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Mrs Christine Dean
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Dean

Special measures monitoring inspection of Milton Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4–5 May 2016, 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 that 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 that took place in March 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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 two newly qualified teachers, one in key stage 1 and one in key stage 2, before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Stoke-on-Trent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2015.

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that it is at least consistently good and ensures that pupils achieve well in Key Stage 2 by:
 - ensuring that the work given to pupils matches their varying needs and abilities, so that work is never too easy for the most able nor too difficult for other pupils, including those who find learning more challenging
 - ensuring that pupils develop their skills in reading, writing and mathematics systematically as they move through Key Stage 2
 - raising teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour and of their accurate use of punctuation, correct grammar and the quality of their handwriting
 - improving marking so that pupils are given good guidance about how they can improve their work, especially the quality of their writing and the precision of their spelling
 - making sure that teaching assistants always provide good support for pupils in lessons, including providing timely help for those who find learning more difficult.
- Urgently improve the impact of leadership and management, including governance, so that advancements made by the school are effective and rapid by:
 - making sure that governors further develop their role so that they can challenge the school to improve teaching and pupils' achievement effectively
 - making certain that subject leaders work closely with teachers in order to improve their practice
 - providing appropriate training and time for subject leaders so that they can fulfil their roles effectively
 - making sure that the pupil premium funding is used effectively to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils
 - ensuring that the use and impact of the primary PE and sport funding is evaluated rigorously, and as a result, is used effectively to improve the quality of the teaching of PE across the school and hence impact positively on pupils' well being.

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

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 4–5 May 2016

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, other leaders, groups of pupils, parents, the chair and other members of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in December 2015, two senior leaders have left the school – the head of school and an assistant headteacher. Governors have appointed a new head of school and deputy headteacher from within the leadership team. A new assistant headteacher has also been appointed recently with responsibility for inclusion and pupils who have special educational needs or disability. Three new parent governors have joined the governing body. Plans are under way for the school to convert to academy status. A provisional date of 1 June 2016 has been set. The sponsor for the school will be the Learning Village Academy Trust. Greenways Primary School, Milton's partner school, will form part of this trust.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Consultations have been held between leaders, staff, governors and the Department for Education in preparation for the school's transition to academy status. Parents are aware of the proposed arrangements. Leaders have established effective working relationships between staff at Greenways Primary and Milton Primary. These will continue to be built on after academy conversion as the executive headteacher already oversees both schools. As a result, Milton staff are not unduly worried about the transition process as they value the partnership arrangement and support provided. Governors are equally optimistic about the proposed arrangements.

The executive headteacher, ably supported by her leadership team, has continued to focus relentlessly on improving the quality of teaching and raising achievement. Together, they have taken firm but swift action to address any inadequate teaching. This has now been eradicated. Leadership capacity has also been strengthened as the executive headteacher and governors have appointed experienced and highly effective teachers to middle and senior leadership posts to model and demonstrate good practice. Subject leaders utilise their skills well to monitor teaching and learning, and support colleagues in areas which need development. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the improvements being made. They appreciate the strong leadership of the executive headteacher and the changes being implemented. While some parents are concerned about ongoing staffing changes and feel that communication could be improved, all those spoken to report that 'things are getting better'.

Teachers regularly assess pupils to determine the levels they are working at and the progress they are making. Teachers also collate information about pupils' learning during lessons and through standardised tests. Leaders upload this information onto the school's tracker and produce an overview of each class and year group. However, the summaries produced show that results are very erratic in most year groups. For example, the proportion of pupils working at or above age-related levels in mathematics in one Year 2 class was 28% in December, rose to 93% in February and fell to 68% in March. This raises questions about the reliability and accuracy of assessments. Leaders are keen to address this and have already begun to establish a new way of checking pupils' levels and how these are recorded.

Governors have improved their ability to challenge leaders and hold them to account. For example, governors detected the anomalies in data mentioned above. Minutes of meetings show that this was pursued by questioning leaders about it. Although most governors are relatively inexperienced, induction and ongoing training are provided to ensure that governors have the skills and knowledge needed to fulfil their responsibilities and statutory duties. They meet each month and have an increasing knowledge about the quality of teaching through the development of 'link governor' roles. However, governors acknowledge that there is further scope for holding subject leaders to account so that they are clear about the impact of this tier of leadership. Governors have continued to analyse their own effectiveness by commissioning external reviews of their work in order to identify and address any remaining areas of weakness.

