

11 February 2015

Mrs Angela Hill  
Executive Headteacher  
Milburn School  
Milburn  
Penrith  
Cumbria  
CA10 1TN

Dear Mrs Hill

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Milburn School**

Following my visit to your school on 10 February 2015, 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

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

- As quickly as possible, improve the quality of teaching so that it is good or better, and so all pupils can make at least good progress in their learning, by:
  - making sure all teachers have high expectations about what pupils can achieve
  - ensuring teaching challenges the most able pupils so they learn at a faster rate and reach the higher levels of which they are capable
  - checking pupils' work and their progress regularly, marking their books carefully and using the information from this to plan and teach lessons that meet pupils' varying ages and abilities.
  
- Raise pupils' achievement in English and mathematics by:
  - improving pupils' ability to use and apply key literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects
  - making sure pupils make secure and brisk progress in spelling, grammar, punctuation and handwriting
  - accelerating pupils' progress in mathematics, particularly by broadening their experience of problem solving.
  
- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, so that it has the capacity to make rapid improvements in teaching, achievement and in keeping pupils safe by:
  - making sure that all safeguarding requirements are met and that staff training is kept up to date at the level required
  - implementing comprehensive arrangements for checking on and managing the performance of teachers, including setting clear targets for pupils' achievement so teachers are held to account for the progress pupils make and inadequate teaching is eradicated
  - ensuring that methods for checking on and evaluating pupils' progress are firmly in place and that the resulting information is used carefully to determine clear and relevant objectives in the teaching and achievement priorities of the school development plan
  - making sure that all subjects of the curriculum meet pupils' needs and are planned in a way that builds securely on their progress and prior learning
  - developing clear policies and providing further training to guide teachers when they mark pupils' work and assess their progress, so that future teaching plans are based securely on reliable information
  - building leadership at all levels, including at headship level, and providing the opportunity for teachers to contribute to the leadership of subjects and aspects of the school's work.

Undertake an external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Ofsted will make recommendations for actions on governance to the authority responsible for the school.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 10 February 2015.**

### **Evidence**

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work and scrutinised a wide range of associated documentation. This included strategic improvement meeting reports and evidence of classroom monitoring as well as individual data relating to pupils' achievement and progress. He met with the executive headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors. In addition, discussions were held with all four pupils in the school and the full-time teacher at the school. A brief telephone conversation was held with a representative from the local authority. Discussions were also held with six parents representing all the pupils in the school. Since the pupils were off-site for most of the day, the inspector visited Temple Sowerby Primary School to observe them participating in science and physical education lessons. In addition, he scrutinised their work across a range of subjects.

### **Context**

There are no significant changes since the most recent monitoring inspection. Four pupils remain on the school roll.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Pupils' achievement continues to show improvement, in part due to the very personalised and individual attention they receive in this very tiny school. They are making good progress overall in their reading, writing and mathematics. There is also emerging evidence to show that the more focused work in history and geography, which has occurred since the last monitoring inspection, is beginning to improve standards in these subjects. For example, the work on coastal erosion allowed pupils to use specific geographical vocabulary, such as revetments, in the correct context to explain how coastlines can be made secure from the erosive effect of waves. They were also able to express value judgements about the impact of pollution on coastal areas. This work is engaging pupils and is having a positive impact in improving literacy, and especially writing, across the curriculum. The quality of pupils' handwriting, however, remains variable and for boys is often less fluent or tidy. Spelling and punctuation continue to require further improvement.

## **The quality of teaching**

The teaching of English and mathematics continues to be focused, well planned and generally good. Teaching in other subjects continues to improve as teachers build up their confidence and access more appropriate resources. Teaching in history and geography has improved due to more focused planning. Similar improvements are currently underway to improve design and technology, music and art provision this term. Participation in Forest School activities has been reduced to enable curriculum time to be made available to teach art and music on alternate weeks. A teaching programme for science has been established with support from the subject leader at St Catherine's Primary School. Planning is now clear and well-focused and in line with the requirements of the new national curriculum. Coverage of content in most subjects is now much improved with tasks more clearly linked to the ages of the individual pupils. For example in history, whereas older pupils in the class studied life in Roman Britain, younger pupils explored what it was like to live in the Stone Age and in Celtic Britain. Good use is made of new resources from subject associations to enhance the quality of teaching.

