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Peter Hollis
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hollis

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Oakhill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2–3 July 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 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 – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

One newly qualified teacher may be appointed in any key stage.

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 Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

David Speakman
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching and accelerate pupils' progress so that their attainment is at least average by July 2013 by ensuring that:
 - all pupils are given tasks that improve their reading and writing skills in literacy lessons
 - pupils spend less time together on the carpet at the start of lessons and are quickly moved on to do work that is appropriately matched to their ability
 - pupils' progress is checked on more frequently in lessons and work given to pupils is adjusted accordingly
 - teachers' marking checks that pupils have carried out corrections and are addressing areas identified as in need of improvement
 - pupils are given more opportunities to develop their mathematical skills in other subjects.

- Improve behaviour and substantially reduce the proportion of pupils being excluded by December 2012 by:
 - analysing the records of incidents more frequently so that emerging patterns of poor behaviour can be identified
 - providing support for pupils at the earliest possible stage.

- Ensure the more frequent assessment, collation and analysis of pupil progress data in order to:
 - identify underachievement as early as possible
 - target checks on teaching to pinpoint the key weaknesses that lead to underachievement
 - draw up sharply focused plans to address the weaknesses identified.

- Provide teachers with more opportunities to observe good and outstanding teaching in order that they can improve their own practice.

Special measures: monitoring of Oakhill Primary School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 2–3 July 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, reviewed documents and met with the interim headteacher, members of staff, a governor and a representative of the local authority. He spoke to a group of pupils, and to other pupils informally during lesson observations. All teachers were observed in seven lessons, which were seen together with the interim headteacher. The nurture group was also observed.

Context

The school is smaller than the average primary school. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children attend Nursery in the mornings and four-year-old children are taught in a Reception class. Arrangements for teaching pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 have been reorganised since the last visit, due to the appointment of new staff. A new class has been created in Key Stage 2. All pupils are now taught in single-age classes, each with a full-time teacher.

Two teachers who were new to the school joined Years 1 and 2 in April 2013, and another joined Year 3 at the beginning of June. These teachers replaced staff who have left. A temporary teacher is covering Year 4 until the permanent member of staff is available. The interim headteacher continues to lead the school. The deputy headteacher has resigned and will leave at the end of this term. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed to start in September 2013.

A nurture group has been established to support pupils who find difficulty in managing their own behaviour, or who are vulnerable and benefit from individual or small-group support. The group runs each afternoon.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school keeps careful checks on pupils' progress each term. These show that in the term since the previous monitoring visit, pupils have made good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. It also shows that pupils in Year 6, despite having made good progress, are unlikely to reach standards that match the national average. This is because they still have a lot of catching up to do due to previous underachievement.

Children in the the Reception Year continue to make good progress, and it is sometimes outstanding. Their personal, social and emotional development improves considerably through enthusiastically engaging in interesting activities. They concentrate for long periods and learn very effectively through investigating and

exploring. Boys and girls work well together, learning through play in groups or on their own. By working alongside other pupils, they quickly learn to communicate. Their speaking and listening skills are developed effectively. Some more-able children write lengthy pieces and read them fluently. They are developing a good vocabulary. For example, some children knew as soon as they read the clue 'arachnid' that they were looking for a spider. From a low starting point, children make good overall progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and by the end of the Reception Year, attainment is broadly average.

In Key Stage 1, pupils are building well on the good foundations laid in their early education. Despite some inadequate teaching and poor progress in the past, they are now catching up again. Attainment in reading and writing is close to the national average. This is much better than the well-below-average results of the teacher assessments at the end of Year 2 in 2012. Even though attainment in mathematics is still below the national average, it is much improved on the 2012 Year 2 assessments. Pupils are much more confident writers and have a growing vocabulary on which to base their writing. Pupils in Year 1 understand the types of words that represent actions and less-able pupils were successfully finding words to describe actions, such as running quickly and shouting loudly. Pupils capable of completing harder work wrote full sentences containing action words and words to describe the actions.

