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Sue Hughes
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Hughes

Special measures second monitoring inspection of Springfield Junior School

Following my visit with Jonathan Sutcliffe, Additional Inspector, to your school on 25–26 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.

This inspection was the second monitoring visit since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2012. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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 should 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 Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely

John Peckham
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching to good or better so that all pupils make rapid progress by ensuring that teachers:
 - plan tasks that are at the right level of difficulty for pupils of all abilities
 - have higher expectations of pupils' presentation, punctuation and spelling
 - question pupils more effectively to check their understanding of what they are learning and to make them think hard
 - deploy support staff more effectively to work with pupils of all abilities
 - improve the marking of pupils' work, especially in mathematics, so that pupils are well informed about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
 - provide more opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy and mathematical skills.

- Improve the quality and impact of leadership, including governance, by:
 - checking teaching more rigorously so that the causes of underachievement are known and the steps each teacher needs to take to improve their performance are identified
 - using the outcomes of such checks to provide tailored training and support for staff, including opportunities for them to observe outstanding practice
 - ensuring that teachers who lead subjects are held to account for teaching and progress in their subject
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and managing staff turnover more effectively
 - ensuring that other leaders are less reliant on the headteacher and are more effective at securing improvement themselves.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 25–26 June 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed ten lessons, three jointly with members of the leadership team, and looked at the school's records and documents, including pupils' books from all classes. Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other members of the leadership team, a group of governors and two representatives of the local authority. A telephone conversation was held with the Local Leader of Education who is providing additional support to the school.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit in March 2013, three teachers have left the school and three teachers have returned from maternity leave. One other teacher is now on maternity leave.

Achievement of pupils at the school

There are some indications that pupils' achievement is improving, but this is patchy and has been further affected in the classes that have experienced disruption in their teaching during the year. The school's assessments indicate that overall results in the Key Stage 2 national tests will improve in 2013 but will still be below national averages. Most pupils are now making better progress, but this too still lags behind the expected rates of progress.

School leaders now have much better systems for checking on pupils' progress and teachers have become more skilled at both making assessments and at using the information to help plan learning. Pupils too have a better understanding of their own progress, but the consistency with which teachers explain exactly the next steps that pupils need to take in their learning is very variable. In some classes, for example, useful grids explaining the criteria for each pupil's next level of achievement were being actively used for literacy but not in mathematics. The school recognises that pupils, and more particularly parents, could still benefit by having clearer information about achievement and progress.

Improvements are more noticeable in mathematics and reading than in writing. This is at least partly due to the success of the 'group guided reading' activity undertaken by all classes and 'big maths' which has brought about a rapid improvement in the speed of calculation and recall of number facts. Overall, pupils' writing skills are low and hold back their progress in a number of areas. Pupils' presentation of mathematical work in their books is generally better than writing. Different teachers, however, have varying expectations about the standards expected in the quality of written work, and marking showed very little emphasis on improving the care with

which pupils complete their work. Pupils have few opportunities to undertake extended writing tasks and there is insufficient focus on the quality of writing and presentation across all subjects in the curriculum.

Achievement across other subjects also requires further development. The creative curriculum, which covers all subjects apart from literacy and numeracy, is currently being reviewed to ensure that there is a much better coverage of all subjects. At present, not all classes have experienced an appropriate range of science, geography, history or information and communications technology.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved since the inspection in November 2012. None of the lessons observed by inspectors this time were inadequate and, although a good proportion required improvement, this is much better than in November. Some good examples of strong subject knowledge and skilful use of questioning were observed. Teachers and leaders were also accurate in their assessment of teaching quality and there is considerable evidence that the school's programme of professional development and improvement is having an impact.

Pupils spoken to, for example, described with some relief that teachers were now talking less and giving them enough time to complete their work. Marking has also improved substantially. Books showed regular marking, with both praise and clear identification of how pupils can improve their work. In most cases, pupils are then expected to respond to the advice, making corrections and improving aspects in red pencil. Inspectors observed some books, however, where teachers had not picked up that pupils had not properly responded.

Teachers are now making better plans to allow for the different learning needs of the pupils in their classes. In some cases, this is highly effective, with individual learning targets, expert use of classroom resources, teaching assistants and teacher time. In others, it is more likely to be three levels of work, with classes divided into three or four groups with different approaches and work. Where this was observed, the grouping was not always helpful and the progress of some students was insufficient because they were either held back by the pace of the group or needed additional support in order to keep up.

