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Mr D Sergeant
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Sergeant

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Merdon Junior School

Following my visit with Warren Wilkinson, Additional Inspector, to your school on 19–20 June 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection, which took place in January 2012. 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 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 Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2012

- Raise attainment in writing so that it matches that in reading and ensure pupils meet the levels expected for their age by:
 - using assessment information to plan lessons that are well matched to all pupils' abilities, particularly the most able
 - reminding pupils regularly as they are learning of their individual targets, as well as those for the whole lesson
 - developing teachers' marking so pupils understand exactly what to do to improve their work and know the next steps in their learning
 - providing greater opportunities for pupils to practise the skills they have learned in literacy lessons when writing in other subjects.

- Ensure pupils make at least the expected progress in English and mathematics by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what all pupils should be able to achieve
 - maintaining sufficient pace and challenge in lessons
 - checking pupils' progress regularly throughout the year so that underachieving pupils are identified quickly
 - intervening promptly in order to target support more effectively, especially for those pupils who are falling behind.

- Improve leaders' systematic monitoring and evaluation of the actions the school takes to remedy areas of weakness by:
 - ensuring improvement plans include rigorous measures of progress, tight deadlines and precise measures of success so that leaders can judge the progress the school is making
 - using assessment information effectively to set challenging targets for pupils' progress, eradicate underachievement and enable pupils to make good progress and achieve well.

Special measures: monitoring of Merdon Junior School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 19-20 June 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and checked the school's single central record. They met with senior leaders, teachers, support staff, a group of pupils, the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and the District Manager from the local authority. Inspectors listened to pupils reading, observed ten parts of lessons and one assembly. They observed pupils' behaviour at different times around the school, and spoke informally to pupils.

Context

There have been no significant changes to the context of the school since it was last inspected.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils have become more motivated to write, but fewer pupils make expected progress in writing than in mathematics. Nevertheless, higher expectations of what pupils can achieve leads to some improvements in the learning and progress that most pupils make. Consequently, the senior leadership team anticipates that the target for this year for the proportion of pupils expected to make two levels of progress by the end of Key Stage 2 in mathematics will be met. Currently, the most progress made in English and mathematics is in Years 3 and 4. The least amount of progress in these subjects is in Year 5 because the learning and progress of this group of has been disrupted by staff turbulence this year.

Pupils are improving their ability to use grammar, punctuation and to construct sentences correctly. They have been inspired to improve their writing following the staff's initiative of introducing 'Writer of the Week'. However, there are not enough planned opportunities for pupils to produce quality writing across the curriculum. In mathematics, pupils are developing their understanding of number bonds and data handling. However, there are significant gaps in pupils' knowledge of number and in their ability to use and apply their mathematics, and this impedes their progress. Although they enjoy undertaking investigative activities, their success is at times limited when investigative work includes too many aspects of mathematics about which pupils are not secure, such as, for example, odd and even numbers, how to halve and double numbers, and how to use inverse operation to check the accuracy of their sums.

Although attainment in reading is generally high, particularly for most pupils in Year 6, there are a few pupils whose level of ability in reading is significantly below that

expected for their age. School data indicate that levels of attainment in writing are broadly average by the end of Key Stage 2; this still represents underachievement given pupils' above average starting points in Year 3.

The school makes better use of data to identify those pupils at risk of under-achieving. Although the school is beginning to narrow gaps in attainment, girls perform better than boys in English and mathematics. The largest group of pupils who underachieve in the school are the lower attaining boys. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs generally make adequate progress on a day-to-day basis because of the quality of additional support provided to them by teaching and support staff. However, their needs in reading, writing and mathematics are not assessed rigorously to identify clear next steps in learning, or the most suitable teaching strategies required. The school has not monitored and evaluated the progress made by different groups of pupils in terms of their levels of attainment.

Pupils have welcomed the introduction of targets to support them with their writing. Several pupils told the inspectors that they would welcome having targets in mathematics to help them to know what to aim for.

The use of assessment information to plan lessons is beginning to have an impact on providing more challenge, particularly for the more able. However, levels of challenge are not introduced quickly enough in lessons for those capable of achieving more.

Assessment information is not recorded in sufficient detail to support pupils, particularly those of lower ability, including in reading.

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

- Raise attainment in writing so that it matches that in reading and ensure pupils meet the levels expected for their age – satisfactory
- Ensure pupils make at least the expected progress in English and mathematics - satisfactory

The quality of teaching

The vast majority of teaching and learning enables pupils to progress satisfactorily on a day-to-day basis. However, common weaknesses remain, which contribute to underachievement over time. There are good relationships between adults and pupils. This helps pupils to feel confident about exploring new areas of learning. Some teachers make effective use of the interactive whiteboard to engage pupils' interests. However, all too often, the technology is not used in a way that is sufficiently interactive to help accelerate the pace of learning. The use of targets in