In mathematics, pupils have an adequate grasp of number and apply this in topic work such as telling the time. They count confidently in fives and recognise the number of minutes past, or to, each hour to the nearest five minutes. Some pupils quickly grasped the idea that they could write the time in different ways and soon learned to write a quarter to three as two forty five. Some pupils struggled with this idea, but persevered and still made good progress.

Achievement at the end of Key Stage 2 has been affected by a long period in the past during which pupils made poor progress. School assessment data show that progress is now good. This last term pupils in all year groups in Key Stage 2 made more progress than nationally expected in reading, writing and mathematics but attainment remains below the national average in Year 6. In Years 4 and 5, attainment in reading and in mathematics is close to the nationally expected level for their age, but in writing pupils are still about a year behind where they should be.

Pupils' numeracy skills are steadily improving and they are more confident in solving number problems than in the past. Pupils in Year 4 confidently worked out the answers to some complex multiplication sums when working out prices on their shopping lists. However, in their enthusiasm to complete their work, a number of them made some careless and unnecessary mistakes.

Learning about letters and the sounds they make (phonics) is now taught throughout the school in a bid to improve pupils' reading skills and spelling accuracy. Year 5 made excellent progress in learning how to accurately spell words with letters that are not sounded when speaking the word, such as stationery, January and

cupboard. They have good learning skills. When matching parts of words to make up the awkward spellings, they checked the accuracy of the work they had completed when the final two word parts did not fit together.

Pupils now apply their literacy skills well in other subjects. Good-quality enquiry skills were clearly seen when Year 3 pupils discussed how they would make sieves to separate mixtures of water, sand and paper clips. They showed a good knowledge of fair testing, made sensible predictions and tested these out. Their discussions with each other and adults demonstrated how well their language skills are developing. Year 6 pupils applied their literacy and computer skills well when they prepared computerised slide presentations for their forthcoming visit to London. They combined pictures of London's famous attractions downloaded from the internet with carefully prepared text to make well-constructed travel guides.

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

- accelerate pupils' progress so that their attainment is at least average by July 2013 – satisfactory
- improve teaching and accelerate pupils' progress – good.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching and learning has improved further since the last visit and the profile of teaching across the school presents a positive picture. All teaching is at least good and almost a half of teaching seen during this visit was outstanding.

All classes now contain a single year group and have fewer pupils, so teachers are more able to focus on individuals or small groups of pupils. They use information on what pupils can already do and understand well to plan next steps of learning so pupils can confidently move forward. Teachers set challenging tasks for all groups of pupils, confident that they will try their very best to achieve the planned outcomes. Consequently, the pace of learning has accelerated and progress has improved.

Teachers give pupils many opportunities to use and improve their speaking and listening skills. Teachers and teaching assistants interact effectively with pupils, asking leading questions so that pupils work things out for themselves. This gives pupils the opportunity to improve their communication skills, helping them be more accurate in voicing their ideas. Through such interactions, pupils become very confident in engaging with each other and with adults.

Teachers have created classrooms that are lively, interesting and support pupils' learning very well. This approach is consistent across the school. The 'learning walls' – displays of visual prompts – are cleverly designed to help pupils learn. These wall displays change with each topic so they constantly give pupils a reference point where they can find things out for themselves. Year 2 pupils learning about time were able to refer to displays which gave them information they could use to tell the time on clock faces. Displays on letter sounds help pupils work out how to spell

unfamiliar words for themselves. Pupils' work is tastefully displayed so their successes are celebrated. In Year 5, excellent quality black-and-white portraits were prominent in the classrooms. Pupils are proud of their achievements and appreciate their work being displayed.

Behaviour is managed very well. Good behaviour in the classrooms is mainly achieved through teachers setting demanding work and celebrating pupils' successes so pupils want to achieve more. Adults manage behaviour and show their expectations clearly and consistently on the rare occasions when this is necessary. Such occasions are getting fewer, and none were seen during this monitoring visit.

