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

Dear Mrs Kingsland

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Siskin Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 30 June and 1 July 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 second 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.

Progress since the previous monitoring visit – 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.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Nolan
Additional Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Siskin Junior School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 30 June and 1 July 2010

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, visited lessons in all seven classes and an assembly, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, pupils, staff, the chair of the interim executive board, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

There have been no major changes in the context of the school since the last monitoring visit. Long-term staff absence continues to challenge the school.

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

The recent provisional national test results in English and mathematics show an encouraging rise in some aspects of the attainment of Year 6. Results remain below average, however, and are still very low in writing. Nevertheless, English results at Level 4 and above improved overall with the biggest gains of 6 percentage points in writing. The pupils' attainment in reading remains similar to that of the previous year. In mathematics, results rose considerably with almost 60% of the pupils reaching the expected Level 4. This was a rise of 14 percentage points on last year. Overall, a third of the pupils gained a Level 4 or better in both English and mathematics, improving on the 2009 results by 8 percentage points. This latter figure was in line with the school's predictions and targets, although neither English nor mathematics fully met their challenging targets.

Despite robust efforts by the executive headteacher and the partnership, the pupils' progress remains uneven across the school. This is closely related to the quality of teaching and long-term staffing challenges. Year 6 made the fastest progress in this academic year, not least because of the many interventions to address the legacy of underachievement in the group. Progress in Year 5 is still too slow, with approximately half making the expected progress in writing and reading and less than a quarter of the pupils in mathematics. Since the last monitoring visit, the school has disbanded the nurture group for those with social and emotional needs. These pupils are now well supported in mainstream classes and are progressing similarly to their peers in strengthening their basic skills.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

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



Other relevant pupil outcomes

Attendance levels for the academic year so far remain close to average with a decrease in unauthorised absence. Most classes show attendance at, or above, the national figures with absence concentrated in particular groups. For these clusters, authorised absence is high because of medical and other individual needs. The number of days lost to fixed-term exclusions is now a fifth of that for the previous academic year and reflects the pupils' increasingly positive attitudes to school. 'This is the best school,' commented a pupil during the break, a sentiment endorsed by his companions.

Pupils from the nurture group, many with very difficult histories, have been well integrated into lessons and, in most classes; pupils remain cooperative and good natured. The high level of support from staff at all levels has helped maintain the mainly good behaviour observed on the previous visit.

The effectiveness of provision

On this visit, no inadequate teaching was observed. This is an improvement. Nevertheless, teaching overall remains satisfactory and there is too little that is good. The executive headteacher is rightly concerned that teaching is not yet good enough to accelerate the rate of the pupils' progress throughout the school. Of the eight lessons seen, there were good features to most lessons, but only two were good.

Staff training has been carefully tailored to correspond with the needs identified in the regular and accurate monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice. Where necessary, the executive headteacher, with support from the local authority, has taken robust action to remedy weaknesses in teaching. Advanced skills teachers are scheduled to support staff in the autumn term until the school is able to make good appointments to replace those leaving the school. The planning format for lessons has been reviewed and changes made are currently being trialled. There is an on-going focus on planning to help pupils see the connections between successive lessons and on matching work to the full range of ability within the class. There has been good progress towards eradicating inadequate teaching, but much remains to be done to ensure that the day-to-day classroom practice is of sufficiently good quality to enable pupils to make up for previous underachievement. Classrooms remain calm and orderly and relationships between pupils and staff are very good. Learning support assistants are well deployed and much more effective than at the time of the last monitoring visit. Teaching is beginning to show the impact of training with some lessons showing imaginative ideas and helpful structures to encourage pupils to actively engage in learning as in a Year 6 lesson involving a debate. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of some of the creative ideas is diluted by superficial questioning and insufficient attention to detail in the preparation of resources. Learning outcomes, together with their expected success criteria, are still



inadequately understood by many pupils and do little to help them evaluate their learning.

Progress since the last visit 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 partnership between Siskin and another local school has continued to flourish, despite a number of unexpected difficult circumstances. The executive headteacher has the support of the staff and of the local authority who has responded favourably to her request for advanced skills teachers to expand the capacity of the school to improve more rapidly.

The raising-attainment plan has been reformulated and refined to address the school's current priorities. The interim executive board has gone from strength to strength and now has clear expectations for the school so that it is able to challenge it effectively. The local authority, working closely with the interim executive board and the governors of the adjacent infant school is seeking, with some success, to procure continuity in the pupils' learning. Within the school, the executive headteacher is developing the skills of the senior and middle managers sensitively but as quickly as possible. Staff have gained a realistic understanding of their responsibilities with regard to the pupils' rate of progress and are now held rigorously to account.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- strengthen the involvement of governors in monitoring the work of school and staff in the evaluation of improvement – good
- 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 – good.

External support

The school continues to receive accurate and reliable evaluations of its performance from local authority colleagues. Literacy and numeracy consultants are working effectively with staff, particularly in helping teachers to develop pupils' writing and to plan usefully for developing strategies to help pupils understand how well they are doing.

