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Mrs Christine Woodward
Executive Headteacher
Middle Barton School
27 Church Lane
Middle Norton
Chipping Norton
OX7 7BX

Dear Mrs Woodward

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Middle Barton School

Following my visit to your school on 23–24 October 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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 previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed provided they are mentored by teachers from the partner school.

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

Lorna Brackstone

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Strengthen leadership and management at all levels by:
 - implementing rigorous systems for checking all aspects of the school's performance, especially the progress pupils are making and the effectiveness of teaching
 - setting appropriately challenging targets for pupils' learning and progress and ensuring that teachers, subject leaders and the leader of provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are held accountable for pupils' progress towards them
 - ensuring that self-evaluation is accurate and based firmly on evidence
 - ensuring that the governing body plays a strong part in checking progress and evaluating the impact of action plans, and contributes systematically to planning for the future.

- Improve the quality of teaching so that all pupils make at least satisfactory progress, and particularly in mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that agreed whole-school approaches are consistently followed
 - ensuring that teachers have the highest expectations of how work will be presented
 - strengthening teachers' skills in asking questions in order to probe pupils' understanding, challenge them to think and develop their reasoning
 - making greater use of technology to enhance teaching and learning
 - further developing teachers' skills in using assessment information to plan tasks and activities that are suitably challenging for all pupils
 - ensuring that teaching assistants are deployed to best effect throughout.

- Strengthen the provision and leadership for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, so that these pupils make at least satisfactory progress by:
 - ensuring that pupils who may be having difficulty learning are identified as early as possible
 - assessing pupils' needs accurately so that interventions precisely match these needs
 - involving teaching assistants more fully in decision making and checking the progress made by the pupils they support.

Special measures: monitoring of Middle Barton School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 23–24 October 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed all pupils at work in their lessons. She looked at their books and scrutinised school documents. The inspector met with the executive headteacher and the associate headteacher. She also met with a group of pupils, parents and carers, a representative from the local authority and two members of the governing body.

Context

There are currently 99 pupils on roll and the number of classes has been increased from four to five. The youngest children are taught in the Reception class by a teacher who joined the school in September. A permanent teacher is responsible for a mixed class for Year 1 and 2 pupils. The assistant headteacher teaches a newly created Year 3 class and two part-time teachers who are on a temporary contract for one year share responsibility for Year 4. A permanent member of staff teaches the Year 5 and 6 pupils. The time given to teachers for planning their lessons and carrying out checks on pupils' progress is covered by a part-time permanent teacher. She also provides specialist support for developing pupils' mathematical skills. The headteacher and deputy headteacher from Bishop Loveday Primary School remain temporarily in post as the executive and associate headteachers. Recently, the governing body has been given permission by the local authority to recruit a new and permanent headteacher.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' progress and the standards they reach are rapidly improving. The standards reached by Year 6 pupils in English and mathematics were better than many other schools nationally, with a good proportion exceeding the level of work expected for their age group. Given that the 2012 group of Year 6 pupils had standards below those expected for their age at the end of Year 2 and had lost a vast amount of learning time when the school was not functioning as it should, their test results show exceptional achievement. This is a result of good teaching where work was set at the right level. It also demonstrates the impact of extra help in English and mathematics which was provided by the executive and associate headteachers. Thorough use is made of the regular tests which pupils are set to check what they understand and the progress they have made. Those pupils who are at risk of not doing as well as they should are given extra help which is of very high quality. This is particularly evident in the individual sessions which take place in an exciting and stimulating room which is full of mathematical games and equipment.

The school is fully aware that while achievement in reading and mathematics has improved significantly, the standard of pupils' writing, particularly boys', needs to get better. A new range of approaches are being used by teachers to help all pupils improve their writing skills. This includes attention to the formation of their letters, extra guidance on how to spell correctly and lessons which give the pupils lots of

time to write in detail. The school has also used extra funds well to support a writing programme which is speeding up pupil progress in Years 3 and 4. Both boys and girls have become much more interested in their learning because the interesting topics planned by teachers encourage them to work harder. For example, topics such as 'Potions', and 'Bones, Blood and Gory bits' have motivated the boys extremely well and encouraged all pupils to write much more.

Pupils who are disabled and those who need extra help are achieving well. This is because their progress is reviewed every six weeks and the approaches used to support them are evaluated and altered where necessary to suit individual needs.

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

- Strengthen the provision and leadership for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, so that these pupils make at least satisfactory progress – good.

