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Mr Stephen Mackay
Acting Headteacher
Stambridge Primary School
Stambridge Road
Rochford
Essex
SS4 2AP

Dear Mr Mackay

Special measures monitoring inspection of Stambridge Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 21–22 October 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2014. 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.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Essex.

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers:
 - are given appropriate guidance about how to improve their practice and have access to high quality support and training, including in the teaching of phonics
 - structure lessons around what pupils are meant to be learning
 - provide work which is more challenging and is closely matched to pupils' ages and abilities
 - promote effective learning by picking up misconceptions and correcting them both within lessons and when marking pupils' work.

- Raise achievement in reading, writing and mathematics by making sure that:
 - the work that teachers set is based on accurate assessments of pupils' abilities so that they are provided with good levels of challenge and are able to make rapid progress
 - teachers insist on correct spelling, punctuation and grammar, and neat presentation of pupils' work
 - teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics is secure.

- Improve behaviour and safety by enforcing the school's anti-bullying policy.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 21–22 October 2014

Evidence

The inspector scrutinised the school's planning and evaluation documents and analysed assessment information. She met with the acting headteacher, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), a local authority adviser and with teachers. Informal discussions were held with parents as they collected their children from school and the inspector took account of the 12 views expressed through Parent View, the online questionnaire. The inspector visited lessons in all three classes at least twice and observed behaviour at playtimes. Several of these observations were undertaken with the acting headteacher. The inspector spoke to pupils about their work and behaviour and looked at their books.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, the executive headteacher has left the school and an acting headteacher has taken up a full-time secondment, which currently runs until the end of December 2014. Two teachers have left the school and two new teachers have been appointed, both initially on a limited contract for one year. The number of classes has been reduced from four to three. Plans are in place for the school to convert to be a sponsored academy early next year.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Analysis of the standards achieved at the end of the 2014 academic year shows that attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 has improved in reading, writing and mathematics. A greater proportion of pupils reached expected levels of attainment than in the previous two years. Current assessment information suggests that these outcomes will also be sustained at the end of the next academic year. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 screening check in phonics (the sounds that letters make) in 2014 improved but remains well below the national average.

At Key Stage 2, the picture is less robust; attainment and progress in mathematics have declined, as has progress in reading. Outcomes overall remained below the national average because too few pupils attained higher than expected levels. However, as a result of improved teaching, both progress and attainment in writing and attainment in spelling, punctuation and grammar have improved. Progress in year groups across the school remained below that expected last year. This is because, in many instances, pupils have not achieved well historically and there are too many gaps in their learning which need to be addressed before their progress can accelerate. Assessment information, just produced this term, does show that most pupils have started to make better progress. This is because the quality of

teaching and the assessment of their learning needs have improved and gaps are starting to be addressed.

There is not enough evidence currently to analyse how effectively the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority) enhances pupils' achievement or to show how effective additional intervention for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is in enabling these pupils to make good progress from their starting points.

Pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their work still need to improve. With the exception of the oldest pupils, too many still pay too little attention to the quality of their work.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection; however, there remains a proportion that is not good because activities are not matched well enough to individual pupil's capabilities and instructions given to pupils sometimes lack clarity. The improvements this term have been made possible because a strong staff team has been established and teachers plan together much more closely. All staff are taking greater responsibility for driving improvement, particularly in English and mathematics. The quality of phonics teaching has improved, although there are still times when the level of challenge in group sessions is not sufficient to sustain pupils' interest and activities are not matched closely enough to pupils' abilities.

Under the guidance of the acting headteacher, the quality and accuracy of assessment have improved. New resources are ensuring that core literacy and mathematics skills are taught progressively. Consequently, pupils' work shows they are starting to make better progress. Teachers conscientiously implement the school's new marking policy and pupils are supported to understand what they need to do to improve their work. In more lessons, pupils understand what they are expected to do and show excitement about, and interest in, their learning. In one lesson seen, pupils worked together keenly to record their observations about wildlife in the rainforest. They used a range of writing skills because their teacher showed such strong understanding of their individual learning needs as well as enthusiasm for their success.

Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved since the section 5 inspection. Children in the mixed Reception and Year 1 class benefit from an increasingly well-planned and resourced range of activities, and outdoor learning tasks are more interesting. However, pupils do not use their writing and mathematical skills frequently enough when they are working independently and there is sometimes insufficient challenge for the most-able pupils in Year 1.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour has improved significantly since the last inspection; in all the lessons seen, pupils concentrated on their learning and tried hard to succeed. In some of the extra group sessions, there is sometimes less well-focused behaviour because activities are not as well matched to pupils' abilities. Support assistants have received training on positive behaviour management and expectations set for behaviour are understood by all. Occasions when behaviour does not meet required standards are recorded so that, where it is less than good, any emerging patterns can be addressed. All staff are more accountable for monitoring and improving how pupils conduct themselves at work and at play. Pupils and parents say that behaviour has improved and that they are clear about what happens when it falls below the standards agreed. Pupils spoken to in class, at lunch and at playtime demonstrate that they know what bullying means and that they know it is unacceptable. They say that if any poor behaviour does occur, it is dealt with effectively.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting headteacher has made expectations of teaching, learning and behaviour clear to staff and to pupils; he has established a 'new start' for the school. It is now a calmer place to be, with higher expectations of pupils' attitudes and progress. Assessment has been improved and is now accurate; it has been moderated and validated by the local authority. As a result, teachers are planning work that caters more effectively for pupils' different abilities, and teachers are held to account against this information for the progress of pupils in their care. The extent of the weaknesses in the school's management systems has become evident as the acting headteacher has reviewed and significantly improved those that were in place. The school has a budget deficit which has, to some extent, constrained improvements. With local authority support, there are plans to address this prior to academy conversion.

Procedures for safeguarding have been tightened up, administrative systems are sharper and a member of the interim executive board has audited the quality of the school's work to safeguard pupils. Procedures to record and respond to any occasions of poor behaviour have been revised, and incidents of bullying are now rare.

In addition to these essential changes, in a relatively short time, the acting headteacher has improved the school environment so that it better reflects the increased aspirations for pupils. These improvements have been achieved by working closely with the local community. A new curriculum has been implemented and teachers are clear about the expected skills progression and curriculum entitlement for each pupil.

The size of the school has helped urgent messages to be disseminated quickly and there are positive indicators that the capacity to improve has increased. Teachers responsible for leading English and mathematics are newly appointed this term. They have quickly established an overview of the quality of pupils' learning and progress, and the mathematics subject leader has undertaken scrutiny of work and planning. Provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is not well enough planned or evaluated, so it is difficult to ascertain whether or not these pupils are all making the progress they should.

Parents say that the leadership of the school has improved. They have increasing confidence that their children's learning needs are being met and they say behaviour has improved.

Members of the interim executive board have strong and relevant expertise which they use effectively to support the school to improve. Through regular visits and communication, members are well informed about what is getting better, and about the remaining barriers to the school being removed from special measures. While a review of the use of the pupil premium has been undertaken and outcomes have been shared, there is not yet enough clarity about how well this funding is used to enhance eligible pupils' achievement. Although plans for the school's leadership in January are not secure, members of the interim executive board are working to ensure the transition to sponsored academy status is positive for the school and to ensure that further change does not interfere with the school's improvement.

External support

The local authority holds monthly meetings with school leaders and members of the interim executive board to monitor improvement. Advisers have been instrumental in securing the temporary appointment of the acting headteacher, although it is a concern that leadership arrangements for January remain unclear. They have provided robust guidance to the acting headteacher and endorsed the quality and impact of his work in stabilising the school. The school has had to purchase other support from the local authority for improving provision, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and for improving the teaching of phonics and mathematics. A local authority audit of health and safety has helpfully supplemented the review undertaken by the interim executive board and validated the systems in place.

Additional support has also been provided by leaders and staff from the school which will become the academy sponsor for Stambridge Primary early next year. This has been particularly productive in improving the quality of teaching and learning in Reception and in Years 5 and 6.