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Ms Andrea Fisher
Interim Headteacher
Mill Hill Primary School
Sunnyside Avenue
Tunstall
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST6 6ED

Dear Ms Fisher

Special measures monitoring inspection of Mill Hill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 30 April 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the interim headteacher, interim deputy headteacher and four other teachers, a representative of the local authority, the executive headteacher and two members of the provisional governing body. I made brief visits to nearly all classes, spoke to a small number of pupils and looked at a few of their books. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the last full inspection the headteacher has left the school and the governing body has been disbanded. The local authority has established an advisory governing body, and appointed an executive headteacher, an interim headteacher and interim deputy headteacher. One of the assistant headteachers has relinquished her senior leadership responsibility and has taken on the role of nursery manager. The other

assistant headteacher will leave at the end of this summer term. Two other teachers have left the school. The school is currently advertising for a number of leadership and teaching posts. The advisory governing body has plans for the school to become an academy later this year.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The school's improvement plan and the local authority's statement of action are closely integrated. They show clearly the swift and well-directed actions that are being taken to address the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. The formation of an advisory governing body, and the appointments of you, your deputy and an executive headteacher have been pivotal in bringing about initial improvements. With the strong support of the executive headteacher and your deputy, you have given the school clear direction for improvement and have acted decisively, and with urgency, to begin to eliminate the causes of underachievement. Restructuring and clarifying of leaders' responsibilities mean that line management arrangements and areas of accountability are now clearly understood. There is now a strong focus on raising achievement through improving teaching. Programmes such as 'getting to good' and 'good to outstanding' are providing all teachers with opportunities to improve their teaching skills. Staff say that expectations of them are now much higher and they feel that they are rising to the challenge of ensuring that all pupils achieve well.

An improved system for tracking pupils' achievement is helping teachers to have a better understanding of the standards reached by pupils, especially when compared with others of the same age nationally. More effective monitoring by you and other leaders is helping to ensure that teachers' assessments are more accurate. Senior leaders are now using this information much more effectively to hold teachers to account for pupils' achievement, set targets for improvement and identify pupils who are underachieving. Staff training is helping teachers plan lessons that build more effectively upon pupils' current levels of attainment. A revised attendance policy, regular reminders in assemblies, certificates and rewards, and frequent contact with parents have resulted in attendance being significantly higher than it was at the same time last year.

There are now signs that progress is beginning to accelerate in some classes. However, progress is currently still too slow and attainment remains low across the school. In lessons, many pupils are given work that is too easy and does not provide sufficient challenge, especially for the most able. In some lessons, the focus is often on pupils completing the activity rather than accelerating their progress. You are aware that pupils' literacy skills are especially weak, and spelling and handwriting are particular areas of concern. A new marking policy is providing teachers with helpful guidance on how they can accelerate learning, but it is not yet applied consistently.

The local authority and the advisory governing body are providing strong support to you and other school leaders. Links with the local academy are used very well to improve teachers' and leaders' skills through providing a range of professional development opportunities. Currently, specialist mathematics and English teachers from the academy are working with teachers and pupils of this school to raise standards and improve teachers' subject knowledge. Academy-led leadership development programmes are helping the school's middle and senior leaders improve their skills of monitoring, evaluating and improving the school.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Advisory Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Stoke-On-Trent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Roy Bowers
Her Majesty's Inspector