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Bradley Taylor
Headteacher
Chiltern Gate School
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High Wycombe
HP12 3NE

Dear Mr Taylor

Special measures monitoring inspection of Chiltern Gate School

Following my visit to your school on 22 and 23 October 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 third 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher 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 Buckinghamshire.

Yours sincerely

Hilary Macdonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching to good or better so that pupils make at least good progress by:
 - ensuring that teachers make clear to pupils what they will learn in each lesson so that they, and pupils, can see how well the pupils have achieved by the end of the lesson
 - ensuring that the work set in lessons matches the different needs and abilities of all pupils within each class and encouraging them, where possible, to learn to work with less support
 - providing teachers with the right learning resources
 - making sure that teaching assistants are clear about their roles and how they can support pupils' learning.

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - establishing effective systems for checking how well the school is doing, including the quality of teaching, and pupils' progress and behaviour
 - ensuring that the outcomes of these checks are analysed, and strengths and areas for improvement identified and acted upon through effective planning for improvement
 - ensuring that governors are well informed about all aspects of the school's performance and check closely on the improvement the school is making.

- Improve assessment by:
 - ensuring that pupils know how well they are doing and what their next steps in learning should be
 - improving systems for recording the work of pupils, particularly those who are following the Early Years curriculum.

- Ensure that the pupil premium is used effectively to support pupils' learning and that this is closely checked by governors.

- Build upon the work started to improve the planning of what should be taught and when, and extend the opportunities for pupils to improve their reading skills.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 22–23 October 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised a range of documents and met with the headteacher, all members of the senior leadership team, and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, as well as a representative from the local authority. Members of the senior leadership team accompanied the inspector in observing eight lessons and making brief visits to all classes and groups during literacy hour.

During this monitoring inspection, systems for recording and assessing learning of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage were not examined as they were found to be effective at the previous visit. This visit did not include an evaluation of the role of teaching assistants. This area for improvement will be considered at the next monitoring inspection.

Context

A substantive deputy headteacher joined the school in September 2013. The senior leadership team now comprises - headteacher, deputy headteacher and two assistant headteachers. The school has increased in size. There are 100 pupils on roll, divided between 11 classes.

Achievement of pupils at the school

It is now much easier to identify the progress that pupils are making. All pupils have workbooks that act as highly individualised records of learning. Workbooks contain photographs and frequent, detailed observational notes and examples of pupils' independent and supported learning. Information derived from pupils' workbooks, a scrutiny of data and lesson observations indicate that most pupils throughout the school are currently making good progress.

Effective systems to track and measure pupils' progress, although introduced relatively recently, are now sufficient to provide an overall picture of achievement in school over the last year. Analysis of data indicates that at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2013, most pupils made good progress and achieved well overall. Progress in speaking and listening was better than in reading and progress in reading better than writing. Particularly good progress was also made by these pupils in aspects of mathematics and science. Also, information indicates that pupils throughout the school entitled to additional pupil premium funding support made faster progress than their peers in the school and nationally. Detailed analysis of achievement data is making a significant contribution to the school's evaluation of their own performance and is used to inform further improvement planning. For example,

targets have been set to improve standards in writing for all pupils as well as to raise the achievement of Pakistani pupils across the curriculum.

Significant opportunities have been provided for teachers to take part in moderation exercises, both within school and with other schools locally and further afield. Staff possess a much clearer understanding of the expectations for pupils' progress and are more assured and accurate in making judgements about the levels pupils achieve. Teachers now use assessment information routinely to plan lessons that more closely match the needs of pupils with differing abilities.

Achievement in reading for pupils of all ages has improved dramatically. A systematic method for the teaching of letters and sounds and for developing reading skills has been implemented throughout the school. All teachers and some teaching assistants have received training to enable them to teach these skills with confidence. Pupils are divided into groups according to their reading levels and they work in these groups for an hour every morning. As a result, during this monitoring visit, pupils were observed to be making rapid progress with reading and pre-reading skills.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is continuing to improve, although not enough is yet good or outstanding. The 'teaching and learning handbook' that was completed in the summer of 2013 provides direct guidance to teachers about what is expected of them and provides much helpful advice.

