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5 July 2013

Mrs E Lake, Executive Headteacher  
Mrs H Horsley, Head of School  
Benfield Primary School  
255 Old Shoreham Road  
Portslade  
Brighton  
BN41 1XS

Dear Mrs Lake and Mrs Horsley

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Benfield Primary School**

Following my visit with Bill James, Additional Inspector, to your school on 3 and 4 July 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 both 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 November 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.

One newly qualified teacher may be appointed to Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2.

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 Brighton and Hove City Council.

Yours sincerely

Melanie Knowles  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 by:
  - making sure that lesson planning caters for the needs of all pupils, particularly the most able
  - creating a brisker pace in lessons and giving pupils more time to get on and finish their work
  - giving more effective feedback in marking so that pupils know how to improve their work
  - clearly defining what additional adults will do in all parts of the lessons, so that they enable those pupils with whom they work to make more rapid progress.
- Raise attainment in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 by:
  - developing pupils' confidence in arithmetic so that simple calculations do not slow them down when they practise what they have learned or move on to more difficult work
  - ensuring pupils are regularly taught how to write accurately using correct spelling, grammar and punctuation
  - giving pupils more opportunities to write for sustained periods of time, for a greater variety of purposes and in a wider range of contexts.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
  - developing the role of governors so that they use information about pupils' progress and standards to challenge the school and hold leaders and managers to account for underperformance
  - checking more regularly and robustly on the quality of teaching so teachers know what they need to do to improve and when they will be expected to have achieved these improvements
  - developing the use of information gained from assessments by all leaders, so that targets set for pupils are aimed at helping them to quickly catch up with their learning
  - regularly checking on pupils' progress, particularly pupils with special educational needs, those eligible for pupil premium funding and those who are falling behind, and taking action where progress is too slow
  - improving the systems for planning for the future so there is a single plan with clear aims and milestones against which progress can be regularly checked.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 3 and 4 July 2013**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed teaching in 13 lessons in Key Stages 1 and 2. They also made short visits to both Reception classes and observed a one-to-one support session for mathematics. Inspectors held meetings with a group of parents, a representative from the local authority, six members of the governing body, senior staff and a group of pupils. They looked at pupils' workbooks and scrutinised documents including the school's development plan and the records of the checks made on the quality of teaching.

### **Context**

One teacher left the school at Easter. School leaders have filled this vacancy with a temporary teacher until the end of the summer term. A new assistant headteacher has been recruited and will take over in September.

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

School leaders have effective systems to review pupils' progress. The deputy headteacher meets with teachers each term to discuss any pupils who are not making the expected progress. Together, they agree what actions will be taken to tackle this underachievement. Work in lessons and in pupils' books confirms the school's view that rates of progress are improving overall. Some pupils have made rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics in the last six months, but many older pupils still have not made up all the ground lost in previous years. Pupils are becoming more confident in arithmetic because they now have regular opportunities to practise quick mental calculations in lessons. Teachers also ensure that pupils get the chance to write for a range of purposes and this is helping to improve fluency. Older pupils, in particular, still make too many basic mistakes in spelling and frequently miscopy key vocabulary when it is provided for them.

More-able pupils are now stretched in lessons and parents confirm that work for these pupils is now more challenging. However, many classes in the school have a very wide ability range. Lower-attaining and disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are not making enough progress. This is because the work set for them does not meet their needs. In some lessons seen during this monitoring visit these pupils could not complete the task set for them, even with adult support. School leaders know that this situation is not acceptable and have plans to introduce targeted intervention programmes for pupils in the autumn term to help them catch up as quickly as possible.

## **The quality of teaching**

There was considerable variation in the quality of teaching seen during this monitoring visit. In the best lessons, all pupils, regardless of their ability, made good progress and greatly enjoyed their learning. For example, in an outstanding mathematics lesson in Year 6, the teacher's careful planning built on pupils' existing knowledge. She used questioning skilfully and encouraged pupils to explain their thinking when they answered. Activities offered the right level of challenge to different groups of pupils, so that all could achieve well.

In less successful lessons, teachers did not plan tasks that met the widely varying needs of pupils. They did not set out clear expectations of how much pupils should achieve when working independently. Some pupils struggled to complete their work, whilst others worked too slowly or lost concentration and began to chatter. As a result, progress in these lessons was uneven and too slow for some.

In all lessons seen during this monitoring inspection, there was a good balance between whole-class, teacher-directed learning and independent work. Pupils are given the time they need to practise new skills for themselves because teachers do not talk for too long. Teaching assistants usually work alongside less-able pupils in lessons and some do not have the skills or in-depth knowledge to explain the learning or deal with misunderstandings.

Most teachers mark pupils' books regularly and pupils understand the 'tickled pink' and 'green for growth' comments that give them feedback on what went well and what they need to do to improve. Some teachers give pupils time to respond to comments and complete corrections, but others do not. There is a similar inconsistency in the use of targets across the school.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The new behaviour policy sets out clear sanctions for misbehaviour and pupils say that teachers apply the policy fairly and consistently. The number of exclusions has reduced significantly in the last two terms. Pupils generally behave sensibly around the school and are respectful to adults. They enjoy their learning, particularly when lessons are active.

There was some low-level disruption seen in lessons during this inspection. In lessons where the teaching was not good, pupils sometimes lost concentration and began to chatter. In most cases, pupils responded quickly to the teacher's reminders to get on with their work, but valuable learning time was lost and these pupils did not complete the task set for them. As a result, they did not achieve well in the lesson.

Attendance for this year has been below the national average. School leaders are working to improve this situation. They have drawn up a new attendance policy and

have plans to raise parents' and pupils' awareness of the importance of regular attendance.

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

The executive headteacher and the head of school work in close partnership and provide strong and determined leadership. They are well supported by the deputy headteacher and the coordinator for special educational needs who have both developed their skills since the previous monitoring visit in March. The leadership capacity of the school will be increased further when the new assistant headteacher begins work in September.

Senior leaders have maintained the fast pace of improvement that was evident at the previous monitoring visit. They ensure that all deadlines for actions in the school's development plan are met. They review the plan regularly, evaluate progress and make adjustments, as necessary. They have a realistic view of the progress made so far and a good understanding of what still needs to be done.

Senior leaders visit lessons regularly to observe teaching and provide detailed feedback to teachers on what they need to do to improve. They also check teachers' lesson plans and review work in pupils' books so that they have a good understanding of each teacher's strengths. Although they have put extra support in place for a few teachers, they have not drawn up a personalised development plan for each teacher to help all staff improve their practice even further.

Governance has continued to improve. A recent review carried out by the local authority found that the governing body is now operating effectively. Well-focused training and support have enabled governors to develop their skills and understanding so that they can ask pertinent questions and challenge school leaders effectively. The strategic action committee (SAC) of the governing body meets regularly to check on the progress of each of the agreed actions in the school's development plan. This key committee also scrutinises detailed reports on pupils' progress each term. The executive headteacher and head of school both agree that governors give good support to the school, but also ask challenging questions and hold them to account. Minutes of meetings do not always provide evidence of the questions asked and sometimes lack detail.

### **External support**

The local authority's statement of action has been amended and is now fit for purpose. Officers from the local authority monitor the school's progress closely. They liaise closely with the executive headteacher and head of school and ensure that the school has the support that it needs. In some cases, support has been reduced. For example, the adviser supporting the governing body has begun to step back as the capacity of the governing body has increased. School leaders value the on-going

help provided by a teaching and learning consultant and an adviser for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Partnership work with Hangleton Infants School provides opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues in an outstanding local school. There are plans to develop this relationship further in the new academic year.