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20 March 2014

Mrs Karen Ashton  
Muriel Green Nursery School  
Church Crescent  
St Albans  
AL3 5JB

Dear Mrs Ashton

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Muriel Green Nursery School**

Following my visit with Christine Malone Her Majesty's Inspector to your school on 18 and 19 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 on 16 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 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 Hertfordshire local authority.

Yours sincerely

Gill Jones  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

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

- As a matter of urgency, ensure that:
  - all necessary risk assessments are updated and submit them for adoption by the governing body as soon as possible
  - the administration and recording of medicine is in line with best practice
  - the school conducts the required programme of emergency fire practices and maintains appropriate records of the issues raised.
- Ensure that all arrangements for safe staff recruitment are met and the single central record is checked and updated regularly.
- Establish a consistent programme of assessment that notes the progress being made by every child.
- Improve the children's achievement by:
  - ensuring that all activities are planned to build upon the individual children's knowledge, skills and experiences
  - monitoring the quality of teaching effectively and guiding staff development through performance management so as to increase the proportion of good or better teaching
  - establishing a programme of individual support for children who show early signs of a disability or special educational needs
  - improving the resources available to promote effective early reading skills.
- Ofsted will make recommendations on governance to the authority responsible for the school. These may include an external review of governance to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 18–19 March 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised planning documents and met with the headteacher, staff, six members of the governing body including the Chair of Governors, representatives from the local authority and 12 parents. Inspectors did not do a detailed check on the safeguarding areas for improvement because they were found to meet requirements at the first monitoring inspection.

### **Context**

A new headteacher started in January 2014 and two teachers joined the school at the same time. The interim headteacher has returned to her advisory role in the local authority and one teacher left the school in December. One teaching assistant is absent on sick leave. The governing body has reconstituted and there are two vacancies.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Children start in the nursery school with levels of development that are broadly typical for their age. Many of the children are highly articulate and converse well with adults and their peers. For example, one child saw that the chicks had been moved from the classroom and explained that where they had gone was 'a mystery'. The more confident children are very responsive in lessons. They join in with stories, give their opinions and engage well with the activities provided. Others are less engaged and do not sustain their concentration, particularly when they are being taught by a single member of staff in a large group for 'carpet time'. On these occasions, children are not sufficiently motivated by the teacher and are reminded to join in by the other adults giving support. This interrupts the flow and children do not learn as quickly as they could.

Outdoors children play well together. Conversations about having a party in the play house while serving each other pretend food and drinks demonstrated the wealth of experience and rich language that many children bring from home. They are cooperative, listen well and follow instructions from adults. They are learning to do things for themselves, such as putting their drawings in the 'going home' tray and choosing which materials to use for art activities.

## **The quality of teaching**

The activities provided for children are beginning to link more closely to their learning needs. Staff have a better understanding of individual children's preferences because they are more aware of children's knowledge, skills and abilities. They are starting to use this information more effectively to plan the curriculum, though they do not always provide enough challenge for the more able. Teachers are introducing topics which interest the children, such as 'animals'. They are beginning to use children's experiences at home as a foundation for their learning in school, such as talking about their pets. However, children who do not bring information from home are not always well supported in school, so are at risk of falling behind both socially and emotionally.

Parents are positive about the new activities and routines introduced. They say their children are enjoying watching the chicks grow and the recent stories about Africa. Planning to develop children's understanding of the world around them is improving. Staff are making more use of the library and now offer a lending service, which is stimulating children's interest in learning to read. Although teaching is improving, the organisation of some lessons is weak as teachers do not always think through the practicalities in advance. For example, hand washing was rightly a high priority for children after handling the chicks, but because the washing facilities were not in the classroom the teacher had to move away from teaching the other children to supervise those washing their hands. This interrupted the learning.

Relationships between staff and children are good. Staff morale is improving and they are working more effectively as a team. Staff are conscientious in supporting children identified with special educational needs and are developing systems to improve this aspect. Staff identify children who are falling behind effectively, but recognise that more needs to be done to bring together other agencies, such as speech and language, to help children to catch up.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Children are friendly to each other and cooperate well. For example, in digging for 'phonic treasure' in the sandpit they were keen to show each other and the teacher what they found. However, where activities lack purpose, children do not sustain their concentration and this leads to disruptive behaviour, such as throwing sand out of the sand pit. Staff deal with incidents effectively after the event, but do not ensure that children are sufficiently focused or interested in what they are doing to prevent them.

The supervision of children is adequate and arrangements for registering the children at the start of the sessions and allowing adult access to the nursery are suitable. However, when the children from the wrap-around care join the nursery class there is insufficient focus on treating resources, such as the musical

instruments, well. Not all staff are alert to and aware of children who are not working directly with them.

Attendance in the morning sessions is much better than in the afternoon. The systems for following up poor attendance are not well developed.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The new headteacher has made a positive start. The local authority has managed the handover from the interim headteacher well and the new headteacher has been provided with effective support, giving her time to get to know the nursery and pre-school. Most parents say they are beginning to see improvements in the quality of care and education provided for their children. The closer links that are being developed between home and school are appreciated by the parents spoken to during the inspection.

Staff recognise the need to improve the curriculum and organisation of the nursery. They are keen to support the headteacher and willing to develop their own practice. They are responsive to suggestions for improvement, such as developing the 'moment in time' and the 'what are we learning this week' notice boards. The system for planning is developing and is providing more accurate information to track children's progress. However, it does not yet focus sufficiently closely on different pupil groups, such as 'nursery only' children as opposed to 'nursery and day care' children. This means it is difficult to draw conclusions about the impact that different aspects of the provision is having on children's progress or to link outcomes to staff performance management.

The governing body had an external review conducted by the local authority. As a result, it has reconstituted and is now smaller than at the time of the section 5 inspection. Governors are keen to have an impact on improving the quality of education provided. Consequently, they are attending training to develop their knowledge and skills to enable them to challenge school leaders more effectively. The involvement of governors in reviewing the changes to the outdoor area is positive, but other aspects of governance, such as reviewing data and evaluating the views of parents, are less well developed.

### **External support**

The local authority is providing good support to the school. It has worked effectively with governors and has made excellent arrangements for the smooth transition between headteachers. It has secured a National Leader of Education to work with the headteacher to ensure improvements to the nursery and pre-school are rapid. This is a new partnership so the impact of it is not yet evident. The local authority recognise that to date it has driven much of the strategic work quickly and to good

effect, but it is now time to step back slightly to evaluate how well the new headteacher builds capacity within the school.