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Ms Hayley Challinor
Acting Headteacher
The Ashbeach Primary School
Ashbeach Drive
Ramsey St Mary's
Huntingdon
PE26 2TG

Dear Ms Challinor

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Ashbeach Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 September 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 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.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher, in any year group, before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Cambridgeshire.

Yours sincerely

Michael Sheridan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment and ensure that all pupils make at least satisfactory progress in reading, writing and mathematics in Years 3 to 6 by:
 - improving pupils' skills in constructing sentences, punctuation and spelling and increasing opportunities for reading and writing at length, including when pupils use the outdoor learning facilities as a stimulus for writing
 - developing and consolidating basic calculation skills and their application to solving mathematical problems
 - ensuring that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are set challenging tasks that enable them to make faster progress
 - developing a whole school approach to teaching handwriting and correct letter formation in order to improve the neatness and legibility of pupils' work
 - ensuring that pupils respond to teachers' guidance when their work is marked in order to improve standards.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that none is inadequate and much is good or better by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils of all abilities can achieve, especially the more able
 - planning more opportunities for pupils to develop literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum
 - ensuring pupils have enough time in lessons to complete challenging tasks which take account of their different learning needs.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels by:
 - developing the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders and subject leaders so that they rigorously and effectively evaluate teaching, learning and the curriculum and play an active part in driving forward priorities for improvement
 - involving the governing body in evaluating school improvement and the impact of actions on raising achievement, ensuring that its members challenge and hold leaders to account.

Special measures: monitoring inspection of The Ashbeach Primary School

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on insert date of inspection

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, acting deputy headteacher, subject leaders, groups of pupils, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last inspection the headteacher and deputy headteacher have both left the school. Last term, an acting headteacher was seconded from another local school for three days a week, with a local authority adviser fulfilling the role of acting headteacher for the other two days. The acting headteacher continues to work three days a week, and this term is being supported by an acting deputy headteacher who is in charge on the two days when the acting headteacher is away from school.

A previously full-time teacher has reduced her working time to two days a week and now shares a class with the acting deputy headteacher. A teacher remains on leave from the school. As well as the deputy headteacher, two further teachers have been appointed. One of the new teachers has been appointed as English leader and a mathematics leader has been appointed internally.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Last year's Year 6 left school with standards of attainment that were lower than they should have been. Boys did particularly poorly in writing. While the considerable extra help that was given towards the end of last year helped them catch up, it was clearly too little too late. Attainment in reading and mathematics was broadly average.

The current Year 6 pupils are in a stronger position, although there remains some underachievement. Work in books and their efforts as observed in lessons show that these pupils have made a positive start to the year, and if this continues they should reach at least average standards of attainment.

Throughout the school, writing remains an area of weakness, particularly for boys. Much effort is being put into improving the quality of teaching and the opportunity to write for sustained periods. Early indications are that the positive improvements made last year are continuing, and in some classes accelerating, this year.

While pupils make better progress in reading than writing, there are gaps in pupils' knowledge of the sounds that letters make. Pupils are often able to work out unfamiliar words by understanding the context of the text they are reading. However, too often they do not have sufficient knowledge of the sounds that different combinations of letters make to read unknown words out of context. This is an important skill for both reading and accurate spelling of new words.

The quality of teaching

There are some positive signs that teaching continues to improve. Teachers are matching work much more carefully to pupils' needs and ability levels, and many are becoming more confident in adapting their teaching during lessons to take account of pupils' comments and answers. Teachers are becoming more adventurous in setting up exciting learning opportunities. Role-play areas and the outdoor environment are being used more effectively to help pupils develop and practise essential skills in a way that they find exciting.

In some lessons teachers are not clear about what they want pupils to learn, and these lessons lack focus. In these cases, pupils complete their work without understanding the purpose of it and, as a result, do not learn as much as they could from the planned activities. In some lessons teachers talk for too long and pupils' attention drifts off, often because they are not sure about what they are expected to do. In some lessons, teachers are not challenging more-able pupils and some get bored.

Teaching assistants are working more in classes supporting individuals and groups. Observations made in lessons show that, while there remains some variation in the impact teaching assistants have on pupils' learning, they generally are getting much better at helping pupils to complete meaningful work. Where this is done best, teaching assistants are closely following the teacher's instructions and asking questions to make pupils think more deeply and, as a result, produce better quality work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils respect each other and most try hard to please their teachers. Inspectors observed some low-level disruption in a small number of lessons during this visit. Where this was the case, teaching was weaker so pupils disengaged or teachers did not give enough thought to how they should best structure the lesson to take account of the different needs of individuals.

Pupils say that they are happy in school. They say that teachers help them to resolve conflicts and get along with each other. They know that name-calling is wrong and say that teachers do not allow children to be nasty to each other.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting headteacher has quickly established high expectations, making sure everyone is very clear about where the school is aiming to be. This clarity of purpose is a very evident and an important improvement since the last visit. There is a shared understanding of what the school is trying to achieve and staff know the role that they are expected to play in moving the school forwards.

The subject leaders for English and mathematics are very new to their roles. They have started to create action plans that are heavily influenced by the overarching plan that has been developed by the acting headteacher. A strong sense of shared ownership for school improvement is developing, with each leader able to talk about how their actions will feed into meeting the school's overarching aims. This is most notable when talking to the special needs coordinator, who is much clearer about the purpose of her role and how she is expected to work alongside class teachers to support good progress for all.

Senior leaders are providing support, training and guidance to subject leaders, so they are developing a clear understanding of how senior leaders expect them to fulfil their roles. They say they find this clarity and support helpful in understanding what is expected of them.

Governors have managed the changes in staff over the past term with an unwavering determination to make decisions in the best interests of the school. They are focused on appointing permanent senior leaders as soon as possible, and recognise the importance of getting this right for the long-term success of the school.

External support

The local authority has continued to rigorously monitor the progress of the school. They provided a lot of support last term when the acting headteacher first took up her responsibilities. This support, while extensive, was necessary to ensure the school continued to improve during a period of considerable turbulence and change. The local authority has now rightly reduced the amount of support and the time is right for this support to reduce further, with advisers focusing more on supporting senior leaders' plans, so all leaders can demonstrate their capacity to manage ongoing improvement independently.

The acting headteacher continues to be seconded for three days a week and this arrangement is expected to continue until a permanent headteacher is appointed. The local authority recommended the appointment of the acting deputy headteacher, who has been employed at the school for one academic year.