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14 July 2011

Mr Joseph McCrossan and Mrs Deborah Hannaford
Interim Headteacher and Headteacher
Millfield Primary School
Grange Lane
Littleport
Ely
CB6 1HW

Dear Mr McCrossan and Mrs Hannaford

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Millfield Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 July 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 February 2011. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are 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 – 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 the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire.

Yours sincerely

Alan Alder
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2011

- Raise attainment, particularly for the most able pupils in English and mathematics across Years 1 to 6, by:
 - providing more opportunities for extended writing, especially in Key Stage 1
 - using demonstrations to show pupils how to organise their text into paragraphs that use a range of sentence structures and punctuation marks
 - giving pupils opportunities to apply their mathematical skills by doing more problem solving and investigative work.

- Ensure that the large majority of teaching is good or better by:
 - matching provision closely to the individual needs of pupils
 - ensuring introductions are brisk and actively involve pupils in their learning
 - improving the use of pupils' targets in lessons to make learning more tailored to individuals
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to assess their own work.

- Strengthen the monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure that weaknesses are tackled robustly and staff have clear direction to enable them to play their full part in improving the quality of provision.

- Improve attendance through:
 - analysing attendance data more rigorously in order to target actions effectively
 - working even more closely with families whose children do not attend on a regular enough basis.

Special measures: monitoring of Millfield Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 12 July 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, the new headteacher, a group of pupils, and a representative from the local authority (LA), and spoke with the Chair of the Governing Body by telephone.

Context

Since the school was inspected in February 2011 there have been significant staff changes. The headteacher resigned in April 2011. Since then the school has been run by an interim headteacher for three days a week and a consultant headteacher for two days a week. More recently, the newly appointed headteacher, who is due to join the school in September, has taken the place of the consultant headteacher. The Chair of the Governing Body has stepped down from that position and there is now a new Chair. Two teachers are on family leave and a further teacher, from the Early Years Foundation Stage, has left. A member of staff with responsibility for literacy is leaving at the end of this term. In September, the headteacher will be at the school full-time and a deputy headteacher will join the school. A subject leader for literacy has been appointed for September

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

The provisional results of the 2011 Key Stage 2 national tests show that the proportion of pupils achieving or exceeding the national expectation of Level 4 in English has improved well. However, it remains below the national average for 2010. In mathematics, there has been a substantial drop and the results are well below the national average for 2010. The proportion of pupils achieving above average results has increased in both subjects, but again they remain below the average for 2010. This group of pupils reached average standards when they were assessed at the end of Key Stage 1, so pupils' progress through the school continues to be inadequate.

The provisional results for the assessments at the end of Year 2 show little change on 2010 and standards remain low.

It is evident from pupils' work that the standards of handwriting and extended writing are low throughout the school. Letters are inaccurately formed and positioned, even by some older pupils, and their relative sizes are often inaccurate. Many pupils, again including those in Years 5 and 6, do not join their writing and spelling is weak. The teaching has too little impact on pupils' learning, such as their

independent writing and use of grammar. In mathematics, pupils are not sufficiently adept at everyday calculations including addition and subtraction.

The progress made by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is mixed, with some making good progress whilst that of others is too limited.

Nevertheless, improvements in the management of this area are beginning to bring about benefits.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- raise attainment, particularly for the most able pupils in English and mathematics across Years 1 to 6 – inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour is improving. They are friendly and approachable and apply themselves to their work willingly. The previous inspection report contains some mention of bullying. The indications are that this is now more rare.

Attendance has improved. Between September 2010 and the inspection in February 2011 it was 93.1%, which is low. In the period from February to July it is 94.2%, which is average. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has halved in that period. This is a result of effective work by the school, the LA and the governing body, which has strengthened its policy on attendance. Pupils are well aware of the importance of good attendance, which is regularly celebrated. Improvement has been particularly strong for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, the attendance of both groups is still slightly below average. The very small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language have low attendance and it has improved little since February.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- improve attendance – good.

