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Mrs Stephanie Praetig and Mr Martin Lee
Executive and Associate Headteachers
Niton Primary School
Niton
Ventnor
Isle of Wight
PO38 2BP

Dear Stephanie Praetig and Martin Lee

Special measures monitoring inspection of Niton Primary School

Following my visit with Stephen Lake, Additional inspector, to your school on 5–6 March 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 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 not appoint newly qualified teachers.

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 Isle of Wight and Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Susan Gadd

Additional inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching to raise pupils' achievement, by ensuring that teachers raise achievement through rigorous systematic approaches by:
 - having consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially in Years 3 and 4, and provide them with work that will challenge them to make rapid progress
 - using assessment information accurately to check if pupils are on track to meet their targets and to set work that allows them to catch up if they have fallen behind
 - creating opportunities for pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills in a wider range of subjects.
- Improve the leadership of teaching, by:
 - developing systems to regularly and rigorously check its quality
 - ensuring teachers are held to account for pupils' progress
 - ensuring teachers are provided with the training they need to teach consistently effectively.
- Develop the skills of leaders and managers at all levels, by ensuring they:
 - are given any necessary training to take a full share of leadership responsibilities
 - evaluate school performance more accurately
 - produce a sharper improvement plan, with time-limited, measurable steps to success that are clearly linked to intended outcomes for pupils and which are regularly checked
 - collect and analyse data about pupils' progress sufficiently frequently and effectively, and take action where needed to make sure individuals and groups are not falling behind.
- Improve the planning of the subjects and topics taught, especially in mathematics, so it includes precise details about the areas of study that need to be taught, and gives pupils more opportunities to develop independent and creative methods of learning.
- Ensure that the governing body holds leaders robustly to account for the school's performance.

- Commission an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 5–6 March 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents, including the checks made to ensure the suitability of staff to work with children. Inspectors met with senior leaders, teaching staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority, and spoke informally to a group of parents and carers at the beginning of the school day. Ten part-lessons were observed; most of these were conducted jointly alongside the executive headteacher.

Context

Since the last visit an executive headteacher has been appointed for three days a week and the consultant headteacher now leads the school on the other two days. Three new parent governors have joined the governing body while two local authority governors have left. Within the last two weeks two clerks to the governing body have been temporarily appointed to cover the long-term absence of the substantive clerk.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The most recent assessment information gathered indicates that many pupils are on track to meet the school's interim milestones. Adults now have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve and this has led to more pupils making better progress than in the past. This finding is supported by book scrutiny carried out during this visit. However, this is too variable between subjects and year groups. For disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, boys, those that are more able and those who are not eligible for additional funding (pupil premium), progress can be slow at times. This applies across subjects, classes and year groups throughout Key Stages 1 and 2. Progress in reading is stronger across the school than in mathematics and writing, although there are signs of improvements in both these subjects. The best progress occurs when teachers have a strong understanding of the subject they are teaching and understand the differing needs of pupils within their class.

In the Reception class children continue to enter school with skills generally expected for their age. Progress in this part of the school remains strong and children enjoy the range of learning activities. They make the fastest progress when adults are able to link tasks and activities to their learning both inside and outside the classroom.

Leaders within the school are currently looking for further guidance on how to develop the use of the outdoor learning environment to further accelerate the progress of these children.

Pupils' love of reading and the opportunities to read a variety of texts are supporting their accelerated progress in this subject. The English leader has just introduced the teaching of comprehension skills through 'guided reading'. Leaders are aware that more training is required in this area to help teachers plan more precisely for pupils' needs.

In writing, pupils are beginning to have more opportunities to write at length. This is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' use of vocabulary and the range of writing they are experiencing. Leaders hope the introduction of a new letters and sounds scheme (phonics) will improve pupils' spelling. However, this introduction is too new for there to be any real evidence of the impact on pupils' writing.

In mathematics teachers have moved away from relying on a single scheme of work. Training has concentrated on developing the understanding of the range of skills and knowledge that pupils should gain as they move through the school. Teachers' planning has become more consistent and pupils report that lessons are more fun due to the greater opportunities for problem solving. For example, in one lesson pupils were converting metric and imperial measurements through playing games. In this lesson pupils showed a thirst for knowledge and were excited to work their way through the various tasks presented. As a result, pupils made good progress and took great pride in supporting one another in their learning.

The quality of teaching

Since the last visit teaching has improved but remains too variable. When teaching is most effective pupils are excited about their learning and challenged to apply a range of skills to solve problems. Boys are eager to participate in practical activities and demonstrate what they already know. Teaching assistants are used effectively to support the skills being taught by the class teacher throughout the lesson. In these lessons activities have been planned to meet the needs of pupils, including those that are more able or have special educational needs. For example, in one lesson pupils applied their knowledge of perimeter and area to plan a garden. This also involved them calculating the cost of resources while working within a financial budget. In this lesson pupils worked in small groups to cooperate on the various aspects of the task. The teacher used her knowledge of the pupils' differing skills to give appropriate challenge and ongoing advice. Consequently pupils in this lesson made good progress.

