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9 October 2014

Ms Sarah Pickering  
The 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 with Andrew Redpath, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 7 and 8 October 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 November 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 Devon.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Penman  
**Associate Inspector**

## **Annex**

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

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
  - ensuring the pace of lessons is quickened to sustain pupils' attention
  - providing all staff with training to use signing and symbols more effectively to help pupils' communication skills, and ensuring all staff use the right level of language
  - ensuring activities provided are more stimulating to fully motivate pupils
  - providing opportunities for staff to observe outstanding teaching and learning in other schools.
- Improve the learning of more-able pupils by:
  - providing them with additional challenge that meets their needs, rather than just extra of the same work
  - improving marking so that it informs pupils of the next steps they need to take in their learning
  - making better use of homework.
- Raise achievement in mathematics by:
  - making sure teachers balance better the introduction of new concepts with opportunities to consolidate skills
  - making sure teachers use imaginative and interesting resources, including practical resources.
- Improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the sixth form by:
  - making sure younger children do not wait too long when they need help in class and sixth form students have work that is geared to their age and ability
  - improving accommodation and resources
  - checking progress data effectively to identify what areas need most attention.
- Improve the leadership and management of the school through:
  - ensuring the school's self-evaluation is accurate and more rigorous
  - focusing improvement planning to secure good teaching and learning
  - using additional Year 7 catch-up funding appropriately and measuring the impact of its use
  - ensuring middle leaders use assessment information better to identify strengths and weaknesses of each area and plan more systematically.
- Improve governance so that:
  - the single central record meets requirements and is monitored
  - statutory requirements for the website are met
  - governors check the work of the school rigorously and accurately.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved. Ofsted will make recommendations on governance to the authority responsible for the school.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 October 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and checked the single central record. They met with senior leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, students, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors. Inspectors held telephone discussions with a representative of the local authority and the headteacher of the partner school providing support to the school. They observed 12 lessons, of which four were observed jointly with the acting headteacher.

### **Context**

The acting headteacher continues to lead the school while the substantive headteacher remains on an extended period of absence due to ill health. There have been changes to the governing body, with the vice chair stepping down and a governor joining who has experience of working with other schools. Preparation to enter a multi-academy trust with a partner primary school continues and a move to new purpose-built accommodation is planned for January 2015.

### **Achievement of students at the school**

The new systems for the tracking of students' progress are beginning to provide clear information for school leaders about students' progress in English and mathematics. The school is now aware, for instance, that students make more rapid progress in reading at Key Stages 4 and 5 than they do lower down the school. The literacy lead teacher now teaches from Year 4 upwards in order to resolve this imbalance. Similarly, leaders are now using assessment information more precisely to address variations in the performance of groups of students, such as those who are entitled to extra government funding through the pupil premium and those who are not.

Analysis of progress data has led to the setting up of small group intervention classes in mathematics. Students enjoy these sessions, but it is too early to measure the difference that they are making. All students in the 14–19 phase are now studying courses that lead to nationally recognised accreditation. These courses have an appropriate focus on preparation for life after school.

Recently introduced homework arrangements for all students, arising from consultation with parents and tailored to students' individual needs, are becoming established. Although students say they enjoy the challenge of homework, it is too early to measure the impact of this initiative. Teachers have worked hard to improve the quality of their marking. Where marking is most effective it explains clearly where progress is being made and what the student needs to do to improve or extend their learning. Challenging targets have been set for all students for the current school year. However, sometimes these broad targets are insufficiently broken down into small steps to support learning in lessons effectively. Appropriate

plans are in place to track students' progress towards their targets through regular collection of information and discussion about progress and achievements.

### **The quality of teaching**

Teaching staff have made good use of opportunities to observe good or better teaching in other schools. Following these experiences they have successfully adapted their teaching, with a clear focus on ensuring that students are challenged to make the progress of which they are capable. This has been particularly successful for those teachers working with the youngest students. In addition, a wider range of learning activities and resources now motivates students of all abilities. Students in a mathematics lesson, for example, enjoyed estimating how many eggs were in the egg box.

Effective leadership of the sixth form is now ensuring that work is better matched to students' ability. This is further supported by the recently introduced progress tracking systems. The new curriculum for less able students and the planned qualifications for students at Key Stages 4 and 5 are providing increased interest and challenge for all students, including the more able.

Signing and the use of symbols to support communication are now being used with greater consistency across the school. School leaders are improving the way they use the large and skilled teaching assistant workforce so that it has a greater impact on students' achievement. For example, very recently introduced small group work, led by experienced teaching assistants, now provides a high level of focused support in literacy and numeracy. Once again, it is too early to judge the impact of this initiative.

With the move to a new school pending, leaders are rightly cautious about spending money on resources and the current building. However, some parts of the school, such as the outside learning areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage classrooms, need to be more attractive and relevant to supporting children's learning and development.

### **Behaviour and safety of students**

Students' behaviour for learning has improved since the section 5 inspection in November 2013 due to the improvements made in the quality of teaching. Students in all classes now display positive attitudes to learning and are keen to work with staff and each other. Students in a class for children with complex needs, for example, enjoyed using a large wooden board to create sounds and were keen to lead their peers in banging out rhythms for them to follow. Similarly, in a mathematics lesson for older students, motivation was supported by age-appropriate activities and the availability of electronic tablets to support learning. An increased focus on doing things for themselves has led to students taking greater responsibility for their equipment. Students remain polite, friendly and welcoming of visitors.

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

The acting headteacher continues to lead the school with determination and ambition. Other senior leaders support her very well, and together they form a dynamic and hardworking team. Their efforts are recognised by staff throughout the school. Staff morale has improved and there is a shared sense of purpose since the new team has been in place. These improvements have been made at a time of increased demand, closer scrutiny and higher levels of accountability for all staff. Leaders have a good understanding of the quality of teaching in the school and are prepared to tackle underperformance where they find it.

Leaders have worked hard to improve arrangements for supporting teachers when they start at the school. As a result, these staff now benefit from support in a range of areas appropriate to their work, such as communication and signing. However, a small number of teaching staff need further help and guidance in lesson planning and in managing students' behaviour.

Governors remain fully committed to improving the school. They continue to be involved in the monitoring of the school's action plan. Planning for the school to enter a multi-academy trust with a partner primary school is at an early stage. Arrangements for governance and for the future direction of the school within the academy trust have yet to be finalised. Governors are enthusiastic about the move to a new school building and are working hard to ensure that arrangements proceed smoothly.

Whilst there have been clear and rapid improvements in many areas of the school's work, progress towards establishing a clear staffing structure and to improve the skills of middle leaders has been relatively slow. As a result, responsibility and accountability for key aspects of the school's work remain unclear. Some middle leader roles remain unfilled or are being carried temporarily by senior leaders. In some cases, roles are not supported by detailed job descriptions. The governing body is currently not meeting its statutory duty to approve a staffing structure for the school. With middle leader roles, in particular, undeveloped, senior leaders continue to carry too wide a range of curricular responsibilities.

All statutory requirements relating to safeguarding and the school's website are now met in full.

### **External support**

The school continues to benefit from a good range of external support, which is having a clear impact on improving students' learning. The acting headteacher and other senior leaders value the advice and guidance they receive from the headteacher of the partner school. The local authority continues to play a part in the monitoring of the action plan and in supporting the governing body. Their work to strengthen the governing body since the last monitoring inspection and in matters relating to the substantive headteacher has been effective.