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4 November 2011

Mr Joseph Rubba
Headteacher
Thameside Primary School
Cotman Close
Abingdon
Oxfordshire
OX14 5NL

Dear Mr Rubba

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Thameside Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 and 3 November 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 third 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 – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly Qualified Teachers may 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 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 third monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 November 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of staff, pupils, parents and carers, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority.

Context

A new headteacher took up post in September 2011. There have also been a number of other staffing changes and three teachers are new to the school. The senior leadership team now comprises a headteacher, assistant headteacher and two key stage coordinators. The school added an extra Early Years Foundation Stage class in September 2011. Thameside continues to work in partnership with another local primary school.

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

Pupils made at least satisfactory progress in all of the lessons observed during the inspection; they made good progress in a minority of lessons. More able pupils made similar progress to others. Although attainment is still typically low, it is rising. Pupils' achievement during the last academic year was considered and reported on at the time of the last visit. At the time, this information was quite new; further analysis by the school indicates that there was a significant gap between the achievement of boys and girls. Pupils' work clearly demonstrates that the school's 'Big Write' initiative is helping to improve pupils' writing skills.

Key Stage 2 national test results improved in 2011. There were particular rises in mathematics and in the proportion of Year 6 pupils attaining the higher levels. These pupils made expected progress from their starting points at the end of Key Stage 1; all groups of pupils, including the more able, made similar progress. Year 2 national assessment levels also improved in 2011, although results remained below national averages.

Children moving from the Early Years Foundation Stage entered Year 1 with higher levels of attainment than in 2010. Children's skills in the area of communication, language and literacy were weaker than their skills in other areas of learning; this has been recognised by the school and a range of useful additional provision is being developed to support children's development in this area.

Progress since the last monitoring 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

Attendance continues to rise: attendance levels for the first half term of the school year were higher than for the same period last year. Pupils generally behave well in lessons and around the school. No poor behaviour was seen during the inspection, although some pupils have weak listening skills and can become restless and inattentive. Senior leaders have recognised this and identified it as a priority for development over the coming term. Pupils also said that their learning is sometimes disrupted by the misbehaviour of one or two pupils. Some younger pupils in particular have very weak speaking skills, although much is being done in lessons to remedy this.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching was at least satisfactory in all of the lessons observed; it was good in a minority of lessons. The school has some very effective teachers and everyone is responding positively to the work that leaders are doing to improve teaching. Teachers are, for example, now directing their questions at particular individuals rather than waiting for pupils to put their hands up to answer; this is supporting better use of questioning and helping to ensure that everyone is involved in the lesson. Parents and pupils recognise and value the improvements that are being made to teaching. Pupils say that they are now challenged more in lessons.

Teachers work closely together when they plan their lessons. This has improved the quality of planning in English and mathematics, and it provides good support for new teachers. Lesson plans are typically shaped to reflect individual pupils' different ability levels. However, in some cases, the teacher keeps the class together for too long at the beginning of the lesson and this can lead to some pupils not being challenged appropriately. In some cases, teachers are also not clear enough about what they want pupils to learn or be able to do by the end of the lesson. Lesson planning in subjects other than English and mathematics is less secure. Lessons in these subjects are not always planned to reflect the needs of pupils of different ability.

A very useful system for marking was introduced last year. It is being used consistently by teachers and it provides pupils with clear advice about how to improve their work. Marking is followed up well to ensure that pupils follow their teachers' suggestions. Changes have been made to the way in which teachers make assessments about pupils' levels. These changes are helping teachers to make more consistent judgements and also to set more precise targets for pupils.

There have been significant improvements to the outdoor area for pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The space has been transformed and now provides much better opportunities to engage children's interest.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The new headteacher has made a very positive start; staff, pupils, parents and carers recognise and appreciate his impact on the school. He already has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and he has high expectations of staff and pupils.

The school now has much greater leadership capacity. The headteacher and assistant headteacher share responsibilities well; the new senior leadership team has developed rapidly. Any proposed changes or developments are carefully discussed and rigorously followed through. Leaders' roles and responsibilities are clear and well considered. Action plans are thorough and useful working documents. Two of the senior leaders are also benefitting from very useful training.

Leaders are monitoring and checking the school's work carefully. Monitoring activities are carefully planned out ahead and the findings are followed up well. Monitoring increasingly involves leaders across the school. Much of this monitoring rightly focuses on the quality of teaching; some of this is formal lesson observation, but there is also frequent informal observation of lessons. Information gathered has been used well to identify individual teachers' strengths and weaknesses, and general strengths and areas for development in teaching across the school. Two teachers are new to the profession; they are being provided with a range of useful support.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- develop the effectiveness of the school's leaders – good.

External support

The school has improved significantly over the past year and now has a full complement of staff in leadership roles. As a result, it is less reliant on external support. However, the school still continues to benefit from a range of useful assistance from the local authority and from its partner school. Local authority staff have, for example, helped the school's leaders to produce detailed action plans for improvement; they are also providing very valuable support in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Staff from the partner school are helping in a range of ways, for example by providing mentor support for one of the newly qualified teachers.