Some teachers, while taking on aspects of the training and revised whole-school policies about learning, still have not fully mastered how to use them most effectively. For example, much work has been put into improving the quality of the learning environment so that classrooms are not only attractive and stimulating, but also have displayed materials to support learning. Each class now has a 'first aid' space with resources such as dictionaries, lists of more exciting adjectives and verbs or tools to support calculation. These resources were often under-used in teachers' planning and teaching, or pupils were not yet accustomed to using them.

The quality and use of teachers' questioning have also improved, but in many cases still have a long way to go to challenge and develop pupils' thinking effectively. It is fairly common, for example, to see teachers using ways to select pupils randomly to answer questions, although the value of this method was often wasted by selecting the name first and not giving enough time for the whole class or group to think about the answer. Teachers are more frequently encouraging and guiding pupils to solve issues for themselves or in collaboration with other pupils. In a numeracy lesson, for example, the teacher asked two pupils to compare their answers and to use the comparison to identify the errors in one. On other occasions, however, insufficient time is given to allowing pupils to explain their reasoning or to explore misunderstanding and misconception.

The expectations of teachers have improved, and there is now a much clearer understanding of the need to ensure that all pupils make good progress. Teachers' expectations are, however, still not yet high enough. This is very clear where the quality of pupils' written work shows a lack of care in the presentation and in their teacher's acceptance of relatively short and superficial writing. Incidents were also observed where opportunities to improve pupils' use of informal language were missed. Expectations that are too low are also apparent in some cases where insufficient thought has been given in teacher's planning to the individualised needs of pupils who might be particularly able or be encountering particular difficulties with certain aspects of work.

In the lessons observed by inspectors, teaching assistants were used well. In many cases, they were suitably briefed about their specific role and so were able to provide high-quality support to the individuals and groups they were working with. Some teaching assistants are also used very successfully to improve the behaviour of individuals so that they are better able to learn and do not disrupt the learning of others.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

This aspect of the school was not addressed in any depth during this inspection as it was not a concern in November. Inspectors were, however, able to observe a generally happy and safe school. Most lessons are characterised by a quiet, purposeful buzz of activity, with pupils who are keen to learn and who behave responsibly.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

This aspect of the school has continued to be affected by instability in staffing. Leaders at all levels have not yet had enough opportunity to gain confidence in their areas of responsibility so that they can begin to make a significant impact. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have recently identified their areas of

responsibility but still frequently work together on key decision making. This sometimes slows the process of implementing and promoting effective change.

The special educational needs coordinator was new to post in September 2012, although she has been in the school for much longer than this. It is thus too early at this stage to be able to fully assess the impact that she had had in her role. The literacy coordinator had only been moved up to her post for six weeks at the time of this inspection, and has now decided to move to another school. The numeracy coordinator returned from maternity leave at Easter 2013 and is also due to move to a new post in September.

Plans have been made for substantive appointments to the literacy and numeracy roles for September, with the appointment of an experienced numeracy coordinator who started work three weeks before this inspection. The local authority has also brokered the secondment of an experienced teacher from another school to take on the role of literacy coordinator from September.

Leaders are now much more consistent in the use of effective monitoring of the work of the school. Lesson observations, planning and work scrutiny are regular and becoming more useful in shaping the professional development of teachers and teaching assistants. Extensive records are being kept of the monitoring, but the analysis and evaluation of this information is not well developed. Because of this, leaders are unable to identify trends and patterns as effectively as they should.

The governing body has recruited a number of new members but still has two vacancies. Some of the new members have yet to undertake suitable training. The Chair of the Governing Body is experienced and skilled, but at present has insufficient support from the rest of the governors due to their lack of experience and training. Governors have arranged for an external review of governance and have started to identify their skills, knowledge and training needs.

External support

The local authority has provided good support to the headteacher and the school through the allocation of additional resources and by providing regular analysis and challenge. The local authority school improvement adviser has made regular visits to the school, each one recorded with a concise description of findings and some sharply phrased action points. He has been supported by a number of local authority consultants who have advised, for example, on the development of numeracy and literacy.

The local authority has also enabled the linking to Springfield Junior School of a Local Leader of Education from an outstanding school. He has been able to provide essential, practical guidance and support to the headteacher and leadership team.

Links are now being made between middle leaders from both schools to promote improvement at all levels.