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Mrs Nikki Miller  
Headteacher  
Blanford Mere Primary School  
Mimosa Walk  
Kingswinford  
DY6 7EA

Dear Mrs Miller

### **Special measures: monitoring inspection of Blanford Mere Primary School**

Following my visit with Frances Millett, Additional Inspector, to your school on 15–16 May 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 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.

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 Dudley.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2012**

- Ensure that the more-able pupils in Key Stage 1 and all pupils in Key Stage 2 make good progress, particularly in mathematics in the latter stage, by improving the quality of teaching so that:
  - teachers use assessment information more rigorously and, as a consequence, work set meets pupils' needs and they are guided carefully through small learning steps
  - during lessons, teachers check regularly on pupils' learning, address any misconceptions, and ensure that pupils understand how to improve their work
  - the pace of learning in lessons is improved and teachers do not talk for too long
  - teachers' marking consistently provides pupils with clear and focused points for improvement
  - pupils are provided with more opportunities to practise and apply their academic skills, especially in numeracy, across the curriculum.
  
- Strengthen the capacity for sustained improvement by ensuring that:
  - leaders rigorously check how effectively pupils at all levels of attainment are challenged in lessons
  - all plans for improvement are focused sharply on improving pupils' achievement, have measurable outcomes and the effectiveness of the plans is monitored regularly
  - the governing body plays a more active role in monitoring and evaluating pupils' achievement.

## **Special measures: monitoring of Blanford Mere Primary School**

### **Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 15–16 May 2013 Evidence**

During this inspection, we held meetings with the headteacher, the senior leadership team, the Chair and three members of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority. We observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met two parents. We observed a number of lesson observations jointly with the headteacher. Opportunities to observe Key Stage 2 lessons were limited because pupils were involved in the Year 6 national tests and optional tests.

#### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring visit, one teacher and one teaching assistant have left the school.

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

Across the school, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics continues to improve. Teachers' assessments and their understanding of levelling pupils' work have improved because of more rigorous monitoring by the senior leadership team and moderation with teachers in local schools. This has been validated by the local authority. As a result, the school's predictions for pupils' attainment are more accurate. The school expects an improvement in the proportion of pupils gaining Level 4+ in English and mathematics and in the proportion gaining Level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2 in the summer 2013 national tests. The school's information indicates that the progress of more-able pupils has improved. The progress of other groups of pupils, including those eligible for the pupil premium and disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs has also improved. More pupils are now making the progress they should and some groups are doing better than this. As a result, the attainment gap between groups is narrowing.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the teaching of reading, writing and numeracy continues to prepare pupils well for Key Stage 1. Literacy skills are well developed and children's use and application of mathematical knowledge is improving. Numeracy activities are well integrated into all aspects of learning. Children are encouraged to initiate numeracy activities; for example, in the 'funfair'. Children paid their entrance fee and bought and sold ice-creams using play money. They confidently counted out change, in ones and twos, and some could recognise the different values of coins. They helped each other give the correct change.

Improvements in pupils' progress in writing and numeracy are evident in Key Stage 1. Work in pupils' books shows that there are more opportunities for pupils to write

at length in all subjects. Work on number is better sequenced and develops pupils' knowledge and skills well across several lessons.

During the inspection, Year 1 pupils wrote simple sentences and discussed how to develop their writing and use their sentences in the next day's extended writing. Higher attaining pupils discussed how their different sentences could describe the habitat of mini beasts. Pupils identified correctly a range of connectives and discussed whether they could change their position in the sentence. Pupils understand the sequence of learning better and how their work will be used in the following lesson. As a result, they are encouraged to apply their skills and to build them up steadily and securely.

In Year 2, pupils are more confident in using their numeracy skills. This is because they work together to solve problems. In a mathematics lesson, pupils gave each other directions using the terms 'clockwise' and 'counter clockwise' and some pupils were able to use the points of the compass.