In lessons throughout the school, there is greater dialogue about learning. Teachers routinely talk to pupils about what they are learning in each lesson and how pupils can demonstrate their understanding. Links are made to previous learning and to next steps. More accurate assessments and regular reviewing and marking of pupils' workbooks are helping teachers plan lessons that effectively meet individual pupils' learning needs. This was observed to be successful in reading lessons where precisely planned activities and plentiful resources encouraged pupils to work alone or with a partner and to approach new challenges with enthusiasm. Not all lessons are so successful. In some lessons observed, teachers lacked clarity about the difference between intended learning and the activity that pupils were carrying out. At other times, although very carefully planned and prepared, activities lacked challenge so that pupils could complete tasks very easily and with minimal effort. In such cases, progress was limited.

Most lessons are now interesting, thoughtfully resourced and enjoyable for pupils, with plentiful opportunities for active participation and increasing independence. On several occasions during this visit, lessons involved going outside to count, observe and measure. When lessons are exciting, pupils respond with increased attention spans and make good progress. From time to time, lessons are dull, do little to

motivate or inspire pupils and, at these times, pupils disengage from learning and do not make the progress they could.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

During this monitoring visit, pupils demonstrated confidence in all adults and many were eager to engage with, and were welcoming of, the visitors to their classrooms. Safeguarding arrangements and systems for keeping pupils safe are thorough.

Typically, pupils are happy at school, and in lessons behaviour is largely good. Teachers and other adults always model positive, helpful and polite behaviour in their relationships with one another and with the pupils. A strong sense of care abounds. Nevertheless, the ways in which good behaviour is promoted and the more challenging behaviour managed is not consistent between classes or at different times of the school day. Senior leaders have rightly identified the need to review policies and practices, so that there are clear 'Chiltern Gate' expectations for standards of conduct at playtimes, lunchtimes and in lessons, and that all adults respond in the agreed ways.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leadership has been critically strengthened. The appointment of a substantive deputy headteacher has extended the capacity of the leadership team. The two previously acting deputy headteachers have been appointed as assistant headteachers. Members of the leadership team have clearly understood roles and responsibilities, and each leader is successfully driving aspects of improvement.

Rigorous and systematic monitoring of the quality of planning, teaching and pupils' workbooks is leading to further improvement. The 'What is Good Learning at Chiltern Gate School?' document sets out the constituent parts of good and outstanding lessons. This document is used by senior leaders when observing the quality of teaching and informs subsequent discussion with teachers. Teachers clearly understand the steps they need to take in order to improve their teaching as the feedback provided by senior leaders is unequivocal. Professional training is responsive to the needs of individual teachers as well as the specified areas for whole-school improvement. Performance management targets link appropriately to pupils' progress and increasingly to subsequent salary progression.

Senior leaders, governors and the local authority make regular and frequent checks on school progress since the previous inspection in December 2012. However, records of meetings, including governing body minutes and local authority 'progress meetings', do not give sufficient priority to the specified areas for improvement. As a result, the rates of progress being made in each area are not evident enough. Information and data from a range of sources are analysed and used to inform future improvement plans. For example, the pupil premium funding is specifically

allocated to additional activities and interventions including horticultural therapy in order to develop pupils' social and communication skills. Pupils' participation, progress and well-being levels are closely monitored over time so that the impact of interventions can be assessed. The information derived is used to inform the range of future support strategies. Governors know how many pupils are entitled to support from this additional funding and how their rates of progress compare with all others.

Governors are well informed about the school. They receive relevant, honest and evaluative information from the headteacher. Formal visits and meetings are supplemented by informal visits to classes and events such as the summer fair and forthcoming Christmas bazaar. Governors are aware of where teaching is strong and where it must be improved. They are becoming more familiar with school data and minutes of meetings and emails demonstrate challenge being directed at school leaders.

The curriculum requires review and this process has already been planned. Particular consideration is being given to personal, social and emotional development as well as promoting effective communication and literacy skills throughout the day. The computer suite has been updated and all pupils now have regular opportunities to develop information and communication technology (ICT) skills and to use a range of computer programs to enhance their learning. Plans are in place to increase ICT resources further. Resources for reading have been increased and pupils are now taking home reading books that relate precisely to their levels of ability. Resources for other subject areas are currently under review.

External support

The school makes maximum use of the direct and brokered support from the local authority. For example, three training sessions specifically for leaders of special schools are taking place this term. Senior leaders and teaching staff have made a number of visits to other schools, including observing good and outstanding teaching. The headteacher continues to be mentored by the headteacher of a local mainstream school. A number of joint initiatives are benefiting both schools. Chiltern Gate has made a significant contribution to strengthening moderation between special schools.