quality of the support they receive varies. Where these pupils do well, teachers and teaching assistants

have a good shared understanding of what they are trying to achieve and regularly plan support to take account of individual pupils' changing needs. However, support works less well when individual plans are out of date and adults offer general support without working towards particular goals.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving. The inadequacies observed during the last visit are being overcome. More teaching is good and there are fewer frailties. Teachers are using time more effectively to teach and practise important skills. As a result, pupils are becoming more confident with number facts and spelling familiar words. Teachers are getting better at asking questions that encourage pupils to think and explain their ideas. This is particularly effective in mathematics, where teachers encourage pupils to apply their knowledge of numbers to work out mathematical problems. By doing this kind of activity, pupils are developing a better understanding of mathematical concepts and learning to explain their thinking clearly and logically.

Marking is being used better to give pupils the opportunity to improve their work. However, this tends to be when a child has made a mistake. This means that more-able pupils do not get sufficient guidance to make their work even better. This is most notable in writing. Often teachers write a comment to congratulate a 'great' piece of work but do not go on to encourage the writer to make it better still. All marking is now legible and pupils are encouraged to comment on the marking to show that they have read it.

Teachers are more regularly setting different pieces of work for pupils of different abilities. This means that more-able pupils are being increasingly challenged by tasks and additional support is being provided for those who need it. Teaching assistants are becoming more skilled. They are thinking more about ways to help pupils understand their work. Some teaching assistants are increasingly using questions to challenge and support pupils. Where this is done well, pupils are encouraged to work and think hard.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is improving. Pupils engage well in their lessons and work hard. In one class, behaviour has improved a lot since the last monitoring visit. In this class, the teacher is more effective at managing behaviour through interesting tasks and higher expectations. This is having a significant impact on pupils making better progress in their lessons.

The school has taken action to tackle the bullying and name-calling issues identified at the last inspection. Special weeks have been arranged for pupils to learn about bullying and staying safe. Each class now has a regular personal, health and social education (PSHE) session where different issues are discussed.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leadership remains fragile. The deputy headteacher has recently taken over the role of mathematics leader and is yet to have any significant impact on this. The literacy leader continues to work with advisers from the local authority and is continuing to develop the consistency of teaching and the use of shorter sessions to practise basic skills. Handwriting is improving because it is now taught regularly and spelling is taught explicitly so pupils are becoming more confident using their skills to work out the spellings of unknown words.

Not enough is being done to test out the quality of leadership systems or to ensure that the substantial work being done by the local authority is being sustained. Senior leaders remain reliant on external support. The reason why teaching is improving now is because the local authority is providing a lot of support and guidance from advisers and through leaders from another local school.

Leaders are producing a lot of paper work but the impact this has on improving the outcomes for pupils is unclear. New systems have been introduced that duplicate existing systems. There is no overall strategy to ensure that leaders work together to drive up standards of attainment. Senior leaders continue to be distracted by peripheral issues. They do not systematically check the quality of work of other leaders so they do not know the impact of what they do. This means that some tasks are duplicated and some are completed without any clear understanding of their purpose.

Communication with parents is improving. Parents and carers say that the introduction of electronic mail means that they are more regularly in touch with what is happening in school. Parents and carers who spoke with inspectors are generally positive about the work of the school, although one suggested that more-able pupils are not stretched as much as they should be. Inspection evidence confirms this to be the case.

Governance continues to improve. The governing body willingly take advice from the local authority. They are starting to ask increasingly challenging questions of leaders in school. However, they still tend to accept the answers they are given without challenging senior leaders to support their assertions with evidence. Governors have ensured that performance management systems are in place and these are beginning to be used.

External support

The local authority has increased their support considerably since the last visit and this is having a positive impact on improving teaching and learning. Teachers and leaders talk very positively about the work they have done with advisers and

consultants. The impact of this work can be seen in pupils' books, as teachers act upon the advice they are given to improve their lessons. As a result, the achievement of pupils is beginning to improve.

The local authority has brokered links with other schools so that staff can learn from the expertise of others. Most importantly, they have arranged for an outstanding school to work closely with this school in providing models of good leadership and teaching. This partnership is beginning to provide additional leadership capacity and support for existing leaders to develop their roles.

The local authority recognises the need for leadership to improve rapidly. Monthly meetings are held to scrutinise the improvements being made. Minutes from these meetings show that governors and school leaders are left in no doubt about the imperative to improve quickly. The local authority is clear that school leaders must start to demonstrate an ability to maintain school improvement independently of external support. This remains some way off.

It will be essential by the next visit that:

- leaders are taking action to maintain and build upon the improvement work being driven by the local authority
- there is clear evidence of robust quality assurance and monitoring by senior leaders so that school improvements are seen to be effective, tasks have a clear purpose and leaders are very clear about the strengths and remaining weaknesses.