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Mrs J Edwards
Interim Headteacher
Germander Park School
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Milton Keynes
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Dear Mrs Edwards

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Germander Park School

Following my visit with Helen Barter, Additional Inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 March 2010, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

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's Services for Milton Keynes.

Yours sincerely

Christine Field
Additional Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Germander Park School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 March 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, staff, the vice-chair of governors, the local authority assistant director – change management and the school improvement partner.

Context

Since the time of the last inspection there has been a change of teacher in Year 2 and the chair of governors has resigned. The vice-chair of governors is currently leading the governing body which comprises five governors out of an agreed complement of nine. The local authority appointed an additional governor in February. There are no parent governors. The interim headteacher is seconded from a local school until the end of her contract in July 2010, as is the Year 2 teacher who started in January and has been seconded from the same school. A resident consultant funded by the local authority has been working in the school two mornings each week since February. A local authority consultation on schools' reorganisation is in progress.

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

Attainment in reading and writing is well below the level expected in Years 1 and 2. From a positive start in Reception, the progress boys and girls make during their time in Key Stage 1 in building these key skills is too slow. Although teaching is improving, particularly in Year 2, it is not yet good enough to enable all pupils to make the progress of which they are capable, and to make up for underachievement in the past. Recent training for the staff working with pupils learning English as an additional language is helping them to better assess language needs and target support more precisely. Pre-lesson tutoring, often taught bilingually, is a very recent feature that is helping pupils who are at an early stage of speaking English to access a lesson more confidently, for example in writing instructions for cleaning their teeth. Pupils who have special educational needs are making steady progress towards their individual targets and are benefiting from the additional support they receive from increasingly effective teaching assistants. The school has moved forward in securing accuracy in assessments and the data now provide a robust baseline to enable regular tracking. Regular progress meetings are now held between the headteacher and class teachers. While this is enabling a more rigorous evaluation of the achievement of all pupils, the impact is not yet being seen in pupils' accelerated progress.

Pupils' reading skills and the pleasure they take in reading books are showing signs of improvement since the last inspection. This is because of the new focus on



reading practice and the introduction of guided reading and daily phonics sessions. A good range of new books are providing interesting choices for the pupils who say they are finding reading far more enjoyable than in the past. Pupils like their weekly sessions in the school library and selecting a book to take home to read with parents and carers. Pupils use their knowledge of letters and sounds in order to read words, and the most proficient use more than one strategy to tackle unfamiliar text. In some guided reading sessions, however, higher-attaining pupils are not sufficiently excited by the tasks they are set, their interest wanes as they work independently and too little work of a high standard is completed.

Pupils' writing skills are weak. Daily handwriting lessons involve pupils in developing legible and well-sized writing but this is not transferred to recorded work in other subjects. There are still significant shortcomings in pupils' fluency, punctuation, the accuracy of spelling, use of grammar and presentation in both years. This reflects low teacher expectations and a lack of pace and rigour in learning.

The whole-school focus on improving lesson planning so that work is more accurately matched to pupils' individual needs has not yet had sufficient impact in improving the progress pupils make.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise pupils' attainment, especially in reading and writing and in Years 1 and 2 – inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The school with support from the local authority has implemented a positive behaviour management strategy. Pupils generally behave sensibly at work and play and the majority enjoy being at school. Pupils are treated in a respectful way by all staff and this is evident in the classrooms where relationships are positive. A small but notable minority of pupils, however, become inattentive and lose concentration when tasks are too difficult or too easy or when they spend too long receiving instructions at the expense of practical activity. Their behaviour declines in such situations and this impedes their successful learning. This is more frequent in Year 1 lessons where good behaviour is not yet a consistent feature. Attendance and punctuality continue to improve as a result of the school's effective strategies.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- eliminate poor behaviour and low-level disruption to learning in Years 1 and 2 by ensuring teachers set and maintain consistent expectations for work and play. Good behaviour should be a feature in 100% of lessons by January 2010 – inadequate.



The effectiveness of provision

Teaching in Reception enables the children to learn successfully. The quality of learning in the rest of the school is not improving at a quick enough rate, largely because teaching is not yet consistently effective. Observations in classrooms and scrutiny of pupils' books show that pupils' progress is too variable.

