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Mrs A Brackstone
Executive Headteacher
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School Terrace
Reading
Berkshire
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Dear Mrs Brackstone

Special measures monitoring inspection of New Town Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 and 14 October 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 October 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers following consultation with me.

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 (IEB) and the Director of Children's Services for Reading.

Yours sincerely

Louise Adams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that teachers assess pupils' achievement accurately and use the information to plan tasks and activities to meet the full range of pupils' needs
 - raising teachers' expectations to provide high standards of challenge for all pupils, particularly the most able
 - providing activities, particularly in writing, that engage and interest pupils, especially boys
 - improving feedback to pupils so they know how to improve their work, and make sure that they respond to advice from teachers
 - checking pupils' learning and providing activities to extend it still further
 - making sure that teachers' planning conveys a clear idea of what it is teachers want the pupils to learn.
- Make sure all pupils make good progress by:
 - improving pupils' reading skills, ensuring that pupils get a better grasp of how sounds are related to letters
 - providing purposeful activities in guided reading lessons, with a clear focus on improving skills in reading
 - improving the correct use of punctuation during writing activities
 - improving pupils' skills in solving mathematical problems.
- Improve behaviour by:
 - implementing the policies for managing behaviour consistently across the school
 - ensuring that pupils understand how they are expected to behave, and taking effective remedial action to improve behaviour where necessary.
- Improve the leadership and management of the school, including governance, by:
 - carrying out a thorough analysis of the school's work to identify weaknesses, and introduce measures to resolve them
 - using assessment information to find out which groups of pupils are underachieving, particularly those that are assessed as being disadvantaged, and to provide appropriate support to ensure that gaps are closing at a faster rate
 - developing the skills of the leaders at all levels to enable them to contribute to school improvement
 - closely monitoring the quality of teaching, providing focused professional development, leading to a standard of teaching that is at least good throughout the school

- ensuring that governors develop the skills that help them to challenge school leaders more rigorously.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 13 and 14 October 2015

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector met with the interim executive headteacher, the acting head of school, senior and middle leaders, a group of pupils from Years 5 and 6, members of the interim executive board (IEB) and a representative from the local authority. Her Majesty's Inspector observed lessons and pupils' conduct in and around the school. She reviewed documentation and procedures the school follows to keep pupils safe, scrutinised pupils' work and evaluated documentation about the work of leaders and the IEB.

Context

Since the last inspection, a number of teachers have left and teachers have been appointed on permanent contracts. Two part-time assistant headteachers have been appointed and a part-time deputy headteacher is due to start after half term.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' outcomes are continuing to improve and this is now the case for all year groups. These improvements were not reflected in the 2015 end-of-year national tests for Year 2 or Year 6. Although Year 6 pupils made very good progress, the gap was too big to completely address the legacy of ineffective teaching. In Year 2, pupils began to catch up but did not achieve as much as they could. Improvements in teaching are helping many pupils to catch up.

Specific groups of pupils are not making as much progress as they need to. Disadvantaged pupils are making the same progress as their peers; this means that the gaps are not closing. Compared to 2014 results, a larger proportion of more-able pupils reached the higher levels in the national tests; however, this is still not in line with national figures.

Children in the early years are making better progress. The improvements in teaching are helping children to communicate more effectively and have the confidence to ask questions. This was reflected in the proportions of children who achieved a good level of development, which was above the national average in 2015.

Pupils' reading is improving. The strategies for developing reading skills are more effective. When pupils are reading the same text in a small group, the questioning and guidance of the adult helps pupils to progress. However, other pupils are not always engaged in activities which support reading development. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of phonics (letters and their sounds) is also improving, although

this was not reflected in the Year 1 national phonics check last term. The current improved progress is due to the noticeable improvements in the teaching of phonics.

Pupils' writing is improving, but there is insufficient focus on catching up to where pupils should be. Progress in punctuation and grammar is erratic; in classes where it is taught explicitly, and followed up in other lessons, the improvements are visible, but this is not consistently the case.

Mathematics skills in many year groups are improving. However, problem-solving and investigative skills are not progressing as quickly as they need to. When teachers check understanding and explain concepts carefully, pupils make more progress.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching has continued to improve since the inspection in April. Teachers are much clearer about what helps pupils to learn and are implementing many of the new strategies. However, there continues to be inconsistencies across the school, from class to class and from subject to subject.

Teachers' planning shows much more clearly what learning is intended. Leaders and teachers have agreed a plan of topics and subjects to teach, but it is not being followed by all teachers. This means that learning opportunities and skills may be overlooked, resulting in gaps in knowledge and understanding. Teachers have further improved the quality of planned activities to support learning. It is now rare to see pupils carrying out tasks which keep them busy but do not help them to learn. This means that time is used purposefully and pupils learn more.

