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13 May 2013

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 8–9 May 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 21 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 third monitoring inspection on 8–9 May 2013**

### **Evidence**

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, subject leaders, a group of pupils, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. The inspector observed teaching in every classroom and in a several small-group sessions. The inspector scrutinised pupil progress data and work in pupils' books.

### **Context**

The headteacher was absent for part of the first day of inspection. The deputy headteacher has returned to the school after a period of absence. The person responsible for leading Key Stage 1 and literacy is absent from school. Her class and responsibility for leading English are being covered by a supply teacher.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Achievement continues to improve. Pupils are making better progress, particularly in reading and mathematics. Boys are making better progress in Year 5 and 6 because there has been a lot of additional support in this class and teaching has improved. Teachers have devised a set of experiences in these year groups that engage pupils so they want to write. The quality of work in books is improving and there are more opportunities for pupils to write at length. The school has employed another teacher so that Years 5 and 6 are taught separately for English and mathematics. This is having a positive impact, particularly on Year 6. While gaps in attainment here are beginning to close, it is unlikely that these will close completely.

Rates of progress in mathematics and reading are stronger. In these subjects, pupils are making the progress they should and pupils are no longer being left behind. In mathematics, pupils are more often using their improved knowledge of number facts to solve difficult problems. Writing continues to cause a concern and small groups of boys in several year groups continue to make slow progress. It is essential that the school tackles this with the same tenacity that has been seen in Years 5 and 6 so that the attainment gap does not become so wide that it becomes insurmountable.

Teachers are better challenging more-able writers and, as a result, these pupils are producing work of a better quality. Many pupils have a better understanding of the attributes needed to become a successful writer. However, some lower attaining writers have gaps in their understanding that are not being sufficiently overcome.

## **The quality of teaching**

Teachers continue to receive additional support from a partner school and the local authority and, as a result of this, teaching is improving. More teaching is good and, while there is still too much teaching that requires improvement, inadequate lessons are very rare.

Where teaching is good, teachers think carefully about how they can excite and motivate pupils. Teachers ask questions that better encourage pupils to explain their thinking and justify their decisions. Teachers in good lessons have realistically high expectations, based on their understanding of the level at which each pupil is working and the barriers they face. Teachers in these lessons expect pupils to join in fully and they work hard to engage all pupils. Because teachers are getting better at pitching their questions and tasks at the right level, pupils are better able to answer questions and think deeply when doing so.

Where teaching requires improvement, teachers tend not to set work at the right level for all groups of learners. In some cases, work is too hard for some pupils because the teacher has not thought about the next steps different pupils need to make. In these lessons, teachers do not always think carefully about the skills or understanding that pupils need to develop to improve their work. This is particularly the case in writing lessons. Too many lessons that require improvement are dull and pupils are sometimes bored by their work. Too often, lessons require improvement because teachers are concerned about the features they believe they need to include in a lesson rather than focusing on the quality of learning and the needs of learners.

Teaching assistants continue to develop their skills. They are receiving training in how to teach pupils reading and mathematics when in small groups. In most classes, teaching assistants are providing more useful support that is designed to help individuals overcome barriers. In a small number of classes, teaching assistants are still too focused on making sure that work is finished, and this is sometimes at the expense of deeper learning because the teaching assistant does much of the thinking for the pupils.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Behaviour is no longer a concern. Pupils are generally respectful of each other and their teachers. In one class where behaviour requires improvement, the teacher is using an increasingly useful set of strategies to promote positive behaviour and quickly deal with inappropriate behaviour so that it does not have a detrimental impact on the learning of others.

The school's focus on developing pupils' understanding of values is paying off. Pupils were able to talk with maturity about recent discussions they have had with their teachers about issues such as friendship, acceptance and name-calling.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

Leadership remains very reliant on external support. There has been little success in securing middle leadership. As a result, the leadership of mathematics and English remain vulnerable. Leaders have been frustrated by setbacks in appointing a temporary leader of English during the long-term absence of the substantive post-holder. There have been difficulties in making this appointment but leaders have not done enough to use the existing support from their partner school. Leaders have not sufficiently considered emerging strengths within their own school when making their plans. As a result, there is no plan for developing English beyond September. Existing improvement plans for English this term are largely a list of opportunities to observe lessons and a range of opportunities for a supply teacher, who has taken on the role temporarily, to learn how to become an English leader. This arrangement is not good enough; there is too much to do to improve English and, in particular, writing for such flimsy arrangements to be acceptable. The mathematics leader is just beginning to take control of this role following a period of absence.

Leaders' tracking of pupils who have fallen behind is sharper. The special educational needs coordinator works much more closely with the senior leadership team so that the work she does in identifying pupils who need some extra help is understood by all leaders and shared with teachers. As a result, teachers and teaching assistants have a much better understanding of those children who have fallen behind and need to catch up. Useful documents show the kind of support and intervention that is planned for each individual. However, these documents do not make clear the intended outcomes of the proposed actions, so measuring their success is difficult.

Leaders have clearer systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and tracking the rates of progress of different groups. Leaders now know how well different groups and individuals are doing and the impact of teaching over time. Leaders regularly monitor teaching but this is too focused on making sure that certain characteristics are included in lessons rather than concentrating on the quality of teaching and the impact different aspects have on the quality of learning. This is encouraging some teachers to focus on doing routinely expected things rather than thinking about how they need to adapt their teaching to best meet the needs of all pupils.

A lead teacher has been employed by the school for one day a week and works with individual teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This is a positive appointment and teachers are enthusiastic about this level of support.

Governors have sharpened their monitoring so they are focused on the most important areas for improvement. They have arranged with the local authority for training to help them identify ways of finding evidence of school improvement. Governors are challenging leaders to improve quickly, although they are sometimes too easily convinced by the reasons that are given for slower progress.

### **External support**

The local authority continues to provide a large amount of support. A local authority consultant is attached to the school for two days a week. This consultant focuses on improving teaching and developing leadership capacity. A further consultant has been successfully working with a recently qualified teacher to improve the quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Senior inspectors and advisers monitor the progress of the school and ensure that the support provided is securing improvements. The school continues to work alongside an outstanding school and this school provides guidance for teachers and expertise in management. In practical terms, this means an experienced teacher works in school twice a week and teachers from this school work, at times, alongside colleagues at the other school. This is a significant resource that was originally designed to support teaching in Year 6 during the deputy headteacher's absence. It is clear that this resource could be better used to help support leadership development.