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Mrs Rebecca Kingsland
The Executive Headteacher
Siskin Junior School
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Hampshire
PO13 8AA

Dear Mrs Kingsland

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Siskin Junior School

Following my visit with Fran Ashworth, additional inspector, to your school on 23 and 24 March 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 2009. 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.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire and the inspection team.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Nolan
Additional inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Siskin Junior School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 23 and 24 March 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, visited lessons in all classes, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, groups of staff, the chair of the Interim Executive Board, and two representatives from the local authority.

Context

Following the inspection, the headteacher left the school at the end of the autumn term. The local authority had already taken steps to form a partnership between the school and another successful local primary school. It has since secured the services of the headteacher of that school to be the executive headteacher of Siskin Junior School. The local authority has also obtained permission to replace the governing body with an Interim Executive Board which has already met twice. Currently, the local authority is considering its options for the long-term future of the school.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Guided by the executive headteacher, the school has started to address the legacy of underachievement, particularly that of Year 6, as a matter of urgency. Systems to assess the pupils' attainment and to track their progress have been reviewed and are now both robust and more frequent than previously. Staff training to assess and moderate the pupils' work has improved the accuracy of teachers' checks on their progress. The most recent information indicates that Year 6 pupils are likely to reach test results that improve considerably on those of the 2009 cohort but are still below the school's published targets for the year group. The current estimates indicate that the percentages of the year group reaching Level 4 or better are approximately 57% in reading, 49% in writing and 65% in mathematics. Just over a third of the pupils are likely to gain Level 4 or better in both English and mathematics.

The pupils' progress remains uneven across the school. Year 5 information, for example, shows pupils are making very limited progress, mainly because of the turnover of staff. In Years 3 and 4, pupils make steady progress and are currently on track to meet their class targets. The school's analysis of groups of pupils shows that those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities as well as those who are more able are progressing less securely than might be expected. This is particularly so in the nurture group where pupils spend too little time on worthwhile literacy and numeracy activities. The executive headteacher has recognised that although this provision is very supportive of the pupils' personal development, it is currently ineffective in improving their basic skills.



Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise attainment and strengthen progress across the school in reading, writing and mathematics – inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Current attendance levels are an improvement on the previous year and are close to average overall. The highest attendance is in Year 4 and as a result, the pupils are making steady progress. The rate of fixed-term exclusions has declined significantly this year and reflects the pupils' increasingly positive attitudes to school. Around the school and in the playground, most pupils behave well although some in Year 3 still demonstrate very immature behaviour which some staff find difficult to manage.

In lessons, pupils are generally cooperative and most maintain their concentration when tasks are well suited to their earlier learning. Nevertheless, pupils rely very heavily on their teachers to guide their learning and have yet to develop much independence in their work. Some have lost interest in taking care in presenting some of their written work, sometimes because too little is expected of them or because marking is superficial or left undone for lengthy periods.

The effectiveness of provision

The proportion of inadequate teaching observed has declined since the last inspection. Nevertheless, too much teaching is no better than satisfactory and is not yet good enough to support the pupils in making the fast progress necessary to address earlier underachievement. Of the eight lessons seen, including intervention provision for mathematics for a group of Year 6, two were good and two inadequate.

The executive headteacher has taken energetic action to eradicate unsatisfactory teaching through a rigorous programme of lesson observations and evaluation as well as staff training. In contrast to previous efforts to support the school, the executive headteacher has chosen a programme of in-house coaching, sometimes in conjunction with staff from the partner school. Where the impact of support continues to have limited effect on the development of teachers' skills, senior leaders, with the support of the local authority, are ready to take robust decisions on staff deployment.

Lesson planning is now done jointly across classes in contrast to previous practice where teachers worked in isolation. Teachers' planning in literacy is monitored by the coordinator but this is not yet the case in mathematics. The planning seen during the monitoring visit was generally satisfactory but some staff still find it difficult to move from a good plan to effective teaching. In the less successful

planning, there was too little consideration given to the needs of different attainment groups.