Teachers' assessments continue to be accurate. Increasingly, teachers plan lessons which follow on from what pupils already know and can do. This means that, in classes where this happens, time is not wasted. Some teachers are now using assessment information effectively to help them identify and fill gaps in pupils' learning. This needs to happen in all classes so that all pupils can fulfil their potential as they move through the school.

All teachers now check pupils' learning during lessons and work with individuals or small groups to help them learn more. In the most effective lessons, teachers adapt the activities if they are too simple or too complex for pupils. However, this is not happening enough.

Teaching of the most-able pupils is not improving rapidly enough. Teachers are aware that they need to challenge more-able pupils but, although most teachers provide these pupils with more work, it does not necessarily extend their thinking. This is because teachers are not clear enough about what the most-able pupils can

achieve. Where teachers have checked carefully what pupils can do, they provide work at the right level.

Teaching of writing is improving and teachers are rightly placing a greater emphasis on improving pupils' grammar and punctuation skills. In some classes there are still not enough opportunities to produce longer pieces of writing. Some thought has been given to choosing topics which enthuse boys, but there is more work to be done in this area to make sure all pupils are motivated to write.

All teachers consistently follow the agreed marking and feedback policy in all subjects. Almost all teachers make useful comments which recognise what pupils have done well and suggest how the work can be improved. In some classes teachers make sure pupils respond to the comments, but this remains inconsistent.

Teachers and teaching assistants are working much more effectively together to support pupils' learning. In almost all lessons observed, teachers planned what their teaching assistant would be doing to support learning. In one mathematics lesson, both the teacher and the teaching assistant worked effectively with groups to investigate weight through a range of activities. In the early years, the teacher and teaching assistant developed children's understanding of shape well by using a limited and specific vocabulary.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The behaviour management policy continues to be applied consistently and there is an increasing feeling of calm and appropriate behaviour in lessons and around the school. It is positive that pupils now behave as well when working with teaching assistants as they do with teachers.

Behaviour continues to be analysed rigorously. Since the beginning of term there have been no significant behavioural issues. Those that occurred last term were managed appropriately. Pupils explain clearly what behaviour is and is not acceptable.

It is positive that some pupils are beginning to demonstrate effective learning behaviours, such as wanting to challenge themselves further and working together to extend their thinking. However, in many classes learning is too formal to enable pupils to share and explore their ideas.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim executive headteacher and acting head of school have continued to drive improvements effectively. They are clear about the strengths and are taking appropriate action to tackle weaknesses. Very occasionally, they do not interrogate the reasons for the weaknesses sufficiently, so their actions, although sensible, do

not resolve the issue. An example of this is attendance: despite implementing many apparently appropriate practices and procedures to improve attendance, it has declined.

The recently appointed assistant headteachers and team leaders are helping improvements to happen more quickly in some areas. An example of this is marking and feedback to pupils, where middle leaders regularly check books and help teachers to develop their practice. This would be further improved by leaders working more closely together to ensure consistency in their expectations.

Leaders' effective work to record, check and analyse information about pupils' progress, and to hold teachers to account for that progress, continues to be rigorous.

Senior and middle leaders check teaching regularly and continue to provide regular and useful feedback, but improvements are not embedded. Teachers are clear about what they can do to become more effective, but they do not apply this consistently.

The early years leader has been very effective in driving necessary improvements. The change of environment is delightful to see and has resulted in children engaging independently in activities. This is because they can reach the resources, the spaces are not blocked and the room is organised into attractive learning areas. The leader has also worked effectively with staff to plan and structure engaging and developmental activities, which has led to a noticeable improvement in the children's confidence and enjoyment.

The IEB has a clear understanding of the school's priorities. Their frequent meetings are sharply focused on school improvement. On occasions, they have been too accepting of leaders' explanations without seeking concrete evidence to support them. Their work to ensure the school's leadership and finances is taking up much of their efforts, but they rightly see this as crucial to the school's success.

External support

The new adviser from the local authority has continued the useful senior leadership support. Other helpful support from the local authority includes developing middle leaders' skills and subject knowledge to be able to drive improvements in their areas of responsibility, and verifying the school's work to improve early years provision.

A contributory factor to the school's low attendance figures is the persistent absence of a number of pupils. The school would benefit from the local authority's education welfare officer tackling this directly with the families identified by the school.

St John's Church of England Primary School continues to provide effective support. The Governors of St John's and the IEB of New Town are exploring options for

permanent collaboration. Other examples of support include the loan of a teacher, who is currently leading the lower Key Stage 2 team, and the sharing of good practice between teaching teams.