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Miss S Brown
Headteacher
John Rankin Junior School
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West Berkshire
RG14 6ES

Dear Miss Brown

Special measures: monitoring inspection of John Rankin Junior School

Following my visit with Peter Clifton, Additional Inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 November, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in December 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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 governors and the Director of Children and Young People's Services for West Berkshire.

Yours sincerely

Graham Lee
Additional inspector

Special measures: monitoring of John Rankin Junior School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 November 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed 16 lessons and looked through samples of pupils' work. They examined documentation, including the school's raising achievement plan, teachers' planning and tracking data. They met with pupils, the headteacher, executive headteacher, all members of the senior leadership team, representatives of the governing body and two of the 'parent champions'. Inspectors also talked to the school improvement partner and consultant headteacher.

Context

The federation of the school with the adjoining infant school was completed in July and a new governing body is in place. The executive headteacher and the substantive headteacher continue to work closely together. A new literacy leader took up post in September. The deputy headteacher has relinquished her role and become the special educational needs coordinator on a part-time basis. The numeracy leader is acting deputy until the newly appointed deputy headteacher takes up her post in January. These members of staff form the leadership team. Over the summer, largely because of retirements and maternity leave, there were significant changes to the staff team. As a result, a number of classes have new teachers this term. The Year 3 classes are both shared by teachers from the two schools.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

In most lessons pupils have very good attitudes to learning and really enjoy what they are asked to do. They are keen to do their best and improve their skills, knowledge and understanding. They respond well to teachers' questions and cooperate effectively in pairs and groups. All these features were evident in a Year 6 lower set mathematics lesson, for example, where pupils enjoyed working together to measure and calculate the perimeter of a variety of rectangles. They understood the importance of accurate measurements, involving decimal points, and took a pride in arriving at the right conclusion. It is evident, however, that some important gaps remain in pupils' mathematical understanding. These are being identified and addressed. Pupils' books show that their attainment in writing continues to improve and there is more work of good quality. Older pupils, in particular are writing at extended length for a variety of purposes, showing a good understanding of the technical features of different styles of writing. Pupils who find learning more difficult are making as much progress as their peers because of the effective support they receive, and there are examples of exceptionally good progress being made by some



of these pupils. Sometimes the younger pupils in particular lose focus when they are asked to sit for too long without active participation.

As a result of the improvements in the classroom, pupils' progress is accelerating, although it is too early in the year for this to be measured by the school's tracking system. The decline in national test results was arrested in 2009, when there was a slight upturn and the attainment of Year 6 pupils was broadly average. The achievement of this group from their starting points was also a little better than the previous year. They did well in reading but there was significant underachievement in writing and mathematics. A number of girls, in particular, had made slow progress in mathematics. School data also indicate that while progress in reading was strong in the last academic year throughout the school, it was much patchier in mathematics and writing, where there has been a legacy of underachievement.

Judgement

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Rectify the underachievement in pupils' writing by raising teachers' expectations and ensuring that challenging targets are set – good.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils continue to be proud of the school and are very protective of its reputation. Those that spoke to inspectors were good ambassadors for their school and are enthusiastic about all it has to offer. Pupils are polite and friendly and their behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good, particularly at the top end. Some younger pupils, mostly boys, present challenging behaviour at times and find it difficult to settle to their learning. They are managed well by staff to enable them to play a full part in lessons and to minimise disruption to others. Pupils enjoy taking responsibility and school council members, for example, are clear that they are listened to and making an increasingly important contribution to the improvement of the school.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is very much better than it was at the last inspection and shows further improvement since the last visit. Teachers' expectations have been raised still further. More than half the lessons seen by inspectors were judged to be good and none were inadequate. Teachers continue to manage their classes well and create a very positive atmosphere for learning. They use interesting approaches which help to motivate and enthuse pupils. For example, in Year 3 mathematics lessons pupils were learning about equivalent fractions through designing and making fruit kebabs! In Year 5, teachers used multimedia presentations to develop pupils' understanding of the art of story telling using visual and oral techniques.



Strategies to engage pupils more in their learning are more firmly embedded. For example, pupils told inspectors that they are much clearer about what they are learning and say that 'success ladders' are helping them to understand how well they are doing. They feel more involved in their learning with the constant emphasis on 'talking for learning'. Marking as well is generally of good quality, which, together with regular references to targets and the support material provided on the 'working walls', is helping pupils to know how to improve their work much more clearly. On those occasions where teaching is not as successful, pupils are still spending too long sitting without being actively engaged in their learning and marking is not quite as helpful in enabling them to move forward.

Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) very well in lessons to support learning. Lessons in the ICT suite, however, are inhibited by a limited range of equipment, some of which is not working effectively. The care and support of pupils continues to be a strength of the school, illustrated by the improving provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. These pupils are well supported in lessons or smaller groups with the help much more tailored to their individual needs.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the overall quality of teaching and learning – satisfactory.
- Ensure that there is consistency and detail in the way that teachers help pupils to move on to the next step in their learning – good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The leadership of the school has been considerably strengthened since the last visit. The two headteachers continue to work effectively together, complementing each other's skills. The base of leadership has also been broadened through the new appointments, although the team will not be fully established until January. Leaders are showing increasing capacity to secure the rapid improvements required. The most important priorities have been identified in the raising achievement plan and they have secured the support of all the staff, who are working very hard together to bring about improvement. The impact of their work is evident in better teaching and learning, accelerating progress for pupils and more focused provision for those with special educational needs.

Tracking systems are becoming increasingly effective in identifying underachievement at an earlier stage and in holding teachers to account for the progress of their pupils. As a result, resources are being effectively deployed where they are needed most. The school is tracking the progress of different groups of pupils very closely and is committed to closing any remaining gaps in achievement. For example, last year the school piloted single-sex mathematics groups to help improve the confidence and achievement of girls in the subject. This boosted the achievement of a number of girls.



The federation has brought a new and experienced governing body, which is beginning to provide the support and challenge required to secure rapid improvement. The federation has also brought wider benefits to the school, for example in the sharing of good practice and resources between the schools. The care and welfare of pupils continues to be of paramount importance. All staff, including the most recent appointments, are rigorously checked to ensure their suitability to work with children. Leaders are working closely with 'parent champions' in order to improve communication and to address any concerns that parents may have.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Strengthen the senior leadership of the school – good.

External support

The local authority continues to provide very good support. The federation is having a positive impact on the improvement of the school and governors receive good support and advice in their work. The work of the consultant headteacher, provided by the local authority, has been particularly effective in coaching and mentoring teachers to improve their practice. This has had a very positive impact on staff morale. Other consultants have also continued to provide effective support, as does the school improvement partner, who challenges the school effectively on the areas for improvement. He also brokers the support of the local authority, which is rightly being scaled back as the school builds its own capacity to continue to improve.