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Kathryn Simmons
Headteacher
Bradfield CE Primary School
Cock Lane
Bradfield Southend
Reading
RG7 6HR

Dear Mrs Simmons

Special measures monitoring inspection of Bradfield CE Primary School

Following my visit with Amanda Gard, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 12 and 13 June 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 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 not 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 Interim Executive Board, the Director of Children's Services for West Berkshire and the Diocese of Oxford.

Yours sincerely

Alison Storey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to good and eradicate inadequate teaching by:
 - improving teachers' subject knowledge
 - ensuring teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensuring they always set hard enough tasks for all pupils, including the most able
 - ensuring that lessons start promptly, lesson introductions are not overlong and pupils are moved quickly on to the main task
 - improving the teaching of phonics in Key Stage 1 and helping pupils to apply their knowledge of phonics when spelling.

- Ensure more pupils reach average and higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Reception, Year 2 and Year 6 by:
 - improving pupils' handwriting, punctuation and spelling, and the way pupils present their work in books
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to write longer pieces and to write for different purposes
 - giving the least-able pupils in Key Stage 1 opportunities to read every day
 - providing training for teachers to enhance their skills in teaching mathematics
 - ensuring play activities in the Reception class are purposeful and promote children's skills in reading, writing and mathematics.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring all leaders and managers share high expectations for pupils' achievement and are more accountable for the school's performance
 - ensuring teachers who are in charge of subjects play a full part in checking pupils' performance, raising achievement and improving teaching
 - developing the curriculum so that teachers can teach the basic skills systematically, and so that it includes increased challenge for more-able pupils.

- Improve the effectiveness of governance by ensuring governors:
 - have a clearer understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, including the attainment and progress of different groups of pupils
 - challenge school leaders by holding them robustly to account for the school's performance
 - carefully check the school's performance and the impact of spending, including the pupil premium funding, on pupils' achievement
 - make sure teachers' pay is linked to the quality of their teaching.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 June 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with: the headteacher, other key staff and a group of teachers; the Chair of the Interim Executive Board; a representative from the local authority; and a local leader in education. They talked informally with pupils during lessons and break times, and looked at the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View).

Context

At the end of May 2013, the governing body was replaced by the Interim Executive Board (IEB). A local leader in education has been providing support to the headteacher since mid-March. Three teaching assistants have left the school to take up other jobs since the first monitoring inspection. One has been replaced and the remaining time is being covered by existing staff.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Information from the most recent checks on pupils' reading, writing and mathematics levels shows some improvement in their levels of attainment but it is too patchy across the school. By the end of the Reception Year, more children are reaching the expected level for their age in writing. However, standards in writing are still weaker than in the other areas of learning, and below the target for which the school was aiming. There has also been a fall in the number of children acquiring the expected levels of mathematical knowledge and skills. Given children's starting points are typically above those expected for their age, expectations are not high enough. Most, if not all pupils, should reach the level expected for their age and more should be expected to exceed those levels than is currently the case.

The school's current information shows that there has not been the consistent and significant shift required in the number of pupils reaching average and higher levels by the end of Year 2. Pupils in Year 3 have not been developing their skills and understanding fast enough, and certainly not at a rate to make up for the low standards they achieved last year. Overall, standards in these classes remain too low.

Teachers' assessments of pupils coming to the end of Year 6 show that the proportions of pupils reaching the level expected for their age in writing and mathematics have increased. There has also been an increase in the number of pupils reaching the higher levels in reading, and particularly in writing and mathematics. This does not, however, represent any significant improvement in the progress pupils make over time since they started Year 3 at a considerably higher level than those pupils who left the school last year.

Overall, the progress that pupils make across the school is too variable. This matches the variations in the quality of teaching and learning in lessons seen by the headteacher and local authority advisers, and during this monitoring inspection. In some classes, pupils are making at least the progress they should, but the school still relies on extra teaching or support for some pupils, often to make up for weaker teaching in the past. Typically, progress in mathematics is weaker across the school.

Because underachievement is widespread and the school's systems for tracking pupils are underdeveloped, it is not clear whether there are any improvements in the progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, or those eligible for free school meals. Senior leaders are checking on the progress of different groups of pupils, including those receiving additional support. However, there is more to do to analyse this information so that they can demonstrate to governors whether these pupils are catching up.

In the lessons observed, the quality of pupils' learning was dependent on the quality of teaching and teachers' expectations of them. Pupils generally settle down to group activities, often because there are a number of adults providing support. Although examples of work displayed around school show that pupils are capable of presenting their work well, they do not always take enough care with their presentation and handwriting.