In some lessons, the pace at which activities are completed remains too leisurely with pupils comfortable rather than animated with the tasks set. At times, there is also a variation in the challenge set for older and younger pupils. For example, in mathematics, work set for older pupils is challenging and focused strongly not only on the use of number but also the ability to solve problems. Much of the work set for younger pupils includes repetitive calculation and the over-use of worksheets.

The quality of marking is good and generally informative. Pupils receive regular, specific and detailed feedback on their work and how to improve it. This is now common across the full range of subjects. However, apart from English and mathematics, insufficient opportunities are provided for pupils to correct and refine their work. The use of assertive mentoring is becoming more routine as staff and pupils become more familiar with the process. As a result, the monitoring of pupils' progress, especially in English and mathematics, is more accurate and target setting is more appropriate. Moderation of work with the staff at St Catherine's Primary School means that judgements about standards and the progress pupils are making are now more secure than previously.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Behaviour and pupils' attitudes to learning continue to be very positive. A close-knit family atmosphere permeates the school and pupils expressed pride in being members of Milburn School. Partnerships with Temple Sowerby and St Catherine's primary schools are proving beneficial in enabling Milburn pupils to develop their personal and social skills. Pupils are keen to take responsibility. For example, they lead on many of the activities when pupils from St Catherine's Primary School come each fortnight to participate in the Forest School programme. Firm friendships are being established between pupils from all three schools. During discussions with the inspector, pupils commented positively about the arrangements for them to meet pupils from other schools. 'It's really good to meet new people and make new friends' was a comment they shared. All safeguarding requirements are fully in place. Parents were unanimously positive about the school and the individual care and support that their children receive.

## **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The school has clearly benefitted from the stability in staffing and the ongoing leadership provided by the executive headteacher. This clearly coincides with the continuing improvements which are taking place. Essential management structures such as checking on the quality of teaching and learning, monitoring pupils' progress and managing the performance of teachers are now in place and functioning. Teachers are working closely and on a regular basis with staff from St Catherine's Primary School to develop assertive mentoring, assessment, and joint planning in science, history and geography, for example. A clear plan to deliver the new national curriculum is taking shape and there is now greater clarity in the coverage. Previous weaknesses in the curriculum are now being addressed and teachers are more secure in their teaching of the full range of subjects. Teachers in Milburn are clearly benefitting from these opportunities to hold a professional dialogue with colleagues in other schools to develop their own confidence and expertise. However, improvement remains fragile and uncertainties about the long-term future of the school continue to be a cloud on the horizon. Leadership until the end of the summer term is secure but from September the picture is less clear. Unless this is resolved, further progress may be frustrated and will leave the school in a very vulnerable position.

Parents remain very positive about the school and are aware of the improvements and changes taking place. They commented on the improved quality and amount of homework their children now receive on a regular basis. They believed relationships have improved and that teachers are very approachable. They considered that their children are making improved progress and backed this up with comments such as 'my child is using much more complex vocabulary' and 'a lot of the work is much more challenging'.

Governors are passionate and totally committed to keeping the school open. They are pro-active in trying to raise the profile of the school and re-engage with parents in the local community whose children currently attend other schools. They are clear about their roles and duties and receive very detailed evidence of the progress being made in monthly strategic improvement meetings. These are also attended by local authority officers and the executive headteacher. However, the external review of governance, which was recommended in the inspection report in January 2014, has still not been completed. This is now over a year ago and the lack of progress in completing this recommendation is simply not good enough.

The school website has been improved but needs further development to be fully compliant with current statutory requirements.

### **External support**

The school continues to remain heavily dependent on outside support. The local authority continues to fund the current support provided by the executive headteacher. Local authority officers participate in the monthly strategic improvement meetings which monitor the progress being made. There is also a reliance on both St Catherine's and Temple Sowerby schools to provide additional support. The teachers from Milburn participate and benefit from the training opportunities and the professional support they receive from St Catherine's Primary School. Equally, pupils benefit from the opportunities provided, on a regular basis, to mix with children their own age when they attend science, physical education and French lessons at Temple Sowerby each week. This high level of support is continuing to sustain Milburn School and ensures that the four pupils who currently attend receive a good standard of education.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- A decision needs to be made about the future of the school. In particular, the current lack of clarity about the future management may hamper further improvement.
- The long drawn out review of governance needs to be concluded swiftly, and as a matter of urgency.