The effectiveness of provision

Of the 11 lessons observed, two were good and one was inadequate. The rest were satisfactory but of these, four were barely so. In too many lessons, the purpose of the lesson is not made sufficiently clear to pupils and the methods for achieving the learning objectives are not well enough matched to their needs. This quality of teaching is not enabling pupils to make up lost ground. There has been improvement in some lessons in the way in which pupils of differing ability are catered for. In a mixed Year 1 and Year 2 literacy lesson, the complexity of tasks given to pupils matched their attainment well. However, this approach is not well developed in the great majority of lessons. The questions asked of pupils do not differ sufficiently according to their ability. Some good independent learning is evident, for example, the use by pupils of a thesaurus to help them in their search

for synonyms. However, in another lesson, the absence of a word bank meant that pupils were over-reliant on adult help. Some good assessment of pupils' learning by a teacher in one lesson helped pupils to improve their work. However, the use of assessment is inconsistent: in another lesson pupils were frequently making the same error in their spelling of a word ending that was partly the subject of the lesson, but this error was not detected and corrected. Time is better used now. In most lessons, the amount of time spent listening to the teacher is not excessive, though in a minority it was too long and this led to a decline in pupils' attentiveness. The pace of lessons has improved and pupils themselves recognise this.

The curriculum remains inadequate. Pupils report that some of the mathematics they study is too easy, and that they still do not do sufficiently investigative or engage in problem solving work. This view is supported by inspection findings. It is also evident from pupils' books that some pieces of work that would lend themselves readily to an investigative approach are not taught in that way. For example, in one lesson in Key Stage 1, pupils took some measurements of a friend, including their foot length and neck circumference. In a subsequent lesson they measured the different pupils' triple jumps. There was no investigation to find a relationship between pupils' measurements and their triple jump performance. Literacy lessons do not build well on each other, and their purpose is not always clear. In one lesson pupils had to find interesting words to use in a poem. They also had to include the past tense of regular and irregular verbs. There were too many demands for pupils to be able to attend to. In Key Stage 2 the work on different genres, including newspaper reports and letter writing, is not being developed well enough.

Teaching assistants work closely with groups of pupils and their planning has improved. However, some lower attaining pupils rarely get an opportunity to work with the class teacher. Books appear to be regularly marked, but do not contain enough guidance on how pupils should improve their work. In English, many pupils need reminders about separating their writing into sentences.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- ensure that the large majority of teaching is good or better – inadequate.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim headteacher has worked with the LA to develop a suitable plan to improve the school and to initiate the necessary actions. As a result, pupils' attendance has improved and there has been some improvement in the quality of their work. A start has been made on improving teaching quality. The interim headteacher has, for example, given demonstration lessons to some of the teaching staff and has followed up the work undertaken with the help of a partner school to improve teaching. Work to raise attainment has continued and this has been successful in the English national tests at the end of Year 6. The literacy and numeracy coordinators are beginning to develop their roles. The interim headteacher

and the new headteacher are accurate and perceptive in their judgments about teaching quality. The leader responsible for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been given more time to carry out her role, and as a result, improvements are taking place. The governing body has increased both its support and challenge to the school, and is now more effective.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- strengthen the monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure that weaknesses are tackled robustly and staff have clear direction to enable them to play their full part in improving the quality of provision – satisfactory.

External support

The LA has been instrumental in recruiting a new headteacher to the school. It has provided strong advice to the governing body, which has strengthened as a result. The LA has played an important part in working with the headteacher in developing an improvement plan, and in monitoring its progress and evaluating its impact. The LA has also provided advice and training to improve teaching, though this is not yet proving to be sufficiently effective.

The LA's statement of action for the school is fit for purpose. The support provided by the LA is satisfactory.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that it is clear what pupils should learn in lessons, and that the activities they are asked to undertake are well suited to the objectives.
- Ensure that, where appropriate, there is continuity between lessons, so that what is learned in one lesson is built upon in the next.