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8 March 2013

Mrs Veronica Shaw
Acting Headteacher
Merdon Junior School
Merdon Avenue
Chandler's Ford
Eastleigh
SO53 1EJ

Dear Mrs Shaw

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Merdon Junior School

Following my visit to your school on Wednesday 6 to Thursday 7 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 January 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 – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

No more than two newly qualified teachers may 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 Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment in writing so that it matches that in reading and ensure pupils meet the levels expected for their age by:
 - using assessment information to plan lessons that are well matched to all pupils' abilities, particularly the most able
 - regularly reminding pupils during the lesson of their individual targets, as well as those for the whole lesson
 - developing teachers' marking so pupils understand exactly what to do to improve their work and know the next steps in their learning
 - providing greater opportunities for pupils to practise the skills they have learned in literacy lessons when writing in other subjects.

- Ensure pupils make at least the expected progress in English and mathematics by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what all pupils should be able to achieve
 - maintaining sufficient pace and challenge in lessons
 - checking pupils' progress regularly throughout the year so that underachieving pupils are identified quickly
 - intervening promptly in order to target support more effectively, especially for those pupils who are falling behind.

- Improve leaders' systematic monitoring and evaluation of the actions the school takes to remedy areas of weakness by:
 - ensuring improvement plans include rigorous measures of progress, tight deadlines and precise measures of success so that leaders can judge the progress the school is making
 - using assessment information effectively to set challenging targets for pupils' progress, eradicate underachievement and enable pupils to make good progress and achieve well.

Special measures: monitoring of Merdon Junior School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 6 and 7 March 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of documents and a sample of pupils' workbooks. The inspector met with the acting headteacher, the deputy headteacher (who is also the new special educational needs coordinator), the English manager, the Chair of the Governing Body and vice chair, the District Manager from the local authority and a group of pupils. The inspector observed the behaviour of pupils at play and at lunchtime. She spoke informally to parents and carers on the morning of the first day of the inspection.

Context

The newly appointed headteacher is due to begin working at the school in April 2013. The leadership team has been restructured. New managers for special educational needs and English have been appointed. One teacher has resigned and is due to leave at the end of this term. There is a class teacher on long-term sick leave whose class is being taught by two permanent members of staff.

Three parent governors and one community governor have left the governing body. A new community governor and two parent governors have been appointed.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Standards of reading, writing and mathematics are rising more rapidly and most pupils are now working at the levels expected for their age. Although the achievement of pupils is still not good enough, given pupils' starting points, it is nonetheless accelerating in most classes and for most pupils. Levels of attainment in writing are higher for girls than for boys across the school. The few pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, for whom the school receives additional funding through the pupil premium, are doing better than their peers in reading and writing, but slightly less well in mathematics. Additional support provided to disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is now appropriately focused on the right pupils. This is leading to pupils making better progress than was previously the case, particularly in reading. Parents and carers spoke favourably to the inspector about the changes recently introduced to improve the support for their children with additional needs.

There are more opportunities for all pupils to write during the course of the school day. Pupils were observed producing particularly good written work in Years 5 and 6. In Year 4, pupils were learning how to write an exciting introduction for a biography of an imaginary superhero. Pupils learnt not to give too much away in their

introductions but to include information that would captivate the reader's interest. As part of her introduction one pupil wrote '... believe you me, she is not the innocent little schoolgirl she first appears to be'.

Targets for writing help pupils to improve their work. However, in some classes, there is limited use of similar targets to support pupils' learning in mathematics. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to develop and use their mathematical skills in context. Pupils particularly appreciate practical and investigative work and told the inspector that their English and mathematics lessons are more enjoyable. Pupils are keen to achieve well, but some expressed concern about not having enough opportunities to progress equally as well in other subjects as they do in English and mathematics. They would also welcome learning more about other cultures, especially those within the United Kingdom.

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

- Raise attainment in writing so that it matches that in reading and ensure pupils meet the levels expected for their age – good
- Ensure pupils make at least the expected progress in English and mathematics – good

The quality of teaching

Teaching and support staff are working hard to implement changes introduced by the school. Most are doing this successfully, but a few still have some way to go to ensure their practice is securely good. Too much teaching still requires improvement but an increasing proportion is now good. The most effective teachers use assessment information well to plan lessons that are appropriately matched to pupils' abilities, particularly the most able. Those pupils at risk of underachieving are now identified more swiftly and are generally provided with effective additional support.

