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4 July 2014

Karen Ashton  
Headteacher  
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 Gill Jones, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 2–3 July 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 third 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 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 County Council.

Yours sincerely

Christine Malone  
**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.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 2–3 July 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the governing body, staff, parents and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors observed a range of activities in the sunshine room and in the garden, and talked with children.

### **Context**

One teacher has left the school since the previous monitoring inspection. There have been no other staff changes. The two vacancies on the governing body remain. The headteacher continues to manage the daycare provision in addition to managing the maintained nursery school.

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

Children are much more interested in the activities provided than they were during the last monitoring visit. Most children are operating at levels typical for their age, and the older children in the nursery school are ready to start school in September 2014. Children who were working at, or slightly below, expected levels are now making quicker progress. For example, they are more attentive when listening to adults, and they carefully choose resources to make complicated models and to create pictures. During their play, children are confident to write words that they know, such as their names, and they are beginning to use their growing knowledge of phonics (the sounds that letters make) during taught sessions. Children have a good understanding of sentences, fiction and non-fiction books. They are able to describe parts of their books, including the front cover, spine and 'blurb'. More-able children recognise letters and blend sounds together in the taught phonics sessions, but they do not have enough opportunities to practise these skills on their own. The system to borrow books from school for reading at home is not used routinely by all parents. Therefore, more-able children, who could be reading for themselves, do not yet do so regularly.

Children identified with special educational needs are helped to make progress through the support from staff and other children. As a result, they are progressing well, from low starting points, in all areas of learning.

During observations, both indoors and outdoors, children responded well to guidance from adults. They listen attentively during taught sessions and concentrated for longer periods than they did at the time of the previous visit. Children enthusiastically shared their knowledge of caterpillars and butterflies with the inspector following their observations of the creatures growing in the classroom.

## **The quality of teaching**

Teaching is improving and some good teaching was observed during the visit. Staff have changed the way that they use the classroom and cloakroom area. There is less clutter. Learning spaces are better organised, and resources are stored more attractively. This is helping children to be more confident in choosing activities. Staff support children more effectively because daily routines and practices have become established. Adults work well together and willingly help each other.

Staff now focus much more effectively on developing children's learning. Planning has improved and the activities provided are helping children to develop their critical-thinking skills. For example, inspectors observed adults encouraging children to work out how to turn a cooking mix into dough.

In teaching phonics (the sounds that letters make), staff group children according to their level of knowledge. These lessons are sharply focused, with clear aims for what children need to learn. In other areas of learning, staff are less precise in following up the next steps that a child needs to make. For example, in children's learning journeys, although staff frequently identify many next steps for children, it is not clear whether activities are planned to follow them up systematically. More-able children, in particular, are not given sufficiently challenging tasks.

The programme of individual support for children with special educational needs has been well thought-out. Staff support these children well and appropriate agencies are now involved.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The staff team is more confident in managing children's behaviour than at the previous visit. Children's attitudes to learning are now far more positive. Children are more interested in the adult-led activities and concentrate for longer periods of time. Most children now play well together and treat resources with respect. This is a big improvement. The arrangements for children from the wrap-around care joining the sunshine room are much better. Consequently, behaviour has improved, and children play cooperatively during activities both indoors and outside.

The improvements to the safety of children in the nursery school seen on the previous visits have been sustained. Parents are confident in the safety of their children when they are at the nursery school. They say, 'Now there is a sense of order and control' and 'There is less confusion and a stronger sense of security.'

When children are absent from the nursery school, this is still not followed up systematically. Inspectors identified this issue on the previous visit.

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

Although improvements to the nursery are clearly visible, they have not been rapid enough. Plans have been implemented at a measured pace. Since the previous visit, leadership has improved. The headteacher works tirelessly to support staff across the provision to continue to improve. She has too much to do because she is temporarily covering too many roles. These include managing the daycare and acting as the special educational needs coordinator. The outdoor area is being developed appropriately. The indoor and outdoor play spaces are now organised well, and staff are more confident in leading activities which generally capture the children's interest. The headteacher is using experienced temporary teachers to help staff to improve their skills further.

The school has addressed most, but not all, of the areas identified in the previous visit. The headteacher does not check the progress and attendance of groups of children in sufficient detail.

The school works hard to engage parents through coffee mornings, newsletters and by offering consultations, but not all parents join in these activities. Parents appreciate the coffee mornings and say they give them good ideas. Parents who attend them say that they have discovered how to help their children make progress. The school is linking effectively with the schools to which children will move in September, and most children are confident about starting a new school.

Most governors attended training, provided by the local authority, about children's progress. They now talk knowledgeably about the questions that they ask the headteacher, and they are starting to find out more about the effectiveness of teaching in the school. They do not yet use information about children's progress when they plan for the future, but they now know how to do this. The governing body has gained a clear understanding of the school's budget since the previous visit. This is proving valuable as governors plan ahead. They have identified skills that they need, such as marketing, that they are looking for in new governors.

Time spent on planning for the future organisation of the nursery school and the daycare provision has meant that plans for September 2014 are realistic. This work, led and managed effectively by the headteacher, has had a very positive impact on the improvement of the daycare, as well as the school.

## **External support**

The local authority continues to provide good support for the nursery school. Since the previous monitoring visit, the local authority has appropriately eased back on its support. The action group now meets less often, and visits are less frequent. Local authority observations of the progress that the school and daycare provision are making are accurate and helpful. A second review of governance has found the governing body to be 'fit for purpose' and this was demonstrated on the inspection.