Despite making satisfactory progress on the specific areas for improvement, there is still much to be done to improve the quality of teaching and thus accelerate the pupils' progress. Less effective and sometimes inadequate teaching continues to occur because work is not well enough matched to the learning needs of all pupils. The observations on this visit highlighted the lack of challenge for the most able pupils and the perception of the pupils that they have too few opportunities to exercise their independence imaginatively within themes and topics. The school is very well resourced with teaching assistants. Their deployment, however, is not always used to the best advantage of pupils in some classes. There are occasions when teachers abrogate responsibility for the progress of the whole class, leaving work with groups too much to the support staff.

The small proportion of good teaching seen reflected the impact of staff training. In Years 3 and 4, for example, there were clear examples of teachers assessing the pupils' understanding carefully and moving them on to the next stage in their learning. In a Year 3 mathematics session the class teacher very effectively managed well-targeted questioning, using the support staff to good advantage. In a Year 6 persuasive writing session led by the deputy headteacher from the partnership school, pupils were enthused by the challenge of responding to a letter from their peers and engaged energetically because they knew there was a genuine purpose to the activity. This session modelled good practice for the Year 6 staff. In a Year 6 catch-up group in mathematics, pupils made fast progress because the work on fractions was carefully geared to allow them to succeed and build their confidence in applying their skills to problem solving.

Improving progress in English and mathematics is rightly a priority for the school. However, there are plans to review the curriculum and to forge much closer links with the adjacent infant school. Currently, pupils' experience is greatly enriched by the music provision which allows them to play, sing and perform, sometimes in conjunction with the partnership school. Pupils are well cared for at the school. Staff are sensitive to their needs and there is a wide range of intervention to support their personal development.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the consistency of teaching through rigorous monitoring and evaluation to urgently raise the proportion of good lessons – satisfactory
- significantly improve lesson planning so that by the end of the autumn term, the work provided for groups of pupils consistently matches their ability – satisfactory.



The effectiveness of leadership and management

The senior leadership of the school has been strengthened significantly this term with the appointment of the executive headteacher. This has increased markedly the capacity of the school to seek improvement and raised the morale of the staff. The plans to raise attainment are now closely aligned with the satisfactory local authority action plan for the school and are clearly understood by all staff. The evaluation of the impact of actions is regular and thorough so that staff are gaining confidence in striving for improvement. There is a resolute focus on raising attainment and improving pupils' learning and progress and a recognition that there is still much to do.

The Interim Executive Board has made a good start in getting to grips with the issues within the school. They have taken important steps to ensure they are well informed on the data relating to the pupils' progress as well as on the day-to-day workings of the school. Through regular meetings and visits to gain first-hand information, they are well placed to hold the school to account. Governors and senior leaders have ensured that safeguarding procedures continue to be satisfactory.

Middle leaders have helpful opportunities to work with colleagues from the partner school and from the local authority to develop their skills further. Through coaching and observing good practice, they are being guided in how to manage their areas of accountability. The school has, however, recognised that the present structure of phase leaders is not effective in encouraging the rigorous monitoring of both literacy and numeracy across all year groups. Senior leaders are well aware that greater consistency in good practice is required in the work of middle leaders and some teachers if pupils' outcomes are to be improved.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- strengthen the involvement of governors in monitoring the work of school and staff in the evaluation of improvement – satisfactory
- ensure that plans for improvement are sharply focused on key issues, contain clear measures to help evaluation of the success of changes made, and are clearly understood and implemented by all staff – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has provided good support for the school, not least through establishing a partnership with a local school with an established good track record. Literacy and numeracy consultants are working well with staff, particularly in helping teachers to moderate work and in developing their understanding of the planning and assessment cycle. The executive headteacher and the primary phase inspector



are collaborating effectively to improve senior and middle leadership in understanding their roles and responsibilities and in developing their skills to shoulder accountability for their areas. These actions are adding capacity to the school's overall drive to raise its performance.