In those cases where teaching was less effective the teacher was not able to adapt the task according to the individual needs of different pupils. As a result, some pupils

found the work either too easy or too difficult which hindered their progress. In less effective teaching, teachers do not deploy teaching assistants to ensure that pupils are giving the lesson their full attention, particularly during the introduction to lessons. In other lessons, pupils do not always have enough time to complete a task fully, resulting in some pupils not achieving as much as they could.

Pupils are now given greater opportunities to respond to teachers' comments in their work. The introduction of 'Fix-Its' in marking helps pupils to understand what they have done well and what they need to learn next. Pupils report 'We get given time in the morning to practise or fix our mistakes. This helps us to improve our work.' A new target setting system has been introduced and as a result pupils are generally able to talk about the standards they are working at, although they are sometimes less clear about what they need to do to improve.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour in class and outside continues to be a strength of the school. Pupils are polite and caring towards each other. They have good relationships with a range of adults, showing respect and courtesy. During discussions a number of pupils were very enthusiastic about their teachers and expressed how much they felt safe and enjoy coming to school. Leaders are now considering how best to log and analyse the rare cases of poor behaviour.

Attendance has improved since the last inspection and is now broadly average. Leaders have introduced a weekly class cup rewarding the best attendance. However, overall attendance figures in such a small school are still subject to variations due to cases where pupils need to travel to the mainland for medical needs and cases of term-time holiday absence. Recently fixed fines have been introduced to discourage term-time holiday absences. However this scheme is too new to see an impact.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The appointment of the executive headteacher in January has provided school staff with greater clarity and a stronger understanding of the extent of change that needs to take place. Her clear direction and focused attention to details have brought about significant changes since her appointment. This along with the support of the associate headteacher has resulted in many staff feeling more empowered both in the way that they are able to teach and through the growing opportunities to carry out their leadership responsibilities.

As a result of joint lesson observations and book scrutiny with local authority consultants or the executive headteacher, the mathematics and literacy leaders are

now more involved in checking the quality of work in classrooms. In particular, they have been looking at how well teachers plan for pupils' needs and the impact this is having on progress. Much of this work is relatively new and leaders will continue to require support to develop their skills in monitoring and evaluating the work of their peers. Action plans for literacy and numeracy have been updated, although these plans are not always specific enough to support leaders in checking if their actions have been successful.

Despite staff training, pupils' progress remains inconsistent between classes and subjects throughout Key Stages 1 and 2. More work is needed to ensure that current assessments are accurate and that teachers are clear about what pupils know and what they need to learn next. This is particularly the case for some pupils identified as being more able, those with special educational needs, those who are not in receipt of additional funding through the pupil premium and boys.

The senior leadership team meet regularly to review the action plan for the school and are focused on ensuring that pupils are on track to meet many of the milestones identified within this plan, particularly those related to progress. However, although information collected recently is positive, it is still too new to draw any firm conclusions and requires further validation to confirm or refute its accuracy. A new computerised tracking system has recently been introduced to support leaders at all levels in identifying those pupils not making sufficient progress. Once again this is very new and leaders have yet to check that the information recorded is accurate and provides the specific detail they require to further support school improvement.

Pupil progress meetings and performance management systems are beginning to help leaders hold staff to account. Changes have been made to progress meetings so that teachers attend these meetings with proposed actions already noted. A performance management policy is now in place although at the time of the visit not all staff had had their initial meeting.

Many parents and carers spoken to were very complimentary about the recent changes and the improvements to both teaching and leadership. However, a very small number did raise some concerns about communications given the significant changes taking place. Senior leaders are very conscious of keeping parents and carers as fully informed as possible through newsletters, texts and regular meetings. They will shortly be seeking parental views to further improve current systems for communication.

Governors continue to work in the best interest of pupils, staff and parents and carers. An independent review of governance has taken place and as a result changes have occurred in how governors gather information to validate the information provided to them by school leaders. Link governors now meet with leaders and since January they have written some insightful reports about the pace of change that has taken place. Despite these improvement governors fully

acknowledge that progress has not always taken place swiftly due to a number of governor positions being vacant and until two weeks ago no clerk for the governing body. The single central record meets statutory requirements. Governors are aware that they need to have a stronger strategic view of possible health and safety issues around the school and that they should regularly check the implementation of policies.

External support

The local authority has provided good support by helping to develop the subject knowledge of teachers in literacy and numeracy and by developing the leadership skills of the literacy and numeracy leaders. This has led to significant improvements in the way in which teachers are beginning to plan for the needs of pupils and provide pupils with more memorable learning experiences. The temporary executive headteacher appointed by the local authority is providing strong leadership.

The local authority needs to continue to support teachers' understanding of how to assess pupils' learning and check whether the most current data on progress and attainment is accurate. In addition, support is required to develop how adults use the outdoor learning space in Reception to further accelerate progress. The local authority will also need to seek additional support from experienced and skilled governors to develop and support current governors.