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16 March 2012

Mrs Deborah Hannaford
Headteacher
Millfield Primary School
Grange Lane
Littleport
Ely
CB6 1HW

Dear Mrs Hannaford

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Millfield Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 14–15 March 2012, 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 February 2011. 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.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed after discussion with HMI.

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 third monitoring inspection on 14 March 2012

Evidence

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

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, a teacher in the Early Years Foundation Stage has returned from maternity leave, a Year 1 teacher has left and her role is currently being filled by a temporary teacher. A new full-time permanent teacher has joined in Year 4, replacing a temporary teacher. A Year 5 teacher has returned after maternity leave on a part-time basis. The rest of the Year 5 timetable is covered by a temporary teacher.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' attainment is improving at a good rate. This is clear from a scrutiny of pupils' work as well as from the school's assessment data. Improvements are evident in both English and mathematics in most classes. Whilst there are inconsistencies in the progress being made by different groups in different classes, no one group is regularly losing ground compared with the others. Higher attaining pupils are also making better progress than they were. However, overall, standards remain low.

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

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

The quality of teaching

Ten lessons were observed of which three were good, six were satisfactory and one was inadequate. This confirms the trend of improvement identified during the last monitoring inspection. There is a greater extent of clear, confident teaching that is accompanied by clear objectives for pupils' learning. The marking of pupils' work is much better, although there is still some inconsistency. In the best examples, teachers make pertinent comments and ask pupils about a piece of work they have done, such as explaining their reasoning, which pupils then respond to.

In one numeracy lesson, the teacher was particularly adept at anticipating some of the problems pupils may have in measuring angles, and took effective steps to reduce these. In another lesson, some good persistent questioning asked pupils why they thought as they did. However, generally, questioning is still under-used as a means of assessing pupils' understanding so that misconceptions can be dealt with quickly. When this is combined with a slowness to monitor the quality of the work pupils are doing, it leads to unnecessary errors not being dealt with for too long.

The extent to which different pupils are provided with different work according to their abilities has increased. However, this does not always lead to all groups being challenged. Sometimes work given to lower attaining pupils leads to the gaps between their learning and that of their peers increasing, not reducing. However, the work being done by teaching assistants is resulting in improved learning.

The teaching of specific skills such as mental mathematics, handwriting and phonics is improving pupils' abilities, particularly in handwriting. Pupils do not make extensive enough use of phonics to read unfamiliar words or to help spell them. Spelling, while improving, remains a weakness. Pupils' use of technical terms is improving. In mathematics, pupils use a wider repertoire of techniques in mathematical calculations, though there remain some gaps. They have more opportunities now to engage with problem-solving activities, though investigative work, while now evident in some books, is not developed across the school.

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

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

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils report that behaviour is usually good and that they feel safe in school. The inspector's observations confirm this. Good attitudes to learning are evident throughout the school. They are exemplified by one group of pupils who, having finished the mathematics problems they had been set, simply wrote themselves some more and got on with them. Attendance continues to be better than it was at the same period last year. Girls have the best attendance. Those who are known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils who speak English as an additional language have the lowest attendance and this is not significantly improved on that of a year earlier.

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

- improve attendance – satisfactory.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Much good practice has been implemented by the headteacher and senior leaders. The tracking of pupils' academic progress and of teaching quality is bringing about improvements. The other teachers with responsibilities are now more involved in leading their areas and monitoring pupils' work, and are more accountable. The strategies to improve teaching are well-judged and there is a satisfactory increase in the number of lessons that include more of the good characteristics of teaching. There is better identification of which pupils require more help with their work and the interventions arranged for them are an important factor in improving attainment. Girls underachieved in their tests at the end of Year 6 in 2011 but, currently, girls in Year 6 are showing higher attainment than boys and are making faster progress. The governing body knows the school well and is holding leaders to account.

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

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

External support

The local authority is providing good, practical support, for example in working with the literacy and mathematics leaders to bring about improvements and in providing longer term strategies for the school to continue to develop teaching quality through sharing expertise with other local schools.