English lessons has become well established, although they are more routinely referred to by pupils than by adults. Although teachers have higher expectations of what their pupils can achieve, key aspects of what constitutes good teaching are still not sufficiently well embedded within their daily practice. Some lessons remain overly directed by the class teacher, resulting in pupils remaining too passive for extended periods. Too few teachers expect pupils to articulate their understanding of what they learn. As a result, only a small minority of teachers retain an accurate view during the course of their lesson of the actual learning and progress that all pupils make. Teachers do not encourage pupils to discuss their work and ideas amongst themselves sufficiently in lessons. They do not use enough visual aids or practical resources to demonstrate unfamiliar learning, such as number bonds up to 1000 in mathematics. This is particularly unhelpful for pupils of lower ability, as well as some disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Although teaching helps pupils to develop basic skills of information and communication technology (ICT), there is not enough use of ICT in class-based lessons as a tool to support learning. Although additional adults are generally well deployed, they are not always provided with sufficient or appropriate guidance about how best to meet the needs of pupils.

Marking is generally better in English than it is in other subjects. Where it is particularly good, there is evidence of dialogue between pupils and the class teacher, such as in science in Year 3. The school has not reviewed its marking policy to ensure that expectations of staff are clear, realistic and applied consistently.

Some teachers report that it is unhelpful to have pupils removed from English and mathematics lessons to attend music or other additional provision. Inspectors observed first hand the extent to which this disrupts the learning of basic skills in English and mathematics for some pupils, including those who at times struggle with their learning in class.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' good behaviour makes a strong contribution to the extent to which they feel safe in school. Pupils say that they enjoy school most of the time. This is reflected in their high levels of attendance and good punctuality. Pupils are polite and considerate. They work and play equally well together. The only time that behaviour is less than good is when either teaching fails to engage and motivate pupils or when activities are not appropriately suited to pupils' needs. However, even on these occasions, pupils remain polite, compliant, and tolerant, albeit visibly bored or frustrated.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

A few senior leaders have started to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. This has helped to bring about improvements in writing. Although

more monitoring and evaluation of the school's work takes place, too long a gap is left between some monitoring activities, such as the pupil progress meetings. This limits leaders' ability to secure better than satisfactory progress.

Senior leaders are improving the way they gather and analyse information about the progress made by pupils. However, there is still no clear view about the average point scores achieved by pupils in reading, writing, and mathematics for every class. Nevertheless, current information is used to set targets that are more challenging. This contributes to reducing levels of underachievement.

Feedback provided to staff about the quality of their teaching is not sufficiently precise or focused on the outcomes for different groups of learners. Consequently, staff are not clear about what they need to do to improve the quality of their teaching. Staff would welcome more opportunities for sharing and disseminating good practice, including peer mentoring. They would also welcome a closer working partnership between different subject leaders. Although staff have benefited from training to help them to improve the way they teach mathematics, they do not believe that staff meetings are used sufficiently to support their professional development.

Some subject leaders have produced action plans. Although there are examples that include a reference to whole-school priorities such as the action plan for geography, this is very much the exception and not sufficiently widespread. Too few plans specify the intended outcomes for learners.

Staff have benefited from the clear direction and guidance provided by the mathematics subject leader, who has been well supported by the local authority's mathematics inspector.

Despite the recent improvements in the school, some staff are of the view that there are significant shortcomings in the leadership and management of key aspects of the school's work. This includes English and special educational needs. Some staff do not feel that the school as a whole is being sufficiently well led and managed. Inspectors found that communication between some leaders and staff is weak. Information that senior leaders share with staff is not always communicated in the most effective or productive manner, such as about work related to disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Furthermore, some aspects, such as information about staff's performance, lack clarity and conciseness.

There is no clear overview to show how different subjects are linked together and can be used, for example, to develop and enhance pupils' skills in writing and mathematics across the curriculum. Although assemblies provide appropriate moments of reflection, they do not contribute effectively enough to pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development.

The governing body have benefited from the training and support provided by the local authority, and they are developing their role well. As a result of the local authority undertaking an audit of the minutes of meetings held by the governing body, members have recognised the need to become more challenging and for this to be evidenced.

There is appropriate support for the newly qualified teacher who was already employed by the school at the time of the last inspection.

The school continues to ensure that it complies with the requirements about the recruitment of staff in order to help keep pupils safe.

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

- Improve leaders' systematic monitoring and evaluation of the actions the school takes to remedy areas of weakness – satisfactory

External support

The quality and impact of the external support provided to the school has contributed to the satisfactory progress made to date. The monitoring undertaken by the local authority has enabled the school to gain an accurate view of the progress made against the key priorities. However, monitoring has not focused on the achievement of different groups of learners or the quality of the relationships between the adults who work at the school.

Although the local authority's statement of action was judged to be fit for purpose, some aspects of the plan have been overly ambitious and, as a result, some targets have not been met. There has been a lot of support commissioned for the school. However, staff are beginning to feel overwhelmed by the plethora of different initiatives, and these will need to be carefully managed so as not to become counter-productive.

The local authority has rightly focused on helping the school to improve the quality of teaching. Equally as important has become the need to improve the credibility of the senior leadership team to be able to drive and embed improvements. This will need to be kept under close review.