

21 May 2015

Mrs Angela Hill  
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 19 and 20 May 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 fourth 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 Acting Corporate 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 19 to 20 May 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 sets of data relating to pupils' achievement and progress. In addition, he examined the recent review of governance and subsequent governing body improvement plan. He met with the executive headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and five other governors. Discussions were held with all four pupils in the school and both teachers at the school. A meeting was held with a representative from the local authority. Discussions were also held with six parents representing all the pupils in the school. Her Majesty's Inspector completed three joint lesson observations with the executive headteacher. In addition, he completed a book scrutiny covering pupils' English, mathematics, science and topic work and listened to pupils reading.

### **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**

For the first time in recent years, pupils have enjoyed a year of stable staffing and leadership. This is reflected in the current improvements in their achievement. They have also continued to benefit from the very personalised support and guidance they receive in this very tiny school. All pupils are making at least expected progress and, in most cases, good progress in their reading, writing and mathematics. Older pupils have a very mature attitude to their work and are making better progress than the younger pupils in the school. For example, one older pupil was determined to improve handwriting and took the initiative to practise his handwriting technique during the holidays and the impact is evident in current work. Boys are particularly motivated by, and make good progress in, mathematics. Pupils are generally working above their expected levels in writing and are using more complex sentences and wider vocabulary as they get older. However, the boys are frequently let down by poor handwriting, punctuation and careless spelling. Ironically, at times, the quality of their writing and presentation is better in their mathematics books than in their writing books. Pupils are encouraged to read regularly, both at home and at school, although younger pupils can, at times, be somewhat reluctant to do so. Overall, their ability to read is above that expected for their age. Achievement in subjects other than English and mathematics is variable and rarely as good. Outcomes are dependent on the confidence and expertise with which teachers plan and deliver a particular topic.

## **The quality of teaching**

The teaching of English and mathematics is well planned, provides challenge to pupils and is frequently good. Teaching in other subjects tends to be more variable, as teachers are continuing to build up their subject knowledge and expertise. When teachers access and utilise appropriate and high quality resources in planning their topic work, the quality of outcomes has been good and has developed their confidence and subject knowledge. Unfortunately, over the last term, this has not been the case, as some of the topics have not been planned effectively and have lacked the resources to provide more than superficial coverage. As a result, the teaching has failed to do the topics justice.

The progress pupils are making in their reading, writing and mathematics is linked to the increasing confidence with which teachers are delivering these subjects. Lessons are well planned in detail and effective use is made of relevant subject association resources and websites. For example, the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics website has been used effectively to provide teachers with a wealth of resources, ideas and support materials, which have enhanced the teaching of mathematics and supported the improved achievement of the pupils.

Pupils' reading is developing because they benefit from regular individual support and guided reading sessions, which provide real challenge. During one such session, Her Majesty's Inspector observed very effective questioning, stimulating discussion between two older pupils as they reflected on the nuances of different reviews of 'The Iron Man' by Ted Hughes. As a result, both pupils were able to make points about persuasive text, recognise the importance of adjectives and provide well-argued responses to their teacher's questions.

The development of assertive mentoring has improved not only the accuracy with which pupil progress is monitored, but also the quality of feedback to pupils and parents. The quality of feedback, especially in English and mathematics books, is detailed and informative. Parents now receive very comprehensive feedback on how their children are doing and pupils have regular opportunities to discuss their progress with teachers. Older pupils have a more mature understanding of this process and are currently benefiting from it the most.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The behaviour of pupils is at least consistently good. Their attitudes to learning are also very positive. Pupils feel part of a very small, but close-knit family. They are very protective of each other both in Milburn school and in Temple Sowerby school, which they attend for part of the week to participate in science, physical education, French lessons and assemblies. Pupils are very positive about these opportunities to mix with a wider range of children, develop their personal and social skills and participate in team activities. They are keen to take responsibility. Pupils enjoy showing off their outdoor skills and are keen to pass on their experiences. They lead on many of the outdoor and environmental skills when pupils from St. Catherine's school visit to participate in their outdoor programme. They particularly enjoyed cooking muffins in hollowed-out orange skins and toasting marshmallows over an open fire. Firm friendships continue to be developed between pupils from all three schools. The partnership between these schools has developed well and supports a broad and balanced education.

The close-knit family grouping means that adults know the pupils in their charge very well. They are able to identify and support any child who feels vulnerable or has personal concerns very quickly. Response is immediate and all safeguarding procedures are followed to the letter. The safeguarding governor is fully informed. All safeguarding requirements are fully in place. Parents, most of whom are also governors, are fully involved in the school and speak highly of the individual care and support that their children receive.

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

The executive headteacher has continued to provide clear direction and has laid the groundwork for future development. Pupils' achievement has improved because they are settled and happy. The executive headteacher has ensured that all the basic administrative procedures, which ensure the efficient and smooth running of the school, are in place. Essential statutory requirements, such as the performance management of teachers, are now in place and becoming embedded. Additional sport funding and money to support disadvantaged pupils is targeted and accounted for. The website has been improved and now contains relevant information. However evidence of pupils' work and achievements is generally dated and showcases little current material.

Historically, data to provide information about pupil progress were not complete or accurate. Monitoring of pupils' progress is now more detailed and objective. Teachers are more secure in their judgements as a result of moderation and the training they have received in conjunction with staff at St. Catherine's school. Parents commented very positively about the very detailed feedback they received recently at the parents' evening about their children's progress and their strengths and weaknesses.

The curriculum continues to be a work in progress as teachers continue to develop their subject knowledge and skills across the full range of subjects to enable them to deliver the new national curriculum more effectively. Teachers are working closely with more experienced staff at St. Catherine's to develop their planning. They also participate in training focusing on moderation, good practice and appropriate pitch in lessons. Planning in English and mathematics is detailed and promotes good teaching and learning. Generally, there is greater rigour and depth in planning activities and teaching in history and geography. Other subjects, such as design and technology, art and music, tend to be 'dipped' into, rather than taught in sufficient depth to enable pupils to develop the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding progressively. Where topics have 'fallen flat', this is usually as a result of poor choice of resources and a lack of subject expertise to enable the topic to be delivered with sufficient rigour or depth.

Governors remain totally committed to keeping the school open. The long-awaited review of governance has recently been completed. The report relies heavily on the audit and self-evaluation carried out by the governing body, but is not sufficiently detailed, objective or evaluative. It has generated a development plan which addresses some areas where governors need to take a more active role, but does not fully address all future development needs.

Improvement has occurred because the school has been blessed with a longer period of stable and effective leadership. Current arrangements are due to finish at the end of this term. The school budget plan for the next school year has not yet been submitted. Although a replacement executive headteacher has been identified, this delay is holding up endorsement of the staffing arrangements for September by the local authority. These arrangements need to be clarified as soon as possible, if current stability is to be maintained.

### **External support**

The school continues to remain very heavily dependent on the good will and support provided by the local authority and the two partner schools, Temple Sowerby and St. Catherine's. Additional funding to provide leadership expertise is currently being sourced by the local authority, which is keeping a close watch on the school and participates actively in the monthly strategic improvement meetings. Teachers from Milburn continue to benefit from the training opportunities and professional support they receive from colleagues at St. Catherine's school. As a result, they are becoming especially confident in using the assertive mentoring process, for example. Pupils are positive about their regular lessons at Temple Sowerby school, where they can mix and learn with children their own age, as well as engage in team sports. A high level of support will continue to be necessary to ensure that pupils at Milburn continue to receive a good standard of education.