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Debbi Flowerdew
Interim Executive Headteacher
Dell Primary School
Dell Road
Oulton Broad
Lowestoft
NR33 9NU

Dear Ms Flowerdew

Special measures monitoring inspection of Dell Primary School

Following my visit with David Webster, Additional Inspector, to your school on 12–13 May 2015, 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 May 2014. 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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk County Council.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk
- The lead and team inspectors.

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good and raise pupils' achievement, especially for the more-able pupils at Key Stage 1 and all pupils at Key Stage 2 by making sure:
 - teachers always have high expectations for pupils' learning
 - pupils know how to improve their learning when their books are marked
 - pupils know how well they are using the basic skills of literacy and numeracy in subjects other than English and mathematics
 - teachers consistently use the information about the previous learning of pupils to provide tasks which extends their thinking.

- Strengthen leadership and management by making sure:
 - leaders rigorously and regularly check the impact of teaching on pupils' learning over time and use this information to form an accurate view of the school's work
 - teachers' assessment of pupils' progress and attainment levels are checked for accuracy, and leaders ensure that teachers use this information to extend pupils' learning
 - governors robustly hold the school to account for the quality of its work
 - leaders and governors restore the confidence of those parents who have concerns about the school.

- Deal with recent bullying incidents consistently so that all pupils and parents know such incidents are always dealt with effectively.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 12–13 May 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim executive headteacher, groups of pupils, parents, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The school expected to become an academy, sponsored by the Active Learning Trust, on 1 March 2015. However, this did not happen and the school's conversion to become an academy has been delayed.

There have been significant changes to the school's leadership since the previous monitoring visit. The substantive headteacher remains absent from the school. An interim executive headteacher from a local primary school supported the school, part time, from 1 to 28 February but was unable to continue beyond this point (the expected date of conversion to become an academy). A new interim executive headteacher joined the school on 13 April 2015, working four days per week. Her appointment was initially until the end of the academic year but has recently been extended until the end of the autumn term. The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have both stepped back to their substantive positions.

The governing body has now been disbanded and it has been replaced with an interim executive board. The interim executive board is comprised of five experienced professionals and met for the first time on 27 April 2015.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The interim executive headteacher has quickly identified that teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment and progress are not always accurate. In some cases, the level of pupils' attainment entered on the school's information management system is higher than their actual level of attainment. This has led to doubts over the validity of assessment generally. This makes it very difficult for senior leaders to measure progress accurately and it is crucial that this issue is now dealt with promptly and fully to ensure that assessment is accurate and consistent throughout the school. Assessment is accurate in some classes and in some subjects.

The local authority has recently moderated the Year 2 end-of-key-stage assessments and found them to be accurate. This year's results are broadly in line with the school's 2014 results and broadly in line with the national average overall, although slightly below the national average at the higher levels in reading and writing.

Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that expectations are starting to rise but this is not yet consistent across the school. In the work sampled, progress was more evident than during the previous monitoring visit. The presentation of work in pupils' exercise books is improving, although this is not consistent throughout the school. Pupils now use a 'purple pen' to address issues that their teacher has highlighted when marking their work. This system is relatively new but it is already having an impact on how well pupils respond to the feedback they are given.

The quality of teaching

Since the first interim executive headteacher joined the school at the beginning of February, there has been a far greater emphasis on improving the quality of teaching. This has been maintained and is being built on. A coaching model has been introduced and teachers have been given opportunities to work closely with colleagues from other schools in order to develop their own practice.

The quality of teaching is now improving and more strengths were evident in lessons seen during this inspection. In the best examples, teachers:

- used their assessments well to inform their teaching
- matched tasks well to pupils' interests and abilities
- used interesting and engaging methods and approaches that maintained pupils' interest
- showed strong subject knowledge
- modelled clearly what they wanted pupils to learn
- showed raised expectations of what they expected pupils to achieve.

However, these features of teaching are not yet consistent throughout the school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils continue to behave well and are polite and friendly. The school's behaviour policy has been adjusted and changes made to the way behaviour is managed. There is a greater emphasis on rewarding pupils who consistently behave well, and pupils say that they like the new 'good to be green' system. Pupils say that there is little bullying at Dell Primary School and that they are confident that staff would deal with any issues should they arise.

Pupils' attitudes to learning were better during this inspection than during the previous monitoring visit. There were fewer examples of low-level off-task behaviour and, in the most effective lessons, pupils showed a keen interest in the work they were doing.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The quality of leadership has improved significantly since the previous monitoring visit. The first interim executive headteacher, despite only working with the school for two and a half days per week, introduced a more focused and effective approach to improving the school. Although she has only been in post for some three weeks, the current interim executive headteacher is already both maintaining and building on her predecessor's work. There is now a much clearer focus on raising standards and improving the quality of teaching. However, although the interim executive headteacher has a very accurate view of the school's needs, systems for self-evaluation are not yet rigorous or robust enough.

The school's action plan is much improved and is now fit for purpose. The plan includes appropriate aims, a range of suitable actions, timescales and planned support. Responsible people are identified for specific actions, and for monitoring those actions. Milestones are clear and measurable, and the plan includes a useful weekly overview. In order to improve the plan, success criteria need to be improved so that they are always measurable and can be used to hold the school to account. Monitoring activity also needs to be made clearer to show when and how actions will be monitored, as well as by whom.

The school was able to provide records of the monitoring of teaching promptly when requested. Records show that teaching has been monitored much more thoroughly since the previous monitoring visit. However, until very recently, records of lesson observations were too descriptive and not evaluative enough. As a result, the areas for development given to staff were not sufficiently sharply focused to be of maximum use in improving the quality of teaching. In some cases, observation records show no evidence that any areas for development were discussed with teachers following observations of their lessons. More recently, this has improved. Records from learning walks carried out by the current interim executive headteacher show that very clear areas for development have been identified and expectations for improvement discussed with staff.

The weaknesses in governance have been addressed fully by the disbanding of the governing body and the introduction of an interim executive board. The interim executive board is made up of knowledgeable and experienced professionals who are able to hold the school's leadership fully to account. Although the interim executive board is in its infancy, it is already clear that there is a much greater sense of urgency and purpose to the school's work.

Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, shows that about three-quarters of parents would recommend the school to others and a similar proportion are satisfied with the leadership and management of the school. A small number of parents expressed concerns to the lead inspector over poor communication. Inspection evidence shows that communication is improving through, for example, the launch

of a much-improved website, more regular newsletters and the interim executive headteacher's recently-introduced coffee mornings. However, inspectors found that parents have valid concerns over the timeliness of communication. The interim executive headteacher is well aware that this is an issue that needs to be addressed promptly.

External support

The local authority acted decisively and appropriately to address the significant concerns about the school's leadership highlighted by the previous monitoring inspection. The decision to disband the governing body was the right one. The local authority has ensured that a high-quality interim executive board is now in place to ensure that the school now improves rapidly.

The local authority's decision to appoint an interim executive headteacher to strengthen the school's leadership until the point that it was expected to become an academy was responsible and timely. The recent appointment of an interim executive headteacher until the end of the autumn term has notably strengthened the school's leadership. It is now crucial that the local authority and the interim executive board work closely together to bring about a longer-term solution to the school's leadership in order to bring much-needed stability to the school.

Local authority advisers continue to provide appropriate support to the school, and this is beginning to have an impact. For example, both the numeracy and literacy subject leaders, both newly appointed at the point of the last monitoring visit, are now more confident and effective in their roles, partly as a result of the support they continue to receive.