

Tribal  
1-4 Portland Square  
Bristol  
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

**Direct T** 0117 3115307  
**Direct email:** rachel.evans@tribalgroup.com

1 May 2014

Ms Sarah Pickering  
Acting Headteacher  
Mill Water School  
Honiton Bottom Road  
Honiton  
EX14 2ER

Dear Ms Pickering

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Mill Water 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 November 2013.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, members of the school's senior leadership team, four governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and the headteacher of a school providing external support. I evaluated the local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan. I also toured the school and visited several classes.

### **Context**

The substantive headteacher is on an extended period of absence due to ill health and you have been appointed as acting headteacher since March 2014. Since the previous inspection several new members have joined the governing body and a new Chair of the Governing Body and vice chair have been appointed. One part-time and three full-time teachers have joined the school to replace staff who were previously employed on temporary contracts.

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

The acting headteacher and senior leadership team, together with the reformed governing body, share a strong commitment to securing the school's improvement and raising pupils' achievement. In a relatively short period of time since her appointment, the new acting headteacher has clarified the direction of the school, reviewed the roles of senior leaders and raised staff morale. Senior leaders are now taking greater responsibility for aspects of the school's work and are tackling more effectively areas for improvement. The acting headteacher and governors recognise that further work is needed to complete job descriptions for senior leaders, provide further support in developing management skills and to establish how their performance will be measured.

Several aspects of the school's work are being improved. At the time of the last inspection, there was limited information on pupils' attainment and it was difficult to know whether pupils were making enough progress. Appropriate systems for gathering information on pupils' attainment have been introduced. Senior leaders have worked closely with other special schools to moderate pupils' work and to make sure assessment information is accurate. These arrangements provide a good starting point for measuring the future progress of pupils. Teachers' planning includes a greater emphasis on providing sufficient challenge for more-able pupils and pupils' work is being marked more systematically. The use of homework, tailored to the specific needs of individual pupils, is being extended in classes across the school.

The action plan covers all the areas identified for improvement in the last inspection report. It contains significant weaknesses which include a lack of milestones, an unrealistic timescale and the ineffective sharing of responsibilities among senior leaders. The local authority's statement of action identifies a range of support for the school. However, it relies too heavily on the school's action plan which does not provide a sound basis for judging success. Senior leaders are currently revising the school's action plan so it is more easily understood by staff and governors and enables them to improve and evaluate the school's work more effectively.

The governing body has taken positive action to strengthen the leadership of the school. It has completed an audit of its skills and recruited new members to provide a broader range of experience. An action plan monitoring committee has been set up and meets regularly to check the school's progress. The monitoring committee has begun to challenge more effectively the school's performance, for example, seeking more detailed information about subject plans and pupils' learning targets. However, deficiencies in the action plan have hampered the governing body's ability to check

whether action is moving the school forward quickly enough. Safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements.

Profitable links have been established with a partner special school, particularly to help senior leaders judge the quality of teaching and learning more accurately. Several staff have visited the partner school and revised guidance for observing lessons has been drawn up. Training has also been provided to extend the skills of staff working with pupils who have communication difficulties. Senior leaders recognise that more rigorous arrangements are needed to measure the impact of this work.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is not 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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Devon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Redpath  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**