Teachers work with enthusiasm and a commitment to making learning more effective for the pupils and have embraced the new planning framework that includes clear learning intentions and success criteria. Mathematics 'learning journeys' and working walls in literacy have enhanced the learning environment. These are important qualities which provide a positive foundation for improving further. Nevertheless, expectations and the level of challenge in lessons are not high enough, particularly in Year 1. Lessons are often too focused on the activities teachers intend to provide, as opposed to what pupils should learn next, in order to make better progress. Too often, questioning involves pupils in giving one-word answers and fails to deepen their thinking or reasoning skills. Not all teachers are confident to move the pupils on when ready.

The quality of presentation of pupils' written work overall is inadequate. Too much is untidy, poorly presented, and not checked effectively. The quality of marking is weak. Although there are usually encouraging comments, there is limited reference to how well the learning intention has been met or what pupils must do to improve. Pupils continue to make the same errors with their writing – such as not using capital letters at the start of sentences – because teachers do not reinforce their expectations from one piece of work to the next. Pupils' progress and their attainment is now being assessed more precisely than in the past, which is enabling all teachers to see clearly the levels pupils are working at currently, and the levels they are expected to attain by the end of the year. However, this information is not yet used effectively enough when planning lessons, to ensure that pupils' work builds on what they already know and can do, and extend key skills.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching and assessment in Years 1 and 2 by:
 - increasing the pace and demand of lessons
 - establishing a closer match of work to pupils' individual abilities
 - using probing questions to deepen understanding and stimulate discussion
 - promoting the enjoyment of books and literature and ensuring consistent approaches to handwriting.

- These features should be present in 60% of lessons by January 2010 – inadequate.



The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership at the interim headship level is effective. The development of leadership capacity at other levels, including governance, remains a priority for the school to address. The headteacher's work in collating and analysing progress data begun at the time of the last inspection is now well embedded and accurate assessment is enabling the close tracking of progress. The headteacher is meeting regularly with teachers at progress meetings to discuss how well each pupil is achieving against their targets. Anyone falling behind is targeted with additional support. There is convincing evidence that these advancements are assisting the leadership in gaining an accurate picture of strengths and weaknesses. For example, the Ofsted self-evaluation form has been completed since the last inspection and provides a realistic evaluation of the school's overall effectiveness. The revised senior leadership team comprising the headteacher and Foundation Stage leader who are responsible for English and mathematics respectively have developed a greater awareness of their subject role through auditing provision. Governors have set up a Progress and Standards Committee and are receiving ongoing training to help them get to grips with performance data in order to monitor the school's results.

These changes are leading to improvements in accountability. Monitoring of teaching has brought about better quality learning environments, a consistent focus on learning intentions and success criteria in teachers' planning, but too many lessons offer too little challenge, especially for higher attainers, and sometimes there is not enough practical activity to keep the pupils interested and on task. The school has begun working in partnership with an effective local school but there has yet to be sufficient sharing of good practice, so that all teachers can see how all pupils can be engaged, enthused and challenged. With ongoing support from the local authority, weaknesses are being addressed. Nevertheless, there is a need to quicken the pace of improvement and establish more rigorous monitoring. The school's capacity to meet the very ambitious targets that it has set itself is not yet secure.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- build the school's capacity to improve by ensuring that all staff have a clear understanding of their roles as leaders and managers and assess their performance against the targets set in the school's 'Raising Attainment Plan' – inadequate.

External support

Following the October inspection, the local authority initiated a sound plan of action that was revised in January in line with advice from the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The school's local authority improvement partner has been a regular visitor and has worked productively with the headteacher to develop self-evaluation processes. Moderation of assessments has usefully been carried out by national strategy regional advisers. The resident consultant has been effective in modelling lesson planning and working with teachers to devise clear learning



intentions and success criteria. These are all important actions and impact is evident, for example in how quickly and accurately underachievement is now pinpointed due to the close tracking of progress. Nevertheless, the school has some way to go to meet the stretching targets and success criteria set out in the current action plan that are to be completed in July.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no further priorities for improvement. The school should press ahead with the key areas for improvement as set out.