Subject leaders are rapidly developing the skills needed to assist the executive headteacher in ensuring that teaching is of a consistently high quality and all pupils achieve their potential. They fulfil their responsibilities with a high level of commitment and diligence. They have benefited from substantial training from different providers to ensure that they carry out their roles effectively. For example, they have worked with nationally recognised English and mathematics consultants to support colleagues with planning and assessment skills. They have also received training in carrying out monitoring activities, including checking the work in pupils' books and observing lessons. They have a good awareness of school data and ensure that suitable interventions are in place for pupils who need additional help. Collaborative working with other schools, such as the 'Compass group', has increased subject leaders' skills and knowledge and raised their levels of confidence. Subject leaders have generated suitable and appropriate action plans in their respective areas, but they do not systematically evaluate these plans to determine the impact of the actions taken against outcomes.

As reported in the previous inspection report, an external review of the pupil premium funding has been carried out and the actions identified are being implemented. A wide range of appropriate literacy and mathematics interventions are in place to support individuals and small groups who are not yet working at the levels expected. Additional adult support is provided both inside and outside the classroom. Additional resources have also been purchased so that pupils can use practical equipment to support and reinforce their basic skills. Leaders carefully track the progress of this group of pupils. The school's own data shows that disadvantaged pupils are making similar progress to other pupils in the school.

However, inspection evidence confirms that wide gaps still remain in reading, writing and mathematics across the school, especially in Year 3 and Year 6.

The sports funding is fully accounted for on the school's website. An increased range of activities and opportunities are provided for pupils in order to promote and develop their physical well-being. Teachers have benefited from observing lessons taught by specialist sports coaches. As a result, their confidence in teaching physical education (PE) has increased as evidenced in the audit of staff views carried out by the PE leader. A report was also presented to governors to update them on the progress towards the key issue identified in the March 2015 inspection. Additional clubs, such as archery and girls' football have also helped promote pupils' enjoyment of sport. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy diet and regular exercise as these are promoted in the 'Change 4 Life' programme which runs before school. Participation in competitive local sports events has also increased pupils' enjoyment of PE and the numbers of pupils who take part in sports activities.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching is improving. Teachers have raised their expectations in relation to the quality and presentation of pupils' work. There is an increasing proportion of teaching which is now consistently good but some inconsistencies remain which impact on the progress made by pupils. Teachers who are newly qualified have been well supported in order to reach the standards expected. There are still three classes which are taught by temporary teachers but these are monitored carefully and contracts have previously been cancelled where the quality of teaching was not good enough. Five new staff have been appointed for September and this will aid the stability in teaching. Improvements noted in observations of teaching made during this inspection include teachers' questioning, use of resources and use of subject vocabulary.

Teachers have received support in planning work which is suitably matched to the different abilities of pupils. A new approach has been introduced with pupils selecting their own starting points for tasks which involve a range of increasing levels of challenge. Where this is most successful, tasks are clear and the level of challenge is suitably graduated. Consequently, the needs of the most-able pupils and those who have special educational needs are well met. For example, in a Year 3 English lesson, pupils selected their own starting points to write sentences of different complexity. Those still struggling with basic skills wrote very simple, short sentences, commensurate with their ability, while middle-ability pupils chose to use adjectives and adverbs, and the most able pupils challenged themselves to use similes and personification. As a result, all pupils achieved well in this lesson. Conversely, tasks set for pupils in a Year 4 guided reading lesson lacked clarity and graduated progression of skills. This resulted in pupils not answering the questions set and thereby not achieving the learning objective, which was to develop their evaluation and analysis skills, as some simply drew pictures.

Leaders have invested heavily in the professional development of teachers so that teachers plan sequences of lessons which build on pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills as they move through the school. Extensive training has been undertaken and teachers have benefited from a range of high-quality support from different providers including the teaching school alliance, local authority, external consultants and the Compass group. Policy changes have been made in relation to how reading, writing and mathematics are taught. For example, cursive handwriting has been introduced across the school, and correct number and letter formation are now taught systematically. As a result, pupils' handwriting and overall presentation in their workbooks have improved significantly. Resources have also been purchased to support pupils' visualisation skills in English and mathematics –for example, phonics mats and 120 number squares. These help pupils embed their basic skills and develop a greater understanding of language and numbers.

