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Mr Daniel Knuckey
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Knuckey

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Iver Heath Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 3 and 4 December 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 November 2011. 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.

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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire.

Yours sincerely

James Henry

Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2011.

- Ensure safeguarding arrangements meet government requirements by:
 - immediately implementing regular risk assessments for school activities and reviewing them on a regular basis
 - immediately providing adequate supervision at break and lunchtimes
 - providing child protection training for all staff as soon as practical.

- Improve the quality of teaching in all year groups by:
 - ensuring teachers make more effective use of data about pupils' prior learning when planning lessons
 - providing all pupils, particularly the more able, with work that is consistently challenging
 - ensuring greater consistency in teachers' marking and that best practice is shared across the school
 - providing a better balance between the time used by the teacher for explaining activities and the amount of time pupils have for completing tasks
 - ensuring lesson activities are better targeted on groups of pupils who are underachieving, for example boys in writing.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing the skills and experience of middle leaders so that they are effective in raising the quality of teaching
 - improving systems for identifying the progress made by pupils from different groups
 - improving planning and evaluation for community cohesion and for ensuring all pupils have equal opportunity
 - making more effective use of others who work with the school to improve pupils' achievements
 - ensuring the governing body provides effective challenge and support for the school in order to bring about improvement.

Special measures: monitoring of Iver Heath Junior School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 3 and 4 December 2013.

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, including the school's own assessments of pupils' attainment levels as they entered the school in Year 3. The inspector met with the headteacher, members of the interim executive board of governors, and members of the shadow governing body and representatives from the local authority. The inspector spoke to groups of pupils and observed 14 lessons and part lessons in conjunction with the headteacher, taught by eight teachers.

Context

Since the last inspection, the acting headteacher has been appointed permanently to the post of headteacher in July 2013. A senior teacher at the school has been appointed as the substantive deputy headteacher in July 2013. Another senior teacher at the school has been given the role of developing middle leaders. Three classteachers have resigned and have been replaced with a permanent experienced teacher and two temporary teachers. A new permanent teacher joins the school in January 2014. A new teaching assistant and a new administrator who has responsibility for monitoring attendance have been appointed.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' attainment in 2013 was broadly in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. The percentage of more-able pupils who achieved the higher levels in the national tests in 2013 was also broadly in line with the national average. These results maintain the attainment reached in 2012. Boys' attainment in writing was above the national average. The percentage of pupils who attained level 4 or level 5 in English grammar, punctuation and spelling in 2013 was significantly above the national average.

School assessments show pupils in Year 6 are on track to raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of the school year in 2014, particularly in the percentage of pupils achieving the higher levels in reading.

Teachers' assessments and observations in lessons show that all groups of pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, are making consistently accelerated progress across all year groups, particularly in Years 5 and 6. This is partly due to teachers more effectively identifying pupils who may be falling behind and helping them to catch-up in lessons as well as the school providing extra support in small groups.

Teachers' own evaluations show that lower-ability pupils' progress in mathematics and more-able pupils' progress in reading are not as quick as other groups.

A significant proportion of pupils who entered the school in Year 3 in September 2013 had not passed the Key Stage 1 phonics (the sounds letters make) screening test. The school is effectively targeting these pupils and assessments show that the new phonics programme is helping them catch-up quickly. However, there are still a significant number of pupils in Year 3 who have not reached the expected level in developing their early reading skills.

The school is closing the gap for pupils in receipt of the pupil premium in the different year groups, but assessments show this is not closing as quickly in writing as in reading and mathematics, especially in Years 5 and 6. National data show pupils in receipt of the pupil premium who left the school in 2013 were about two terms behind other groups of pupils in the school in reading, writing and mathematics, although they were broadly in line with other groups of pupils in the school in English grammar, punctuation and spelling.

The quality of teaching

Quality of teaching continues to improve but there are still inconsistencies. Teachers regularly use data and assessments to match tasks to meet different groups of pupils' abilities. There are occasions when tasks do not stretch pupils' thinking, particularly for the more-able. For example, tasks such as copying questions from worksheets or spending too long cutting and pasting pictures into books slows the pace of learning.

Teachers are spending less time explaining activities with pupils now regularly involved in lessons. For instance, during an English lesson, older pupils had the confidence to express their opinions about whether there was 'personification' in a sentence. There are times when teachers do not adapt their lessons to ensure pupils' learning continues at an accelerated rate, such as by talking unnecessarily to the whole class during lessons and not giving pupils time to finish their work. Also, some opportunities are missed for more-able pupils to undertake independent tasks that would allow them to investigate and learn for themselves.

Marking is consistently done with teachers following a whole-school approach. There are examples in pupils' books when comments from teachers are not precise enough to fully help pupils improve their work. Pupils are not consistently given chance to respond and practise the guidance given through adapted activities in subsequent lessons, especially in mathematics.

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

- improve the quality of teaching – good

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils continue to have positive attitudes to school. Pupils say they feel safe in school and in the playground, and that bullying of any kind is rare. Pupils behave well in lessons, around the school and in the dinner hall. Staff manage the behaviour of pupils well following a whole-school approach to rewarding good behaviour and sanctions for any inappropriate behaviour.

Pupils are trained as play leaders with older pupils organising and leading different activities. This is overseen by adult midday supervisors who also engage different groups of pupils in games. The playground is supervised well both before school and during break and lunchtimes.

The school is beginning to help pupils keep themselves safe. For example, the local community police officer has been in to school to talk to pupils about cyber-bullying.

Attendance is broadly in line with the national average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The school now has a stable and capable senior leadership team. The newly appointed headteacher, supported by the new deputy headteacher, has an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are following an updated action plan and are implementing initiatives that are continuing to improve the school. This includes monitoring the quality of teaching and providing feedback that is improving pupils' learning in lessons.

Different initiatives have been delegated to other senior leaders, indicating the school is building the capacity to improve further and can support new teachers who may join the school. In September 2013, a new senior leader took over responsibility for developing the skills of middle leaders. While middle leaders have undertaken activities such as monitoring teachers' planning and reviewing pupils' work, they are not monitoring learning in lessons.

Senior leaders and teachers continue to track effectively individual and groups of pupils' progress across the school. This now includes measuring pupils' progress using the school's own assessments of their starting points in Year 3. These assessments have been externally moderated and validated by the local authority. This is giving teachers a clearer picture of the gaps in pupils' learning and enables them to help pupils to catch-up, for example, in developing their early reading skills.

An action plan to promote community cohesion is beginning to be carried out, such as when the school celebrated 'Gypsy, Romany Traveller Week' to help pupils understand different cultures and communities.

The school continues to work where necessary with outside agencies such as social services and the local authority children and families service. This is helping to ensure that more-vulnerable pupils have an equal opportunity to achieve in school. There are now more-effective links with parents and carers, for example in holding 'Reading Workshops' to explain how parents and carers can help with their child's reading.

The shadow governing body is now more established in providing challenge and support for the school. Members of the shadow governing body have visited classrooms with the headteacher and spoken to pupils to gain their views about the school.

All staff have received updated child protection training and are fully vetted before being allowed to work in the school. Risk assessments are undertaken and regularly reviewed for the school premises and for activities undertaken by pupils such as swimming and school trips.

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

- ensure safeguarding arrangements meet government requirements – good
- improve the effectiveness of leadership and management – good.

External support

The Buckingham Learning Trust (BLT), which is commissioned by the local authority, continues to provide a good level of support, for example in providing the expertise to assess and validate pupils' attainment levels on entry to the school in Year 3. Although the school is monitored regularly to ensure improvements continue, any extra support is now only provided when necessary.