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Miss Anna Grice
Headteacher (acting)
Thameside Primary School
Cotman Close
Abingdon
Oxfordshire
OX14 5NL

Dear Miss Grice

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Thameside Primary School

Following my visit with Lynne Kauffman, Additional Inspector, to your school on 8 and 9 March 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. 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 be appointed. (This may be to any key stage, but there should be no more than one appointment in the first instance.)

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 governing body and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Russell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2010

- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate progress throughout the school, including for more-able pupils, this academic year by:
 - increasing the proportion of good teaching throughout the school
 - ensuring that assessment information is used consistently well by teachers to plan lessons at the appropriate level for pupils' ages and abilities.

- Develop the effectiveness of the school's leaders this academic year by:
 - ensuring all staff with leadership roles have the skills to carry them out and fully understand their accountabilities
 - ensuring that whole-school assessment information is accurate and used more rigorously to track the progress of all groups of pupils from their starting points and to set challenging targets
 - using monitoring of the quality of lessons more effectively to pinpoint accurately improvements required in teaching and learning.

Special measures: monitoring of Thameside Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 March 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, members of staff, pupils, members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority.

Context

The Headteacher has been on long-term sick leave since shortly after the inspection and has now resigned with effect from the end of March. The school is now being led by the school's assistant headteacher; governors are currently attempting to recruit a new headteacher for September 2011. Another member of staff also left the school at the end of last term and two of the school's teachers are currently on temporary contracts.

The school is now part of a 'soft' federation with another local primary school. This means that the headteacher and a number of other staff from the partner school work closely with staff at Thameside.

Although the governing body remains in place, progress is also being monitored by a task group comprising the acting headteacher, chair of governors, local authority personnel and staff from the partner school.

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

Inspectors looked at a wide range of evidence to establish pupils' starting points when they join the school. This evidence clearly demonstrates that pupils typically join the school with skill levels significantly below those usually seen.

Pupils were making at least satisfactory progress in all of the lessons observed during the inspection; in a number of cases pupils were making good progress. However, in a number of lessons more-able pupils made less progress than others.

Systems are now in place to collect data about pupils' achievement every term. Data were collected in November and pupils are currently being assessed again. As assessments have not all been completed, and the results are yet to be moderated, it was not possible to use this information to gauge the progress that pupils have made since the school was placed in special measures.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate progress throughout the school, including for more-able pupils – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils typically behave well in lessons and around the school. While no poor behaviour was observed during the inspection, some pupils became restless and slightly inattentive in the less effective lessons. Many pupils also lack the skills necessary to enable them to work well independently. Attendance has improved this year: it is 0.5% higher than at a similar point last year. The last inspection confirmed that pupils felt safe in school. Pupils spoken to during this visit indicated that this is still the case.

The effectiveness of provision

All of the teaching seen during the inspection was at least satisfactory; teaching was good in a minority of lessons observed and outstanding teaching was also seen. Inspectors confirmed the school's view that, while the proportion of good teaching is similar to the time of the last inspection, inadequate teaching is now rare. In the best lessons seen:

- the lessons' structure and activities for pupils were carefully shaped to challenge everyone in the class
- the teacher had very high expectations, both for the class as a whole and for what individual pupils should achieve during the lesson
- the teacher's use of questioning led to high quality class discussion which enthused the pupils and helped them to consolidate what they had learned.

The school has done a range of work to improve teaching, for example by focusing on how teachers plan their lessons. Planning is now typically good; teachers use what they know about pupils' abilities to plan different activities or outcomes for individuals. However, not all teachers yet have all the skills necessary to successfully deliver what is in the plans; consequently, many lessons do not challenge everyone fully. In particular, teachers often fail to set sufficiently sharp expectations about what more-able pupils will achieve during the lesson; as a result, these pupils do not push themselves as much as they could. In some cases teachers also talk for too long at the start of the lesson, limiting pupils' opportunities to work on their own or with other pupils.

Teaching assistants play a valuable role in supporting pupils' learning. Their approach to recording the progress of the younger children is inconsistent; this limits the effectiveness of planning for children's next steps.

A useful, common system for marking is in place and is used consistently by teachers. Almost all marking is followed up to ensure that pupils make the required amendments, or follow the teacher's suggestions of how to improve the work.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting headteacher is providing clear direction and effective leadership. She has helped staff to work through and move on from a very difficult time last term. She has an accurate, thorough and realistic understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and is clear about what she needs to do to support improvement.

A range of monitoring is in place, carried out to a well-organised schedule. The local authority and partner school are closely involved. As well as monitoring lessons, they also monitor other aspects such as marking and lesson planning. A range of useful work is being done to improve teaching. Valuable work is also going on to improve the work of the governing body.

The roles and responsibilities of the school's main middle leaders have been clarified. Each middle leader has prepared an action plan for her area of responsibility; this is a useful development, although it is too early to evaluate the impact of the plans. Middle leaders are now more closely involved in the school's leadership and management. Although they currently have limited involvement in the monitoring of teaching or pupil achievement, sensible strategies are in place to develop and extend their involvement in the future.

The school has set challenging targets for the achievement of its pupils. A clear and useful system is in place to monitor academic progress. This enables the school to monitor pupils' general progress against their targets and also check whether they are on track to reach national average levels as they move through the school. Underachieving pupils are provided with additional support. It is, however, too early to gauge the impact of the tracking system on pupils' achievement.

Some teachers can confidently and accurately assign levels to pupils' work; others are less confident. Teachers' levels are therefore moderated carefully and training and support are being provided where necessary.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Develop the effectiveness of the school's leaders – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority's statement of action for the school was judged to fulfil requirements when it was evaluated by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors in January. The local authority is providing a wide range of useful help and support, particularly through the 'Improving Schools Programme', and is monitoring progress carefully. This has been well received by the school and is clearly having a positive impact.

The support from the school's partner primary school is also very valuable. A number of factors have helped to ensure the success of these arrangements: the partner

headteacher has a very good understanding of the challenges facing a school in special measures; the schools' contexts are very similar; support is focused on key areas; working relations between the schools are very positive; a range of staff are involved, not just the two headteachers.

The task group helps staff from Thameside, its partner school and the local authority to ensure that monitoring and support activities are complementary and carefully coordinated.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that all teachers set, monitor and enforce appropriately high expectations for what individual more-able pupils will achieve during the lesson.