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20 March 2013

Miss J Klimek
Headteacher
Holne Chase Primary School
Buckingham Road
Bletchley
Buckinghamshire
MK3 5HP

Dear Miss Klimek

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Holne Chase Primary School

Following my visit to your school on Monday 18 to Tuesday 19 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 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 third monitoring inspection on 18–19 March 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work and scrutinised documents, including the local authority's post-inspection action plan, minutes of the most recent review meetings and relevant safeguarding documents. The school's most recent monitoring records and assessment information based on the school's tracking of pupils' progress were also considered. Learning sessions covering all classes in the school were observed, mostly undertaken jointly with the headteacher or interim deputy headteacher. In addition to discussions with these two colleagues, the inspector met with four teachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and a local authority officer responsible for monitoring and evaluating the school's progress.

Context

Since the previous visit in November 2012, the interim headteacher has been appointed as the substantive headteacher. An interim deputy headteacher was appointed from January 2013. Other colleagues fulfil middle leadership roles but are not in receipt of specific remuneration for this work. One teacher left the school at February half-term. There are several long-term supply staff in the school covering staff absences. Two assistant headteachers and two other teachers will be joining the school after Easter. There have been several recent resignations from the governing body, which currently has three vacancies. This includes the Chair of the School Improvement Committee.

With the exception of children in the two Reception classes, all pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. Since January, however, Year 6 pupils are taught separately in the morning sessions for English and mathematics. In the afternoons, they are taught in one of three Year 5/6 classes.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Current information provided by the school shows that pupils overall continue to make better progress in reading, writing and in mathematics than at the time of the previous inspection. Rates of progress are accelerating for most pupils. When comparing different classes and year groups, variations in rates of progress persist but the gaps between them are narrowing. Progress is still most rapid in Key Stage 1. Year 6 pupils are catching up quickly with their peers nationally and are now on track to reach broadly average standards by the end of Key Stage 2. This is as a result, at least in part, of the revised timetabling arrangements. The legacy of slow progress identified when the school became subject to special measures is now

being rectified for most pupils in Years 5 and 6. However, rates of progress in Years 3 and 4 are more erratic, especially in writing and mathematics. Nevertheless, improved teaching is beginning to result in better achievement in these classes.

The quality of teaching

All aspects of teaching which were highlighted as weaknesses at the previous inspection have been at least partially addressed and, in most cases, there are clear indications that notable progress has been made in the past 12 months. In most lessons, teachers demonstrate that they have raised their expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving. Planning typically takes account of the learning needs of pupils of different abilities, although there is still some unevenness in how well this is translated into practice in lessons, including the teaching of phonics (the sounds letters make) in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1. Phonics has a more prominent place in the curriculum than was the case in previous monitoring visits. However, across the school, phonics tends to be taught towards the end of lessons. Consequently, it sometimes lacks the status afforded to other activities and is not always as well developed as it might be, especially, but not exclusively, in Years 5 and 6.

The teaching of reading generally, however, continues to be an emerging strength. Guided reading sessions occur every day in all classes. During the monitoring visit, effective practice was observed across the three Year 3/4 classes. Overall, there was a far higher level of consistently good practice seen than during previous visits. All groups were productively occupied in a range of well-planned activities which are increasingly valued by pupils. When asked why he felt guided reading was useful, one pupil remarked to the inspector, 'It helps me to be a better reader, but also really helps me with my writing.' Despite this improvement in the implementation of guided reading, leaders are aware of the need to continue to monitor closely the effectiveness of this key improvement strategy.

The teaching of writing has also remained a high priority and there are now considerably more opportunities for pupils to develop their skills and increase their capacity to write at length in different subjects. This improvement in writing is partially a result of more consistency in the quality of marking across the school, especially in the Year 3/4 classes. In teachers' marking, there is generally an improving balance between praise for work successfully completed and pointers about how to improve, increasingly in mathematics. The least effective marking and the poorest standards of presentation seen during the monitoring visit were seen in 'topic' books, notably in Years 5 and 6.

During the monitoring visit, one of the weakest features of teaching seen in several lessons was excessive teacher talk and insufficient opportunities for pupils to work independently or collaboratively with their peers. This restricted the degree of challenge, especially for more able pupils. Teachers also made insufficient use of

opportunities to review learning with pupils both during and at the end of lessons. These parts of lessons characteristically did not actively involve enough pupils, did not always have a clear purpose and, as a result, made little positive contribution to moving pupils' learning forward.

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

Behaviour and safety of pupils

As reported in previous monitoring visits, pupils continue to behave well in lessons and typically have positive attitudes to their learning. Occasionally, when they are not actively involved in their learning, a few become inattentive and restless.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Sound leadership by the headteacher has ensured that, despite the many changes in staffing and in leadership roles, the school has progressed securely since the previous monitoring visit. This is because essential systems, such as those relating to the gathering of information about pupils' progress, have been put in place and proved to be robust. Consequently, there has been minimal disruption to pupils' learning, and teaching has continued to improve, albeit at a slower pace overall than senior leaders and the governing body had expected. Staff morale continues to be high and those staff who spoke to the inspector reported that they believe that the process of school improvement has been managed well. This is also reflected in the views of the majority of parents who responded to a recent survey organised by the school.

The interim deputy headteacher has made a significant difference in supporting the headteacher, especially through building a more effective team of teachers in the Year 3/4 classes. Monitoring undertaken by senior leaders is more regular and provides accurate information on how well individual teachers are raising the achievement of pupils in their classes. However, monitoring is still not extensive enough to provide a detailed overview of the strengths and weaknesses in different aspects of teaching across the school. Leaders and the governing body have recognised the limited leadership capacity at senior level and, as a result, two assistant headteachers have been appointed to take up post in the summer term. However, middle leaders continue to play little part in raising standards and monitoring the quality of teaching within their areas of responsibility.

Self-evaluation is gradually improving. Since the previous monitoring visit, a more comprehensive version of the school improvement plan has been developed, with clearer indications of how successful completion of objectives will be measured.

However, updates on progress to date and milestones reached, do not identify sharply enough how well specific improvement strategies are working in practice, nor identify precisely enough exactly what the next steps should be to meet the objectives. The progress to date of different groups of pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, is not reported to the governing body regularly enough. This, along with a lack of clear, written analyses to accompany the useful numerical progress information which is routinely provided for them, restricts governors' capacity to hold the school to account as rigorously as it might. Nevertheless, the governing body, and particularly the School Improvement Committee, is now beginning to ask more searching questions of senior leaders than was the case in the recent past. Governors are aware of the need to at least sustain, and, in the near future, increase the rigour of their monitoring and challenge of school leaders. This is unlikely to be an easy task given that its membership is not currently at full strength.

The local authority continues to provide valuable support to the school in improving the quality of teaching. It also offered useful assistance in the recent round of new appointments to the school staff.

- Progress since the previous monitoring inspection on the area for improvement relating to leadership and management – satisfactory.
- Progress since being subject to special measures on the area for improvement relating to leadership and management – satisfactory.