All teachers now ensure that learning objectives and success criteria are clearly displayed for all lessons. Typically, key vocabulary is displayed and clearly explained and pupils are encouraged to refer to their targets to help them with their learning, particularly in writing. However, teachers do not all transfer their good teaching skills to the teaching of all subjects. Consequently, they do not always check pupils' understanding and progress regularly enough during the course of all lessons. Some teachers still talk too much, and this slows the pace of learning and the level of pupils' engagement.

Where teaching in the school is best, typically in Years 5 and 6, pupils are enabled to become leaders of their learning and are helped to develop high expectations of themselves. Teachers typically make effective use of the interactive whiteboard to

motivate pupils and to demonstrate new concepts. However, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to use information and communication technology to support and enhance their learning in class-based lessons. All teachers now take greater responsibility for planning the learning for pupils with special educational needs. This group of pupils now receive more regular teaching from their class teachers and not just from learning support assistants. However, some learning support assistants have not received sufficient guidance and training to enable them to be confident in the support they provide to pupils who are more able.

The school has recently revised its policy about homework. However, from conversations with parents and carers, the school's policy has yet to be implemented equally as well for all classes.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils continue to say they feel safe at school and older pupils are aware of how to keep themselves safe, for example when using the internet. Most pupils apply themselves diligently to their learning. However, pupils become bored and their concentration wanes when their teachers spend too much time talking.

The vast majority of pupils play nicely together at break times. However, not all of the adults on duty in the playground at lunchtime pay sufficient attention to what is going on in their designated areas. Some pupils told the inspector that staff on duty in the playground at lunchtimes do not always intervene swiftly enough to help prevent minor disagreements from escalating.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The senior leadership team has been strengthened as a result of being reorganised. The leadership and management of English and special educational needs are much improved. There is now an appropriate focus on improving the teaching of grammar and spelling. The special educational needs policy has been revised and the register of pupils updated. Consequently, at least half of the pupils previously on the special educational needs register have now been removed. This is because either their needs have now been met or some pupils had previously been inaccurately identified due to former weaknesses in teaching.

The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher undertake rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and the progress different groups of pupils make. They compare the progress made by different classes within the same year group, and this has highlighted discrepancies between classes, particularly in Years 4 and 5. The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher make good use of information about pupils as well as their observations of teaching and learning to rigorously challenge weaknesses in teaching. Underachievement is being systematically eradicated, leading to the good progress seen on this visit. The higher

expectations of teaching and support staff have highlighted training implications for a range of staff.

Some staff told the inspector that communication within the school still needs to improve. They also believe there is a need for leaders and managers to follow up on the extent to which new initiatives, such as guided reading, are being consistently and successfully implemented.

Leaders and managers have developed a range of helpful improvement plans that set a clear sense of direction for the school. However, these plans do not all include interim timescales and precise measures so that progress can be closely monitored and checked. Leaders and managers have been more proactive in liaising with parents and carers, but recognise that there is still a way to go to ensure they have the full confidence of parents and carers in meeting the needs of their children.

The Chair of the Governing Body is providing strong and clear leadership to the governing body. Governance has been strengthened by the addition of new and experienced governors. The governors' action plan is linked to the school's single plan. However, the governors' plan does not make sufficient reference to checking the progress made by different groups of pupils in every class regularly enough.

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

- Improve leaders' systematic monitoring and evaluation of the actions the school takes to remedy areas of weakness – good

External support

The school receives good and effective support from the local authority. This enabled the new special educational needs coordinator to get up to speed very quickly and has contributed to improvements in the teaching and learning of English and mathematics. Support for the leadership and management of the school has led to greater rigour of school self-evaluation and monitoring. The local authority provided clear guidance and support to governors for the recent appointment of a new headteacher. Local authority records of visits to the school are informative and clearly identify what the school needs to do next in order to continue on its journey of improvement.

Although the school continues to receive a high level of support from the local authority, this has started to decrease, reflecting the effectiveness with which the school is building its capacity to improve.