The quality of teaching

The main reason the quality of teaching is variable is that teachers do not focus consistently on what the pupils should be learning. There is an expectation that teachers make sure that introductions to lessons are not overlong and that pupils spend more time involved in activities rather than simply listening. However, this has led to a rather formulaic approach with teachers sticking to rigid timings regardless of whether it is appropriate or effective. They tend to start with what pupils will do rather than focusing on what they want them to learn. As a result, pupils are not consistently challenged to develop their knowledge or skills enough. This is particularly the case on the occasions they are free to choose which activity they do. The focus on tasks leads to staff being more concerned with how much pupils do, and how quickly, rather than on the quality of their work or what they have actually learnt. There are weaknesses in the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters or combination of letters make) in the Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 classes for similar reasons. Staff focus more on the recommended structure of sessions and on planning practical activities than on what pupils should be learning.

Teachers are more aware of the levels the pupils in their class should be reaching by the end of the year, although they are not always ambitious enough for the most able. Weaknesses in their own subject knowledge or the way they question pupils to check their understanding during lessons, mean they are not always clear what

pupils need to learn next. As a result, sometimes the work set is too easy, particularly for the more able who are not stretched sufficiently. Occasionally, it is too hard.

There are some positive features of teaching to build on. Teachers try hard to make lessons interesting for pupils. In a few better-taught lessons, teachers do focus on what they want the pupils to learn. They plan appropriate tasks that motivate and challenge pupils of different abilities, and keep a check on how well they are doing in lessons through careful questioning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour around school and on the playground is still commendable. In the main, they are caring and respectful towards each other, courteous to staff and welcoming to visitors. Their behaviour in lessons is not as strong. In part, this is because they are getting used to different ways of working independently and with each other. More often than not, their attitudes towards learning, and how well they concentrate, are directly linked to how good the teaching is.

Attendance is broadly average, having fallen slightly due to a bout of illness in the spring term. It is a concern that not all parents and carers ensure that their children arrive on time every day. Even when they are just a few minutes late, these pupils miss vital learning time as teachers start lessons promptly.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

There has not been any discernible improvement in the school since the last inspection. Progress has stalled because things have not happened quickly enough and staff have been resistance to change.

The headteacher knows what good teaching and learning looks like, but she has relied too much on local authority reviews to monitor lessons and identify what needs to improve, rather than establishing rigorous and regular systems in school. As a result, teachers see monitoring as an external process rather than an integral part of the school's development. The feedback they get on the quality of their teaching is not clear enough. Staff usually receive verbal feedback from senior leaders or local authority advisers after an observation, but individual points for improvement are not recorded or followed up systematically or quickly enough. Any written feedback on the quality of teaching is presented as general strengths and weaknesses across the school so individual staff are not clear enough which specific points apply to them. The weaknesses in monitoring are compounded by staff attitudes. Too few are willing to listen to and act on support, while others remain resistant to change and unwilling to accept responsibility to improve their practice. They see the targets they have been given to improve their practice as too daunting,

when, in the main, they are simply the 'essentials' that should be part of every lesson.

The headteacher has recognised these weaknesses and accepts that more should have been done to motivate staff. She has very recently updated the action plan and started to make changes to monitoring systems but it is far too early to see any impact. She knows which teaching approaches have been successful in other schools and is trying to implement them here. However, there has been insufficient training for staff on some initiatives, which means that they do not fully understand what they are being asked to do, and why. Not enough has been done to improve staff's own subject knowledge. The move to one system for tracking pupils' progress has been too slow. Currently, too much falls to the headteacher. Other leaders either lack experience or expertise, or do not fully grasp what is required of them.

Improvements in governance were delayed while the local authority waited for approval for the IEB, but in the short time it has been in place, improvements have been rapid. It is still very early days, but already it is clear that there is a relentless focus on improving things for the pupils' benefit. They are already asking challenging questions in meetings and showing that they will hold the headteacher to account. They are frustrated by the lack of progress to date and determined to turn things round.

External support

The local authority has provided a good deal of support from its officers to improve English and mathematics, and the Early Years Foundation Stage, to review the quality of teaching across the school, and to establish the IEB. It has brokered the support of the local leader of education, who is providing welcome support for organisational issues. However, given the barriers to improvement in the school, and until very recently, the absence of effective governance, the local authority left it too long to check whether actions were being followed up. Progress meetings have not been sufficiently focused on the impact of the support it is providing, or on holding the headteacher to account, until very recently. Too little attention has been paid to addressing the lack of leadership capacity at all levels within the school. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.