There continues to be a strong focus on improving the quality of pupils' writing. The writing process, where pupils draft, edit and publish their work is becoming more established and evident in pupils' books. Grammar, punctuation and spelling schemes have been purchased and teaching assistants have received training so that they too can support pupils. While standards in writing are rising overall, teachers focus too heavily on the quality of writing solely in English lessons. Less attention is paid to pupils' writing in other subjects, for example guided reading tasks. Opportunities for pupils to write at length in topic and science books are also curtailed by the use of worksheets or writing frames. The school's marking policy is consistently applied and pupils receive guidance on how to improve their work. However, simple and frequent spelling errors are often ignored and not addressed.

Teaching assistants have received substantial training in order to contribute more effectively to the progress made by pupils. They have been given increased levels of responsibility, through leading interventions and tracking progress of pupils in these groups. Lessons visited showed that teaching assistants were suitably used to support learning. An audit of their skills has been conducted to ascertain what further individual development is required in order to maximise their effectiveness. Leaders plan to hold assistants to account by setting them performance targets.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' attitudes to learning are strong. They show high levels of resilience and determination in completing tasks. They behave well in lessons and around school. British values and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are strongly promoted through lessons, assemblies and exciting events, such as those recently in relation to the Queen's 90th birthday and the anniversary of William Shakespeare's death. Pupils are aware of what democracy means as they elect school council representatives. Members of the school council also visited London and 10 Downing Street to reinforce their understanding of British values.

All staff contribute to pupils' welfare. Parents agree that their children are safe and happy. Pupils say they feel safe in school and know whom to go to if they have a problem. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe and how to help others: for example, Year 5 pupils' recent first aid training by St John Ambulance. Pupils are

aware of different forms of bullying, including cyber bullying, but say this does not happen at school. Records checked show that staff carefully record any racist or bullying incidents and take appropriate action. However, incidents are rare. Attendance of pupils is in line with the national average but rising. Robust systems and tracking are in place to follow up those who are persistently absent. Incentives offered, such as the termly I-pad raffle, are continuing to promote good attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Visits to classrooms and checks of pupils' books show that most pupils are making expected progress across the school in reading, writing and mathematics. However, too few pupils are making better than expected progress. Work in pupils' books shows that increasing numbers of pupils are working at age-related levels compared with the last visit. Over half of all pupils are now at or above the levels expected for their age in almost all year groups. However, standards in writing remain lower than in reading and mathematics in key stage 2 and are particularly low in Year 4.

The progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs is similar to others in their class. This is due to the support they receive and the impact of specific interventions, for example developing rapid mathematics. However, wide gaps remain in the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their classmates in all subjects, especially in Year 3 and Year 6. While leaders assess and track this group of pupils, they do not calculate the gap in Years 1 to 6 in different subjects to determine where these gaps are widest or whether the gaps are closing over time. Opportunities to provide further support are, therefore, missed. The progress of the most able pupils is also not currently shown on assessment summaries produced by leaders, and it is therefore not always clear as to precisely how well these pupils are achieving.

Children in the early years are making good progress from their starting points. This is because teaching and leadership are consistently good and children's needs are very well catered for. High expectations are the norm. For example, teachers ask very challenging questions and continually plan exciting and imaginative activities to extend every aspect of children's early development. For example, following a visit by the fire service, Nursery children watched an animated video of the Great Fire of London and demonstrated excellent levels of speaking, listening, understanding and behaviour. Gaps in reading, writing and mathematics between boys and girls are closing and leaders are monitoring this carefully.

External support

The school has received and commissioned extensive external support. The local authority adviser knows the school well as she has worked closely with senior leaders and provided training and resources for individual teachers in literacy. Regular task force meetings are held to monitor the progress made by the school, and additional reviews are commissioned by the local authority each term to provide an objective view. Leaders have also accessed funding to receive support from the teaching school alliance, local schools' Compass group and nationally approved consultants. Leaders and staff visit other settings to seek and gather ideas and

examples of good or outstanding practice. The external support received is making a good contribution to the progress the school is making.

In order to further improve, the leaders and governors should:

- ensure that data analysis is accurate and reliable and supports observations of teaching and work seen in pupils' books.