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Miss Sue Brown
Headteacher
John Rankin Junior School
Henshaw Crescent
Newbury
RG14 6ES

Dear Miss Brown

Special measures: monitoring inspection of John Rankin Junior School

Following my visit with David Williams, Additional Inspector, to your school on 19 and 20 May 2009, 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 December 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

One newly qualified teacher may be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children and Young People's Services for West Berkshire.

Yours sincerely

Graham Lee
Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of John Rankin Junior School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 19 and 20 May 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed 12 lessons and looked through samples of pupils' work. They examined documentation, including teachers' planning, monitoring records and tracking data. They met with the headteacher, executive headteacher, other staff in leadership positions, representatives of the school council and two parents. Discussions were also held with the School Improvement Partner and two members of the governing body.

Context

Since the last inspection, one full-time and one part-time teacher have left. A new member of the leadership team has been appointed for September to lead on literacy and challenge. The local authority, in consultation with governors and parents, has set up a federation with the infant school on the same site. The infant school's headteacher has been appointed executive headteacher and is working closely with the substantive headteacher. The two schools will have a joint governing body under this arrangement, which will be formalised in July following governor elections. The local authority is in the process of appointing 'parent champions' to the school.

Achievement and standards

The 2008 national tests results for 11-year-olds were below average and confirmed a picture of declining standards over the last few years from above national averages. Pupils' achievement was inadequate. Too many had not made enough progress in writing and mathematics from their average starting points when they joined the school. The year group contained a significant numbers of vulnerable pupils with learning difficulties. While many of these pupils made good strides in their emotional development, too many underachieved academically in spite of the school's efforts to boost their performance.

Considerable improvements in teaching and learning are leading to better progress in lessons. In particular, a great deal has been done to improve pupils' skills in writing. Pupils are given many opportunities to write for different audiences and purposes in a range of subjects. They are also being given more structure on which to build and develop their writing. For example, the 'success ladder' is helping them to understand the particular features of different styles of writing. This was evident in a Year 3 lesson, where pupils were constructing the opening to a mystery story, with clear ideas about how to make it interesting and exciting. It is too early for this improvement in progress to be reflected in the data about pupils' performance. The data show that, throughout the school, pupils' progress in reading is good but it remains too slow in writing and mathematics.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- rectify the underachievement in pupils' writing by raising teachers' expectations and ensuring that challenging tasks are set – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Although no key issues were identified for development in this area, improvements have been made by the school in some aspects of pupils' personal development since the last inspection. Pupils are friendly and polite. They enjoy school and many are proud of what it has to offer. They generally behave well and say there is very little bullying in the school. A few pupils present challenging behaviour from time to time but these pupils are supported well by staff to enable them to play a full part in lessons. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and cooperate well with each other and with adults in lessons. Members of the school council spoke warmly about how the school has improved since the previous inspection, for example, in providing them with more challenging work. They also believe that teachers are better at helping them to understand how well they are achieving and how to improve their work.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning has improved markedly since the last inspection. Around half the lessons seen by inspectors were good or better and none were inadequate. Teachers enjoy good relationships with pupils and manage their classes well. A key factor in the improvement is that teachers now have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. In turn, learners told inspectors that lessons are now much more challenging and enjoyable. Teachers make very good use of interactive technology to introduce ideas and consolidate learning. Generally, they make pupils much more aware of what they are learning and how they will know if they have been successful. As a result, lessons are purposeful and both teachers and their pupils are developing a clear sense of the progress that is being made in lessons and over longer periods of time. However, these improved features are not yet embedded and some plenary sessions, for example, are ineffective in reviewing and consolidating learning. Also, learning sometimes becomes too passive when pupils are asked to sit for extended periods. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to the quality of education, particularly for pupils who find learning more difficult.

The curriculum is becoming more effective in helping pupils to develop their basic skills in literacy and numeracy, although it is not consistently challenging, particularly for the more able pupils. The school provides well for pupils' personal development and the range of enrichment activities, in sport and music, contribute well to this development as well as to their enjoyment of school.

John Rankin Junior takes good care of its pupils and arrangements for their safeguarding are securely in place. Academic guidance is becoming stronger. Every

pupil's progress is tracked very carefully and regular progress meetings are helping school leaders to identify potential underachievement at an earlier stage. A range of strategies are being used to help pupils to reflect on and improve their work. These include assessing their own and each other's work, using criteria related to the purpose of the learning. Target setting is also becoming more robust and marking more specific. Pupils are clear that these strategies are helping them to improve. These features are not yet firmly embedded, however, and are more developed in some classes than in others.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the overall quality of teaching and learning – good
- ensure that there is consistency and detail in the way that teachers help pupils move on to the next step of their learning – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The move to federation has already strengthened considerably the school's leadership. The headteacher has welcomed this development and has formed a fruitful and constructive partnership with the executive headteacher. Together with the deputy headteacher, they have a clear and accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This is reflected in the raising achievement plan, which sets out clearly how school leaders intend to tackle the weaknesses as a matter of urgency. Staff have picked up the baton and are working together to bring about the rapid improvements required. Resistance and a reluctance to embrace change have been almost completely eradicated. The unity of purpose is evident in the significant improvements in teaching and learning. The effectiveness of the wider leadership team, however, is not fully established. The mathematics leader is making a significant contribution to school improvement but the leadership team will not be complete until September. Governors have developed their understanding of the issues but their energies have, understandably, been devoted to establishing the federation. They are somewhat in limbo and will not become fully effective until the new governing body is in place. Thus, while the school's capacity to improve has been considerably strengthened, it is not yet fully secure. While the actions of leaders have led to clear improvements in teaching and learning, it is too early to measure their impact on raising standards and accelerating achievement. Tracking systems enable leaders to have a clear view of the progress of individual pupils, but the data are not yet used well enough to identify the bigger picture of trends in attainment and the progress of different groups.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Strengthen the senior leadership of the school – satisfactory

External support

The local authority is providing very good support to the school. Its statement of action fulfilled requirements and offers a clear outline of how rapid improvement in the school is to be secured. The local authority has acted decisively in setting up the

federation, which is already strengthening the capacity of leadership in the school. It has also provided a consultant headteacher who is supporting improvements in teaching and learning very effectively. Support from literacy and numeracy consultants has been of high quality. Teachers have been very appreciative of the modelling and 'hands on' support provided by these colleagues. School leaders are clear that the local authority has consulted with them fully and has provided support that is proportionate to their needs. Much of this has been brokered through the School Improvement Partner, who provides good support but also a level of challenge designed to keep the school on an upward trajectory.

Priorities for further improvement

- Accelerate pupils' progress in mathematics.