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Miss Sybil Mary Camsey
Headteacher
Barnehurst Junior (Foundation) School
Barnehurst Close
Northumberland Heath
Erith
DA8 3NL

Dear Miss Camsey

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Barnehurst Junior
(Foundation) School

Following my visit with Isobel Randall, Additional Inspector, to your school on 21 and 22 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 for Children's and Young People's Services for Bexley.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Parker
Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Barnehurst Junior (Foundation) School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 21 and 22 May 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work; scrutinised documents; and met with the pupils, headteacher, consultant, deputy headteacher, mathematics and science subject leaders, and representatives of the local authority.

Context

The local authority, supported by the governing body, proposes to federate the school with the adjacent infant school. A consultant is working alongside the headteacher. The consultant will lead the school through the process of federation following the retirement of the headteacher at the end of this academic year.

Currently, two classes are being taught by temporary teachers covering maternity leave.

Achievement and standards

The data collected and analysed by the school show that pupils' progress in mathematics has accelerated over the last term. In most year groups the pupils made more than twice as much progress as they did in the previous term. Lesson observations confirm that pupils are making better progress because the work the teachers set is more accurately matched to the pupils' differing abilities.

The good improvements in mathematics result from the focus placed on improving teaching. The work of local authority consultants to support the teachers has sharpened the use of objectives for learning and criteria against which the pupils can assess how successful they have been. The teaching of small groups of pupils who need additional support to reach the next level is also helping to raise standards in mathematics. The teachers' questioning of pupils is more searching and is exposing weaknesses in some pupils' skills and understanding, notably how they use and apply what they have learned to solve problems.

The teaching of science has not benefited from the same degree of support or improvement. Consequently, progress in science is much slower and the standard and quality of the pupils' work have not improved to any degree. There is still variation, from class to class, in the amount and quality of the pupils' work. Some of the tasks they are set do not provide sufficient challenge and the development of their investigative skills is not systematic.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards and achievement, particularly in mathematics and science
– satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Discussions with the pupils indicate that they enjoy many lessons. They appreciate the growing range of interesting activities in mathematics. One pupil commented, 'Maths has got better this year ... it has got harder!' The pupils also welcome more information about how well they are doing and find that the targets they are set are helping them to improve. They are also becoming more confident in assessing their own progress.

The pupils behave well in lessons and most concentrate on the tasks they are set by their teachers. In paired work and discussions, some pupils are happy to allow their partner to dominate but teachers are modifying the way they use this strategy to ensure more pupils actively participate in discussion. Through these and other strategies the pupils are developing a wider range of approaches to learning.

Pupils have enjoyed some of the recent developments, particularly the science week, during which they were able to carry out a number of experiments and are now very keen to be involved in more experiments and investigations.

The pupils' pride in their school and the strong sense of community was illustrated by their excellent response in a whole-school assembly in which Year 5 pupils told the story of the 'les trois petits cochons'.

Quality of provision

The teaching of mathematics has improved as a result of considerable support, training and coaching over the last term. The headteacher and consultant are focusing on establishing higher expectations, with particular success in mathematics. Mathematics lessons are planned in considerable detail, drawing on the increasing range of assessment data collected by the teachers. There is an increasing emphasis on the teaching of problem-solving skills. However, evidence from lesson observation shows that this remains an area of weakness for many pupils.

Observation of lessons and scrutiny of a sample of the pupils' work show that progress in improving the quality of science teaching has been much slower. Lessons are not based on assessments of what pupils are able to do, and too little consideration is given to developing the pupils' investigative skills. There are too few opportunities, for example, for pupils to make predictions, test ideas, record observations, present findings and draw conclusions. Where these opportunities are provided, they do not build systematically on what pupils can already do or challenge them to extend and develop their skills. In some classes there is an over-reliance on worksheets and prepared pro forma to record observations and present findings.

In many lessons, teaching assistants play an important role to support the inclusion of pupils with learning difficulties. Support staff are well briefed and, in one mathematics lesson observed, contributed very useful information about individual

pupils' performances to supplement the teacher's assessments and evaluation at the end of the lesson.

There are examples of helpful marking that highlight what pupils need to do to improve their work. However, these developments are not established in all classes or in all subjects. In some cases, where comments point out to pupils how they can improve, the comments are not acted upon. In science, some marking is cursory.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning so high expectations lead to improved achievement – satisfactory
- ensure all teachers make full use of assessment data to match work to pupils' needs – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The headteacher's strong commitment to the welfare of the children continues to underpin the work of the school. She is well supported by the deputy headteacher. With the additional support of the consultant, they have established a very secure platform for improvement. The school development plan and the local authority's statement of action set out a very clear agenda for improvement. In mathematics some of the early milestones have been reached and the impact of these achievements is evident in lessons and the faster progress made by pupils.

The consultant is working very effectively alongside the teachers to improve the quality of teaching. The teachers are receptive to suggestions as to how they can enhance teaching and learning. The subject leaders for mathematics and science are playing an increasing role in managing improvements. The mathematics subject leader has held the responsibility for longer than the science leader, who is very new to the role. In both subjects there are appropriate action plans. However, these are focused largely on improving general teaching skills rather than extending the teaching of mathematical and science skills, particularly those related to problem solving and investigation.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- develop leaders' and managers' evaluation skills to enable them to play an effective role in leading the school in improved achievement – satisfactory

External support

The local authority's statement of action sets out an appropriate strategy to aid the school in tackling the weaknesses highlighted at the last inspection. The local authority has provided considerable support to improve the quality of teaching and accelerate pupils' progress in mathematics. This support has resulted in good improvements in mathematics.