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

- improve teaching and accelerate pupils' progress – good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour continues to improve. During the monitoring inspection it was never less than good, and was excellent in some lessons. Pupils say improved behaviour is the most important change the school has seen since being made subject to special measures. They comment very positively on the way pupils who in the past presented challenging behaviour are now dealt with. The nurture group, which takes place each afternoon, ensures that vulnerable pupils are supported, their behaviour improves and they can eventually be reintegrated into full-time schooling. Pupils say that their lessons are no longer disrupted. The group has also had the impact of drastically cutting down the number of exclusions from school. There have been no exclusions since the previous monitoring visit.

Pupils enjoy school a great deal and show loyalty. Older pupils took it upon themselves to write letters to the inspector, telling him how proud they are of Oakhill and how it has improved. They now have very positive attitudes to school and try their very hardest to achieve. Teachers are not cautious about setting demanding work because they know pupils will rise to the challenge. Pupils take care over the quality of their work and show a pride in achievement. Year 6 pupils were very keen to share their computer presentations on London's famous sites.

Relationships are strong among pupils, and between pupils and adults. Mutual respect is obvious in all school activities. Pupils work together well in groups, sharing ideas and listening respectfully to each other. Because they know adults respect them, pupils respond willingly to teachers' requests and lessons progress smoothly. They understand the need for behaviour management and value the impact improved behaviour has had on their daily school life. Behaviour at break times is much improved. There is play equipment available at longer breaks. Pupils commented on how they value adult supervisors joining in games with them at lunchtime. Some older pupils help younger ones at break times as play leaders.

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

- improve behaviour and substantially reduce the proportion of pupils being excluded by December 2012 – outstanding.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The effective leadership of the interim headteacher continues to raise aspirations among the staff, which in turn supports improvement in the quality of education. Staff views are now much more positive. Comments now focus on pupils and how adults are improving the school for their benefit. There is a much more positive view about working at Oakhill.

Leadership is under constant review in the light of staff changes. Staff who have demonstrated competence in the classroom and an insight into pupils' needs have joined the leadership team. As a group they have had a significant impact on the quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum, behaviour management, assessment, the ethos of the school and not least staff morale.

Teachers have raised their effectiveness through partnership with another school. There is now enough good and outstanding practice within the school to be shared so that staff are able to benefit and improve teaching and the curriculum even further. For example, there is a case for extending the best aspects of Early Years Foundation Stage practice further into Key Stages 1 and 2.

The governing body has raised the level of its involvement in the school, and its members realise that in the past they did not challenge leaders enough. Governors now work very closely with the leadership team and ask searching questions to help leaders evaluate the impact of their work on school improvement. Governors have made some difficult decisions which have had the effect of moving the school forward more quickly.

School leaders have a clear picture of how well each year group is doing, and the academic progress different groups of pupils are making. This information is used to hold teachers accountable. Even though there have been a number of staff changes, pupil performance reviews are effective in improving achievement. Ongoing monitoring of teaching and learning forms the basis of school improvement. Senior leaders have clear plans for further improvement. For example, they plan to extend the assessment of pupils' progress to give them secure information on how the school's performance compares against other schools, and to show how many pupils are exceeding expected progress.

The curriculum is being adapted in response to pupils' changing needs. Learning activities are set into meaningful contexts. Subjects are linked into topics to interest and engage pupils, and these are enriched very well with visits and visitors to give pupils experiences beyond what they would normally have. The planning of the

curriculum clearly promotes all aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. The school makes sure that all pupils have an equal opportunity to take part in learning activities and make progress.

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

- ensure the more frequent assessment, collation and analysis of pupil progress data – good
- provide teachers with more opportunities to observe good and outstanding teaching in order that they can improve their own practice – good.

External support

The local authority continues to monitor the school's performance regularly, and the school responds to the detailed written reports it provides. It has cooperated with the governing body, and continues to provide effective leadership through a Local Leader of Education as interim headteacher. The local authority is having a positive impact on school improvement.