The quality of teaching

Lesson plans indicate that the teachers understand better the need to set work at the right level for their pupils. Most lesson plans provide detailed information on how key facts will be taught and matched to the needs of all pupils. In most lessons, teachers ask suitable questions which extend their thinking. Extra challenges, such as the 'Marvellous Measuring Marathon' in the Year 4 class, excite the pupils and encourage them to work at top speed so that they have time to move onto these activities. Good use is made of opportunities for pupils to chat about their learning with each other. This was observed in a good lesson in Year 5 and 6 where pupils talked to their partner about what the complicated text they had just read together actually meant. The explanations that many teachers give are clear, but sometimes they talk for too long and pupils become inactive, and progress slows. Classrooms have become vibrant and exciting places to learn with a good mixture of displays which help to strengthen children's skills but also to celebrate good work. By adopting a consistent approach to the marking of workbooks, teacher expectations have improved and most pupils have a better understanding of what they need to do next to get better. However, there is still room for improvement with one or two teachers who could benefit from sharing the examples of the outstanding marking which were seen in the Year 5 and 6 books.

Improvements in the way that pupils' progress in mathematics is checked have resulted in a significant rise in standards throughout the school. Where pupils are identified at risk of not doing as well as expected, a specially trained teacher gives them individual tuition. By using lots of interesting and fun approaches with numbers, they gain more confidence in their mathematical skills. This enables them to be better prepared back in class lessons and speeds up the rate of progress they make.

Pupils who are disabled and those who need extra help are taught well both within the classroom and in small groups. Following an intensive programme to improve their understanding of their role, teaching assistants are working more effectively to support those pupils who need extra help.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that all pupils make at least satisfactory progress, and particularly in mathematics – good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' attitudes to their learning are positive and this is reflected in the 'active buzz' which is a strong feature in most classrooms. They are confident that they know what learning targets they are working towards and have noticed a big difference in the way that their work is marked. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the continuing improvements to the school. They say that the attitude of the teachers is much better and note that there are fewer staff absences. They are appreciative of the improved level of resources throughout the school and welcome the assemblies which they consider to be much more fun. The additional opportunities to sing more often have also impressed the pupils. They also appreciate the better range of after-school activities on offer and particularly like the subjects they are taught which they think are much more interesting. For example, although Year 4 pupils found the dissecting of a pig's heart 'a little bit disgusting', they admitted that the lesson had been fascinating. In fact, one pupil who spoke to the inspector explained that 'sometimes I don't want to go home'. This was a view also expressed by some of the parents and carers to whom the inspector spoke. The impressive attitude and engagement of the pupils in school life has reflected well in their behaviour. They are polite and courteous, and proud of their school, and anti-social incidents are rare.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The manner in which the executive and associate headteachers have maintained their strong focus on high expectations for both pupils and the teaching staff is impressive. Areas for improvement are sensibly prioritised and actions taken are practical and meaningful. Their ambition for the school to be at the heart of the village and their pursuit of excellence in all aspects of school life has not faltered. The significant improvement in the most recent Year 6 national tests, the increasing amount of good teaching and the renewed enthusiasm of the pupils and their parents and carers in the life of the school is testament to the huge efforts made by this impressive duo. By setting sharp targets for the teachers and providing good-quality training opportunities, the executive and associate headteachers have raised teacher expectations and helped them use a wider range of teaching strategies. The extra money given to schools who are at risk of not doing so well has been used skilfully to provide additional staff to help pupils maintain their improved rates of progress. The specialist local authority adviser for pupils who need extra help is maintaining a very high-quality level of support for the school. By checking individual learning plans and providing good training for the teaching assistants, she ensures that those pupils who need extra help are making good progress and are involved in all aspects of school life. The mathematics subject leader has made a good start to her role by systematically checking teachers' planning and successfully leading a staff meeting where consistency was highlighted as a priority. By closely following

this through, she is ensuring that all teachers attend to individual needs in their planning. The leader for English is very new to this leadership position and has yet to establish her role as a leader out of the classroom environment.

Members of the governing body have a better understanding of their role. The detailed information they receive from the school is used well by the committees to raise questions and promote discussion. Visits to school and links with subject leaders help them to understand the daily challenges in school. They have greater levels of accountability and are fully aware that their greatest challenge will be the forthcoming appointment of a new headteacher.

Parents and carers and the local community have welcomed their greater involvement in the life of the school. Fundraising events have been very well supported and the successes of the most recent national test results have been proudly shared with the parish council. A 'Happy Harvest' tea for local elderly citizens was much enjoyed by both the community and the pupils who were involved in its organisation.

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

- Strengthen leadership and management at all levels – good.

External support

The executive and associate headteachers use expertise extremely well from their own school to help teachers and teaching assistants improve their classroom skills. Joint staff meetings between the two schools help Middle Barton teachers to grasp a better understanding of setting tasks to meet every pupil's needs and improving techniques to teach spelling. The subject leaders at Bishop Loveday Primary School also provide good support to the developing leadership roles at Middle Barton. Through the deployment of an excellent advisory teacher for pupils who require extra help, a highly perceptive school improvement officer and a range of specialist guidance from human resources, the local authority demonstrates very well its commitment to supporting the school.