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Ms Sue Hughes
Headteacher
Springfield Junior School
Springfield Road
Swadlincote
DE11 0BU

Dear Ms Hughes

Special measures monitoring inspection of Springfield Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 21 and 22 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm my 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 visit 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.

The school may now appoint newly qualified teachers.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying them both to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire County Council.

Yours sincerely

John Peckham
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching to good or better so that all pupils make rapid progress by ensuring that teachers:
 - plan tasks that are at the right level of difficulty for pupils of all abilities
 - have higher expectations of pupils' presentation, punctuation and spelling
 - question pupils more effectively to check their understanding of what they are learning and to make them think hard
 - deploy support staff more effectively to work with pupils of all abilities
 - improve the marking of pupils' work, especially in mathematics, so that pupils are well informed about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
 - provide more opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy and mathematical skills.

- Improve the quality and impact of leadership, including governance, by:
 - checking teaching more rigorously so that the causes of underachievement are known and the steps each teacher needs to take to improve their performance are identified
 - using the outcomes of such checks to provide tailored training and support for staff, including opportunities for them to observe outstanding practice
 - ensuring that teachers who lead subjects are held to account for teaching and progress in their subject
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and managing staff turnover more effectively
 - ensuring that other leaders are less reliant on the headteacher and are more effective at securing improvement themselves.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 2 – 3 October 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the literacy coordinator, the numeracy coordinator and the special educational needs coordinator. He also met with two groups of pupils, some parents, members of the governing body, and the school improvement adviser. Lessons taught by most teachers were observed and, during these observations, the work of pupils was examined. The inspector spoke on the telephone to the national leader of education who is supporting the school.

Context

There have been no significant changes in staffing or other factors since the last inspection.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's assessment records point towards a significant improvement in the National Curriculum attainment levels for the present Year 6 at the school compared to the very low achievement of last year. The proportion of pupils expected to achieve a Level 4 in reading, writing and mathematics should be above 60% in 2014, compared to 46% in 2013. If this is achieved, the school will be above the minimum targets set by the government, but still well below the national average. The rates of progress that all pupils across the school make from their Key Stage 1 scores have improved, but they are still not as good as they should be, and are also likely to be below national averages. This is mostly due to a backlog of underachievement from the last two years caused by staff turbulence and poor teaching. Some pupils have crucial gaps in their knowledge and understanding caused by this, which is restricting their ability to make faster progress now.

The school has revised the academic targets set for each pupil and issued 'flightpaths' to help them and their parents to track progress. Pupils and parents spoken with welcomed this and in most cases, were very much 'up for the challenge'. In some cases, however, pupils and parents do not feel that this approach fully recognises the individual needs of their child and are not achievable. School leaders accept that they are in the early stages of implementing the system and understand that some minor modifications might be needed as it becomes established. Although most pupils spoken to were now clear about their targets and their current level of attainment, they were much more vague about exactly what they needed to do to improve. As one pupil said: "Flightpaths tell you where you are and what your target is, but they don't tell you how to get better". Systems to track the progress of all pupils across the school are very thorough, although the accuracy and frequency with which some teachers record progress is still inconsistent.

The care that pupils take over their work has improved since the last monitoring inspection and teachers have begun a process of raising the minimum acceptable standards. However, the presentation of the work produced by some of the older pupils remains poor. They do not spend enough time to reach acceptable standards both in terms of the quality of work and the quality of presentation. In addition, pupils do not use pencils and rulers with sufficient precision when drawing diagrams and constructions in mathematics.

Homework is set weekly across the school and most pupils tackle this with enthusiasm. A homework club runs on Monday and Tuesday lunchtimes to support those who need it.

The quality of teaching

School leaders have used observations of teaching and scrutiny of lesson planning and work to provide training and professional development for teachers. In some cases teachers have planned work together to discuss common approaches and share resources. These actions have led to an improvement in the overall quality of teaching since the last inspection. In most lessons, effective planning ensured that little time was wasted and that pupils could quickly start work to improve their knowledge and skills. Often, thought had been put into providing a variety of work to enable pupils to work at a suitable level of difficulty. In one or two cases, however, pupils were not able to keep up because the teacher's introduction was too fast or became bored because it was unnecessarily detailed. In one outstanding lesson, all the pupils were fully engaged in appropriate work. The teaching assistant, working to a clear brief provided by the teacher was working with one group, the teacher was providing some focused teaching to another group and a number of pupils were busily engaged in working on their own on suitable work. This teacher was able to use questioning in a very skilful manner to probe pupils' understanding and when it became clear that some pupils were unsure, instead of just providing the answer, he encouraged the group to discuss their ideas first with one another in order to develop their understanding. Pupils in this group are making the strongest progress because of consistent good teaching.