Improvements in writing and mathematics in Key Stage 2 owe much to the improved teaching and improved accuracy in the identification of pupils' starting points. There are more opportunities for pupils to apply their skills to real-life situations, and this makes learning more interesting and memorable. In Year 6, gifted and talented pupils have benefited from additional support. This enrichment has enabled these pupils to develop challenges for all Year 6 pupils. This, in turn, has increased the enjoyment and confidence of all Year 6 pupils in tackling mathematical problems. The school is appropriately providing imaginative mathematical challenges for all pupils and families to work on for homework. Pupils are very positive about these activities.

### **The quality of teaching**

Teaching continues to improve but is still too variable. Teaching is more consistent in the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, and Years 5 and 6. Opportunities for numeracy work across the curriculum are better planned, although teachers are not always clear how the numeracy activity supports the learning in the subject. Consequently, some activities lead to confusion and missed opportunities to reinforce pupils' mathematical skills.

Teachers enthusiastically implement training but do not always consider the full range of skills that could be improved. For example, training to develop pupils' thinking led to a focus on developing literacy skills in Year 6 science lessons but opportunities were missed for pupils to apply their numeracy and scientific skills. Teachers have made good use of the recent training on using questioning to re-shape learning. This has improved the pace of learning and pupils' engagement.

Better use is made of the school's 'stepping stones' booklets to plan activities which extend learning. In many lessons, all pupils can choose to tackle a more challenging activity that builds their capacity to persevere. Pupils' write perceptive comments in each other's books and make useful suggestions as to how their classmates' work could be improved. Teacher's marking is improving and is having a greater impact on pupils' learning. Teachers clearly identify pupils' misconceptions and, increasingly, pupils write a thoughtful comment in response about what they have learnt. Pupils are able to improve their work because time is provided for them to do so in the following lesson.

Teaching assistants are better deployed because teachers share their lesson plans with them; teaching assistants know how and when to step in to help pupils. During this inspection, teaching assistants reframed tasks to explain them more clearly to pupils, and their skilful questioning enabled pupils to see their own way through problems. Teaching assistants used their initiative to identify pupils in the class who needed support. They were less effective when they worked with small groups and they were unable to engage inattentive pupils. In such instances, the lack of interest of a minority of pupils slowed the learning of the whole group. The progress of some lower attaining pupils is slowed because they are spending too long with teaching assistants instead of working with the teacher.

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

- ensure that the more-able pupils in Key Stage 1 and all pupils in Key Stage 2 make good progress, particularly in mathematics in the latter stage, by improving the quality of teaching – good.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Behaviour around school and in lessons continues to be good overall. Teachers skilfully manage the rare occurrences of low-level disruption. Parents and carers report that they had no concerns about their children's behaviour and safety. Pupils' attendance is in line with national averages. The school has worked effectively, in partnership with the local authority, to improve the attendance of a small group of pupils.

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

The headteacher and senior leadership team continue to provide strong direction, driving improvements across the school. Their sharp focus on improving teaching and increasing pupils' progress is paying dividends in raising standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

The quality of teaching is improving because the headteacher and senior staff are monitoring the work of the school more effectively. The monitoring of teaching is

linked more closely to how well pupils are progressing. The stronger focus on pupils' progress is reflected in sharper performance management targets for teachers. Teachers have engaged well with training on assessment and applying National Curriculum levels to pupils' work; assessment is more secure.

Leaders have correctly identified that the improvements in teaching in English and mathematics need to be replicated across the wider curriculum and plans are in hand to address this.

The governing body is more effective; it is monitoring and evaluating pupils' progress more. As a result of its links with the governing body of a local school, it has identified the need to reorganise its committee structure to ensure that it can challenge the headteacher and senior staff more rigorously. Link governors are increasingly confident about challenging school leaders and managers. However, governors miss opportunities to look at learning first hand because guidance for them on how to do this appropriately has not been provided.

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

- strengthen the capacity for sustained improvement – good.

### **External support**

The school benefits from the rigorous challenge provided by the local authority and the support it provides through its School Improvement Partner and arrangements with local partner schools. The school is in a stronger position and is able to correctly identify and share its own good practice.