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Mr N Munns
Executive Headteacher
Monteagle Primary School
Burnham Road
Dagenham
RM9 4RB

Dear Mr Munns

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Monteagle Primary School

Following my visit with David White and June Woolhouse, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 25 and 26 November 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in June 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Corporate Director of Children's Services for Barking and Dagenham.

Yours sincerely

Graham Lee
Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Monteagle Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 25 and 26 November 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, other staff in leadership positions, representatives of the school council and two members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB). Discussions were also held with the school improvement partner for the school. A total of 19 lessons were observed throughout the school and an inspector also visited the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Inspectors looked through samples of pupils' books in mathematics. They also examined school documentation, including teachers' planning, monitoring records and tracking data.

Context

The headteacher recently resigned and left the school two days before the visit. The school has been federated with another local school, whose headteacher has been appointed as the executive headteacher of Monteagle. He began work the day before the visit. Following the inspection, the local authority withdrew delegated funding from the school and replaced the governing body with an IEB. The staff remain substantially unchanged since the inspection. Five teachers are on long-term supply contracts and three are newly qualified teachers. In the latter case, these appointments had been made prior to the last inspection.

Achievement and standards

The 2008 national assessments show that standards continue to rise in Key Stage 1. There was a sharp rise on the 2007 figures, which in turn were higher than the previous year. Overall standards are now average in Key Stage 1, which represents good progress for these pupils from mostly low starting points. Generally good teaching and a stable and committed staff are responsible for these improvements. Pupils do particularly well in mathematics, where standards are now above average. Their performance in writing, however, lags behind that in reading and mathematics. Together with the improvements in the EYFS, pupils are now getting a secure start to their education at Monteagle.

Pupils' overall attainment also rose in Key Stage 2 in 2008, although information about national standards has yet to be confirmed. The main reason for this was a very significant improvement in pupils' performance in science. The vast majority of pupils reached the expected level for their age and more than one in three reached the higher level. Their performance is now only a little below that of pupils nationally. This improvement is the result of a greater emphasis on the skills of scientific enquiry. This is helping pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding in the context of scientific investigations. For example, in Year 6

pupils enjoyed using their existing knowledge of evaporation to set up investigations to test hypotheses and develop their understanding.

Attainment in mathematics improved marginally in Key Stage 2 in 2008 but remains too low. Too many pupils made insufficient progress during their time in the juniors. The school's current tracking data show considerable inconsistencies in progress. In some year groups and classes pupils are not doing well enough in mathematics. While observations show some good teaching, expectations are not consistently high and there is an over-reliance on published materials. This results in a lack of challenge and pace, which is evident in pupils' books in some classes. Pupils confirm that they find it frustrating in mathematics when 'teachers hold us back and we do not have enough to do'.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2008:

- raise standards, particularly at Key Stage 2 in mathematics and science – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' attitudes to learning, and behaviour in classrooms, are good. Pupils are polite and courteous and many exhibit pride in their school. Occasional restlessness was evident only when pupils had been sitting for too long or when tasks failed to engage them sufficiently. Nevertheless, the school does have some challenging pupils and the number of temporary exclusions is quite high. The school's diligent efforts have led to some improvement in attendance although it remains below average. Pupils enjoy learning and work well together to support one another. They enjoy taking responsibility around the school as prefects, dinner monitors and school councillors.

Quality of provision

Inspectors' observations broadly confirm the picture of teaching and learning established by the school's most recent round of monitoring. Around half the teaching was at least good and there were some examples of outstanding practice. The remainder was mainly satisfactory, with a small residue of inadequate teaching. There were a number of examples when the teacher catered well for the often wide range of learning needs in the class. Where this was the case, teachers explained clearly what pupils would be learning and how they could check if they had been successful. Consequently, pupils make good gains in their learning. The pace of learning and the challenge provided by teachers, however, remains inconsistent, especially in Key Stage 2. Sometimes teachers talk for too long and pupils do not have enough opportunities to work independently for extended periods. This results in pupils, particularly the more able, being held back. In mathematics, pupils often spend too long on unchallenging numerical calculations, resulting in the neglect of other areas of mathematics, notably data handling.

The school has concentrated its efforts on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and this has resulted in some imbalances in the curriculum. For example, science receives a great deal of attention at the upper end of the school to the detriment of subjects such as geography and design and technology. This is recognised by pupils, and one commented, 'We only do English, maths and boring science every day'.

The assessment coordinator has dramatically improved the school's systems for tracking the progress of every pupil from their point of entry to the school. This is being used with increasing effect to identify potential underachievement, and to provide additional support, when required, through regular progress meetings. At the moment, this information is not readily accessible but plans are well under way to hold all data electronically which will allow all staff much easier access to it. The setting of very challenging targets in English, mathematics and science has raised expectations of what pupils should achieve by the end of Key Stage 2. These assessment systems are very new and it is not yet possible to be clear about their impact on pupils' progress.

The school has worked hard with the support of the local authority to improve its procedures for the protection of children. All checks are now in place and the arrangements for the safeguarding of children fully meet requirements.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection of June 2008:

- increase the pace of learning and the level of challenge in lessons so that the different needs of all pupils are met – satisfactory
- use assessment and monitoring information to match support, guidance and the curriculum to the needs of all pupils – satisfactory
- ensure safeguarding procedures fully meet government requirements – good

Leadership and management

A great deal of monitoring of lessons and books by senior staff has taken place since the inspection, sometimes with the support of the local authority. Senior staff have been trained in the skills of effective monitoring. There is evidence that some of this work has been effective in improving teachers' skills and that they have found this supportive. The school improvement plan, however, has been slow to develop and has not been established as the central vehicle to drive the school's improvement. Moreover, the schools' self-evaluation has not been updated in a way that is accessible to all senior staff. Hence, monitoring and evaluation are not underpinned by a common and shared understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Middle leaders are committed and enthusiastic but their role in improving teaching and learning and raising standards has been underdeveloped. Performance management has not been implemented for the current academic year. As a result, teachers are being denied their entitlement to continuing professional development and performance management is not being used to hold teachers to account for the progress of their pupils. Most newly qualified staff feel vulnerable and unsupported.

Members of the IEB are very knowledgeable and experienced. Although it has not been set up for very long, the board has already established a very clear picture of the school's strengths and what needs to be done to bring about the rapid improvement required. Nevertheless, the school is not yet demonstrating sufficient capacity to improve.

Progress on the areas for development identified by the inspection of June 2008:

- strengthen the rigour of monitoring and evaluation by leaders at all levels to secure rapid improvement – inadequate

External support

The local authority is providing good support to the school. Its statement of action fulfilled requirements and offered a clear outline of how rapid improvement in the school is to be secured. The impact of this work is already evident in some of the improvements that have been made in teaching and learning and in raising standards in science. The local authority acted decisively to remove the governing body and establish the IEB, which is giving the school more strategic leadership. An experienced advisory head has provided good support and advice to the school and is now part of the IEB. The school has been included in the London Challenge programme and considerable support has been provided by the National Primary Strategy. The school improvement partner has worked closely with the school to identify the actions that need to take place as a matter of urgency. The local authority has also been very helpful in supporting the school to make its safeguarding procedures robust.

Priorities for further improvement

- Implement performance management as a matter of urgency.