Not all teachers have strong enough subject knowledge in all the subjects they teach. The new numeracy and literacy coordinators, together with the creative curriculum coordinator, have begun to have some impact in helping where this is the case and the local authority numeracy consultant has also made a useful contribution. There are gaps in the understanding of some teachers about the way in which children need to learn and understand key concepts and skills. This leads to activities being set that pupils find too hard, for the wrong reasons. For example, a suitable mathematical task, set for the most able pupils in two classes on using coordinates, became too difficult for many because the grids being used to plot them on were too small. In many cases, teachers have not been sufficiently precise about

the specific areas of work that pupils need to improve upon to reach the next level of attainment. The school is currently focusing on asking pupils more challenging questions. This was not evident in all classes, but pupils described more frequent situations where they were expected to give longer and more detailed responses.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour continues in many ways to be a strength of the school. The classrooms and playgrounds are well supervised and orderly. Supervision is effective, so pupils generally play well in the playground and are calm and well behaved going to assembly or in the dining room. Lessons are generally purposeful; pupils know what they need to do and get on with it. Most children are very happy and they work and play cooperatively together. Some children and parents have complained that the school does not deal quickly enough with behaviour or bullying issues. Others praised the effectiveness of the school's actions. Pupils were clear that the way in which the school managed the behaviour of the most challenging pupils was improving their behaviour over time.

Many pupils are keen to work hard and achieve well. They approach their work with enthusiasm and are careful to do their best. There are still a minority of pupils, however, who need regular encouragement to focus on their work. Not all pupils bring in their homework regularly. Relationships are especially strong between pupils and staff. Members of staff know the pupils well and because of this, pupils are polite and behave respectfully towards adults. There is excellent practice helping pupils with autism to build their social skills in a secure and well-supported environment.

Leaders and staff have helped to make the school a very safe place. The site is well organised and maintained to ensure that children's safety and safeguarding is prioritised.

Attendance continues to improve and is now better than in most schools. A small number of children struggle to arrive regularly and on time, but in all of these cases, the school has established links with the families and with the educational welfare services to try to bring about improvement.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

There is real evidence of growing confidence amongst leaders in the school. The establishment of a stable team of staff and having the key numeracy and literacy coordinator posts filled, is now enabling a much more effective team ethos. All leaders are clearly aware of the size of the job that still needs to be done and are beginning to develop effective tools. All four of the teachers with leadership roles have been able to join the deputy headteacher and headteacher in activities to check the quality of the school's work this year. They are also growing in confidence about

how to use their subject and specialist knowledge to support the teaching of other staff. For example, the special needs coordinator has been able to provide advice about how to use teaching assistants more effectively in the classroom. The literacy coordinator has provided teachers with materials to help improve the standard of pupils' writing. The numeracy coordinator has been able to help colleagues better understand the scope of some topics so that they can teach it more confidently. All teachers now have a better understanding of how to use the time spent in the creative curriculum to extend the reading, writing and mathematics that pupils learn in the mornings.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have clarified their roles and responsibilities so that there is no longer an overlap. They both have a very clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development for the school and for each member of staff. Their evaluation of the school is therefore accurate, but is too elaborate and detailed to enable governors to gain a quick grasp of the progress that the school is making.

Real progress has been made over the effectiveness of the school's work with parents and families. Most of the parents spoken to were very happy with the contacts they had with the school. They appreciated the efforts to make links with families, for example by making sure that there are always teachers in the playground to greet pupils and parents in the morning. Some effective information events have been held to help more parents understand modern schooling, such as one recently to explain the flightpaths. During this inspection, parents were invited to come and join their child's mathematics lesson for a while to see how the teachers approach the teaching. The school also runs a family learning programme and has used the inclusion manager effectively to build stronger links with families, especially those who, for whatever reason, find coming to and into school difficult.

The governing body is continuing to work with a national leader of governance to reform the way in which it works. The committee structure has been revised and there are now just two committees to manage all aspects of the work of the school. There have been a number of changes in personnel, including the election of four new parent governors very recently. There is a new vice-chair of the governing body and chairs have been appointed to both committees. This aspect of the school, however, is improving too slowly to have the impact that it should. Governors need further training and support and some more time, in order to be able to properly hold school leaders to account. That said, governance is in a better position than at any time in the last two years.

External support

The local authority has continued the levels of support identified in the last inspection report. A national leader in education is also still working with the school together with the national leader in governance. As school leaders gain in

confidence, however, the nature of the support is changing and becoming less 'hands on' and more consultative.