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Mrs Patsy Peres
Executive Headteacher
Ramsey Community Junior School
Station Road
Ramsey
Huntingdon
PE26 1JA

Dear Mrs Peres

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ramsey Community Junior School

Following my visit with Lindsay Hall, Additional Inspector, to your school on 22–23 January 2014, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in July 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement 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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher to provide additional support for pupils in any particular year group.

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 Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire.

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard

Her Majesty's Inspector Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching to good or better by ensuring that all staff:
 - use assessment information effectively to set work for pupils that will move their learning to the next level
 - give pupils time to work on tasks and activities by themselves and in groups
 - ask pupils searching questions that help to develop their understanding and deepen their thinking.

- Improve the quality and consistency of marking by ensuring that teachers:
 - give pupils clear guidance when marking their work that lets them know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve
 - increase opportunities for pupils to respond to teachers' comments so they can learn from their mistakes
 - learn from and adopt the most effective marking that exists in the school.

- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate their progress in reading, writing and mathematics by ensuring that:
 - teaching improves and secures consistently good progress year-on-year
 - teachers plan interesting activities that inspire pupils to learn and to use their reading, writing and mathematical skills when learning in subjects.

- Increase leadership capacity and the rate at which the school improves by:
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels, including the governing body, rigorously maintain the focus on improving teaching and check the effectiveness of their actions on pupils' achievement
 - developing the role of those who lead subjects in driving improvement across the school
 - establishing effective methods to keep parents and carers informed about how well their children are doing.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 22–23 January 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, members of the school's leadership team, subject leaders and teachers, pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Four new teachers were appointed in January 2014.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils who took the national tests in 2013 reached levels slightly below the national average. Given that these pupils joined the school with above-average skills, their progress was inadequate. Assessment data indicate that a significant number of pupils now in Year 5 and Year 6 are currently working below the level expected for their age, especially in mathematics, and that recent more rapid progress has not been sufficient to make up for earlier weaknesses in teaching. Pupils in Year 3 and Year 4 are making progress that is at least in line with expectations.

Recent changes to teaching, and the provision of additional support to help pupils catch up, have not yet made an impact on standards. However, in all of the lessons observed by inspectors, pupils were making better progress than reported at the time of the last inspection because they were engaged in work at a suitable level of difficulty for their particular abilities.

Pupils are being given more opportunities to use their reading, mathematical and writing skills when learning in all subjects, and enjoy the regular opportunities they have to write creatively and at length. The early impact of improved teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) was evident during the inspection; pupils were able to read unfamiliar words fluently and work out their meaning. Pupils' books show that the quality of written work is improving. Most is neat and well presented, indicating that pupils are taking a pride in their work. Pupils who have special educational needs are making rapid progress because they are getting the support they need.

The school is investing the additional funding it receives from the pupil premium to provide further teaching and small-group support to help eligible pupils catch up. As yet, their attainment and progress remain below expectations.

The quality of teaching

The school's self-evaluation indicates that the improvements in teaching are too recent to have had an impact on the rate of progress made by pupils, which remains insufficiently rapid. Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that teachers are now starting to plan activities based on their secure knowledge of what pupils know, understand and need to do next. During one lesson, pupils made rapid progress in mathematics because the teacher used her understanding of what every child had learned in the previous lesson to plan interesting and appropriately challenging activities for all. In that lesson, and in others that were observed, teachers asked questions skilfully to check pupils' understanding and encourage them to develop their ideas fully. Teachers also asked questions that helped pupils think through solutions to difficult problems they encountered in their work. This built both their confidence and ability to make progress when working without direct help from the teacher. Teaching assistants are making a better contribution to pupils' learning within lessons because the learning aims for different groups of pupils are clear in teachers' plans.

Marking has improved but is not yet consistently effective in helping pupils to improve their work. All teachers give pupils regular feedback through comments on their work that tell them what they have done well and what they need to improve. Teachers often use their comments to set pupils additional challenges, or make clear the need to correct errors or inaccuracies in spelling, punctuation or grammar. Some, but not all, pupils respond to these comments and challenges and make rapid gains in their understanding as a result. Some pupils are not sure about the targets they are working towards and what they need to do in order to achieve them.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils enjoy learning and appreciate the recent changes their teachers have made to make activities more engaging and challenging. There has been a considerable reduction in the number of incidents of serious misbehaviour, and in the number of times that pupils need to be removed from lessons as a result of it. The school has not needed to make use of the sanction of exclusion since the previous monitoring visit. An effective response to the recent use of homophobic language on the part of a small number of pupils involved using assemblies and lesson time to make clear some of the consequences of such behaviour. During the inspection, pupils were courteous, keen to learn, punctual in arrival at lessons and supportive of each other and their teachers during lessons. They are responding to new systems that reward good behaviour as soon as it is noted.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders have taken determined action to bring about improvements, but their actions have had insufficient time to demonstrate sustained impact. The headteacher has set clear and appropriate priorities based on a secure understanding of what needs to happen if the school is to improve, and is being supported by senior and other leaders, including governors. Systems to check the quality of teaching, planning, marking and other aspects of the school's work are now in place and leaders are taking action to address areas of weakness.

Teachers can access support in order to help them meet the challenging targets they are set, and they appreciate the clear information about pupils' progress that helps them plan how to help pupils do better. Since the previous inspection, the school has arranged additional support for pupils who have gaps in their learning as a result of previous poor teaching; during the inspection, small groups of pupils were observed completing work that was precisely matched to their needs. Teachers appreciate the training they have received. Subject leaders for literacy and numeracy are giving good advice to teachers on how to help pupils develop their skills in these areas.

Governors are involved in evaluating the progress made on the priorities for improvement outlined in the school's plan. They receive regular information about how well the school is doing in different areas of its work and take part in visits so that they can see how plans are being put in to practice. A recent review of governance indicated that governors support the school's leaders, and are asking challenging questions to evaluate the impact of their work and assess how well different groups of pupils, including those eligible for the pupil premium, are making progress.

External support

The local authority has provided training and support that have been highly appreciated by both new and established teachers, who are starting to use new strategies in the classroom to engage pupils and help them make better progress. Local authority advisers are helping leaders to monitor and evaluate progress towards targets in the improvement plan and to make secure judgments about the quality of teaching. They have provided training in specific areas of the curriculum including literacy; pupils now have regular opportunities to write creatively and at length. Following the judgment made at the first monitoring inspection, the local authority has now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose.