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Mrs Lizzie Blount
Headteacher
Croft Primary School
Station Road
Sutton-in-Ashfield
NG17 5FJ

Dear Mrs Blount

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Croft Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5–6 March 2013, 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 November 2011. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are 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 – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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 Nottinghamshire.

Yours sincerely

Dorothy Bathgate
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment and accelerate progress through the school, especially in mathematics, by ensuring that the teaching is consistently good, based on:
 - using information about the levels at which pupils are working to provide activities that match closely to their abilities and provide a good level of challenge
 - setting targets in literacy and numeracy which are known and understood by pupils and of which they have ownership
 - marking that informs pupils regularly of their achievements and the next steps in their learning.

- Strengthen the effectiveness of leadership and management across the school and provide support for the headteacher in her drive to raise attainment levels, by making sure that:
 - senior leaders have roles, responsibilities and accountability for moving the school forward in key aspects of school improvement, including the quality of teaching and learning and the use of assessment
 - middle leaders have greater impact on improving the outcomes in subjects for which they are responsible
 - the governing body monitors and evaluates the school's performance comprehensively so that it can challenge the school and influence its direction.

Special measures: monitoring of Croft Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 5–6 March 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, looked carefully at school documents and met with the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team, a group of pupils, representatives from the governing body, and the local authority education improvement adviser. The inspector visited 11 classes to observe teaching and learning.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, one member of staff who was employed on a temporary contract has left the school. This post is currently being covered by a long-term supply teacher.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Since the previous monitoring visit, the quality of pupils' learning has continued to improve. As a result, pupils' progress is improving and their attainment is rising. Pupils say that they enjoy their lessons and talk enthusiastically about the many exciting, practical activities they regularly enjoy. The rate of progress made by pupils across the school, including in mathematics, is accelerating and in some years it is good. First-hand evidence from lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work confirms that assessment data are accurate and almost all pupils are working at, or close to, age-related expectations.

Across the school, an increasing number of pupils identified as having special educational needs and those known to be eligible for free school meals are making good progress. This is because the good range of effective strategies used to help and guide pupils are monitored rigorously to ensure that their needs are being precisely met, and they receive good support and encouragement.

In Reception, children thrive on carefully planned activities that generate keen interest and enthusiasm. As a result, they make rapid progress. A sharp focus on the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) has helped children in Reception and pupils across Key Stage 1 to develop their early reading and writing skills. The school is currently reviewing the arrangements to help Reception children move smoothly into Year 1. For example, it is providing opportunities for Year 1 teachers to teach in Reception during the summer term, and giving them detailed information about the levels individual children are working at to ensure good continuity.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching and learning continues to improve, and this is enabling pupils to close gaps in their learning. Over half of the lessons observed during the monitoring visit were good or better. This is reflected in the school's own monitoring and that of the most recent local authority review. In the most successful lessons, key factors included high expectations, activities well matched to pupils' ability levels, the promotion of discussions to develop pupils' understanding, and probing questions to assess pupils' progress and challenge their thinking. As a result, pupils made accelerated learning and enjoyed these lessons greatly.

In the lessons that required improvement, the pace of learning was not sufficiently brisk because teachers talked for too long and the success criteria were not always defined sharply enough for different groups of pupils. As a result, progress was limited. Teaching assistants considerably enhance learning by leading small groups effectively and demonstrating good subject knowledge. Throughout the school, pupils are developing higher expectations for what they can achieve and are rising to them.

Teaching is increasingly based on accurate and regular assessments. These are constantly monitored so that if any pupil's progress is seen to be slow, plans can be modified and additional support provided immediately. Pupil progress review meetings provide good opportunities for staff to check assessment data and identify which pupils need more help and support.

Marking is good. Almost all teachers understand and consistently apply the requirements of the revised marking policy. Pupils are being provided with clear and more detailed academic guidance. They say that the new marking system and teachers' comments help them to understand what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils have good opportunities to respond to marking and learn from their mistakes, as well as to evaluate their own and other pupils' work.

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

- raise attainment and accelerate progress through the school, especially in mathematics, by ensuring that the teaching is consistently good – good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The pupils' behaviour was a positive feature of this inspection. Pupils are polite, welcoming and proud of their school. Their behaviour is consistently good in lessons and around the school. Pupils continue to say that they feel safe in school, and enjoy good friendships with no fear of intimidating behaviour.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

The headteacher, supported by the other members of the senior leadership team, is successfully transforming the school into a positive and stimulating learning environment. Everyone now plays a part in the rigorous procedures for checking on the effectiveness of all aspects of the school's work. All staff are being held accountable for their part in improving pupils' achievement. The systems for tracking pupils' progress at individual, group and whole-school level ensure that any underachievement is swiftly identified and immediate action taken to remedy it.

Responsibility is being successfully shared as staff build their skills in leadership, monitoring and evaluation. For example, subject leaders evaluate the quality of teaching in their subject areas through undertaking learning walks, as well as regularly checking pupils' work and teachers' planning. The deputy headteacher has now completed his phased return to work. He is aware of the significance of the role he needs to play in setting high expectations, and showing that he has the necessary skills to drive school improvement by ensuring consistently good or better lessons and raising attainment. Leaders at all levels are being challenged and held to account and as a result, leadership is strengthening throughout the school. Evidence from this monitoring visit confirms that leaders have been particularly effective in raising the quality of teaching and learning.

The representatives of the governing body report that the quality and clarity of information they receive are good, and this is giving them a clear understanding of the issues facing the school and the progress being made towards the challenging targets set. The governors offer practical support to the school, as well as increasing challenge to school leaders as they share their ambition for its success. They continue to ensure that national requirements, including those for safeguarding and child protection, are met well.

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

- strengthen the effectiveness of leadership and management across the school and provide support for the headteacher in her drive to raise attainment levels – good.

External support

The local authority continues to work effectively with the school and provides good-quality support. The education improvement adviser has a good overview of the school's work, and rigorously monitors its progress and the level of support required. Governors particularly appreciate the high-quality training provided, which has been precisely tailored to their needs. Productive partnership arrangements with other local schools are successfully supporting the improvements in teaching and learning.