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17 June 2010

Mrs Katharine Bultitude  
Acting headteacher  
Gorefield Primary School  
High Road  
Gorefield  
Wisbech  
PE13 4NB

Dear Mrs Bultitude

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Gorefield Primary School

Following my visit to your school on the 15 and 16 June, 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 January 2010. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

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 governors and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridge.

Yours sincerely

Sheelagh Barnes

Additional Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Gorefield Primary School.

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 June 2010.

## Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, visited lessons and assembly, scrutinised documents and met with senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, the school council and other pupils and an inspector from the local authority.

## Context

One teacher has left since the last inspection and two members of staff, including the headteacher are absent due to maternity leave. The acting headteacher, governors and staff are working in partnership with another local school, whose headteacher is the consultant headteacher for this school. An experienced ex-headteacher has also been seconded to Gorefield for four days a week. A wide range of consultant support is also being provided by the local authority.

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

Pupils of all levels of prior attainment and from all groups have positive attitudes to learning. They are polite, try their hardest to pay attention and do their best. Teachers have begun to work to make lessons exciting and interesting, but lessons are still not accurately matched to pupils' needs. As a result, pupils' progress, particularly in Key Stage 2, is too slow.

In Years 1 and 2, pupils make broadly satisfactory progress in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Standards are below those expected for pupils' ages overall, although they are broadly in line with the standards expected in science. Scrutiny of work in books shows that pupils are given suitable opportunities to write at length and practise their developing skills. There are regular opportunities to handle numbers and pupils develop confidence in mathematics. They are given suitable opportunities to learn in practical ways about the properties of magnets, for example. As a result, learning is memorable and pupils are excited and keen to do more.

In Years 3 to 6 the progress made by pupils from all groups is too slow. Older pupils are given too few opportunities to develop their writing skills and make the progress they should. Tasks are set which are slightly different for each of the broad ability groups. However, these different tasks are not based on any clear understanding of what pupils have attained and what they need to practise next. The levels of challenge of the different tasks are too similar. As a result, the progress pupils make is not good enough. In science, there is no whole-school system to record the levels pupils have attained. Teachers pass on notes to each other as classes move through

the school, but this is not sufficient for lessons to be planned to take prior attainment into full account. Frequently, the whole class works at the same experiment, set up for them by adults. Pupils find this exciting, but as it is not rigorously based on what they have already attained, it does not move their learning forward significantly and does little to develop their own skills in devising ways to test their theories.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Bring about improvement in pupils' achievement especially in Key Stage 2
  - inadequate

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils enjoy school, particularly opportunities such as sport and swimming. The great majority attend regularly. Pupils have a good knowledge of how to stay safe and how to keep healthy and feel secure and well looked after in school. They interact well with each other and with adults and their behaviour is good. Even in lessons where the pace is slow, they remain polite and considerate of others. They are thoughtful and keen to work for others less fortunate than themselves. Their contribution to the community is good.

The effectiveness of provision

School and local authority monitoring indicates that the quality of teaching has started to improve. Teachers have started to plan to make lessons exciting and interesting. They select themes for learning, such as Dr Who or the Ancient Greeks, which pupils enjoy. However, there is still too much inconsistency in the use of assessment and other relevant information when planning these lessons to meet the needs of the range of learners in each class. In addition, there is inconsistency in the frequency and usefulness of marking. Although the learning in some lessons is satisfactory, or even good on occasion for some groups, overall there is still too much inadequate teaching, leading to pupils continuing to make inadequate progress, particularly at Key Stage 2.

Plans for lessons are inadequate and provide insufficient challenge for potential higher attaining pupils and insufficient support for others to enable each learner to be successful. As reported previously, in the weaker lessons, although pupils' behaviour is generally good, they are frequently passive and then become bored, and then disengaged. In addition, despite there being a revision of timetables to ensure adequate time for the core subjects of English and mathematics, older pupils have far too few opportunities to practise writing skills. There is far too high an emphasis on spelling tests, instead of writing for a purpose.

Despite a clear and suitable policy, marking remains generally weak. All pupils have individual targets for their own next steps in reading, writing and mathematics. However, these targets are referred to infrequently by teachers when marking work.

While some good use is made of targets for some of the youngest pupils, this good practice is not uniform. As a result, pupils tend to forget what their targets are. Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage remains a strength.

The school has developed effective strategies for identifying individual pupils' additional learning needs in English and mathematics. Additional help is being provided for a number of pupils who have been identified as being in most need. However, a continuing weakness is in the lack of any whole-school system to assess and monitor pupils' progress in science. After assessments at the end of Year 2, no further whole-school assessment is used until the pupils reach the end of Year 6. As a result, teachers follow lesson sequences based on age-related expectations, rather than any known needs. Not all teachers have a good understanding of the National Curriculum for science and the importance of pupils investigating for themselves. As a result, pupils are not well prepared to set up their own experiments confidently to test their theories.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Use assessment systems to greater effect to accelerate pupils' progress - inadequate.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting headteacher, ably supported by the acting assistant headteacher, has significantly improved whole-school systems to monitor pupils' progress in English and mathematics. She has also developed her skills and confidence in using data from the new efficient assessment recording system to extrapolate information on individuals and groups. Leaders are starting to use this information effectively to drive improvement and embed ambition for higher standards through sharing it regularly with all staff and governors and using it to target pupils who need extra support. Regular and rigorous systems to monitor the quality of teaching and learning have been put into place, including observing lessons and scrutinising work in books. Much has been done to streamline storage of equipment and to create welcoming areas for parents and pupils. Classrooms, waiting areas, staff work areas and learning bays are bright and attractive. As a result, staff and pupils have positive attitudes and a sense of pride in their school. The school is still in the process of developing and amending its formal written development plan to focus more sharply on improving areas highlighted by the previous inspection. However, in practice a great deal has been reviewed in the drive for greater efficiency; for example, the curriculum has been reviewed. Teachers now plan using a topic approach, carefully selecting themes to appeal to boys and girls alike, to make learning more enjoyable. Arrangements for teaching mathematics have been changed and timetabled swimming has been reduced from five, to two sessions a week for each pupil. As yet, these many new initiatives have not had time to impact on standards, but have renewed the sense of purpose and team spirit in the school.

The governing body's determination to be fully accountable is strong. Governors have undertaken training to increase their confidence and skills and more training is planned for the near future. The governing body has reviewed and amended the structure of committees and responsibilities and is starting to take a more active role in determining the direction the school should take, working alongside governors of their partner school. Governors have been pro-active in involving parents and gaining their views. They are a visible and supportive presence for the school. Their challenge is starting to be focused more accurately on raising standards.

Development of the roles and responsibilities of coordinators is variable. Monitoring of English is systematic and embedded. Monitoring of mathematics has started. However, as yet, time has not been given to develop systems to monitor pupils' progress in science.

Progress since inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve leadership and management at all levels to ensure that all areas of the school's work, especially pupils' achievement, are monitored carefully to provide an accurate assessment of the school's effectiveness and make this central to strategic planning for improvement - satisfactory

External support

The local authority is providing a satisfactory level of support for the school. The original plan submitted by the local authority was deemed by Ofsted to require amendments. The current plan outlines support for two of the three subjects highlighted in the original inspection. The quality of support is satisfactory. However, in terms of science, the support from the local authority has not yet been sufficient to bring about any improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

No priorities for further improvement were identified.