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Mrs Lorraine Roll
Acting Headteacher
Highfields Primary School
Market Street
Highfields
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN6 7JE

Dear Mrs Roll

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Highfields Primary School

Following my visit with Lesley Clark, Additional Inspector, to your school on 29 and 30 June 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – 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 the Shadow Governing Body and the Director of Children and Young People's Services, Education and Inclusion for Doncaster.

Yours sincerely

Christine Harrison
Additional inspector

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Highfields Primary School

Report from the fifth monitoring inspection on 29 and 30 June 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, acting headteacher, associate deputy headteacher, deputy headteacher, a group of pupils, the Chair of the Shadow Governing Body and representatives from the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, a new temporary associate deputy headteacher has replaced the previous temporary holder of that post. A new part-time teacher is now teaching in the Nursery. The Key Stage 1 teacher, who is also a senior leader and who was previously absent, has completed her phased return to school and is now back to normal working. The interim executive board (IEB) has been replaced by a new shadow governing body but all members of the former IEB are continuing as governors. The executive headteacher has put forward a proposal for the school to be federated with her own school but a firm decision on this plan has not yet been reached.

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

The quality of pupils' learning, and the progress that they make in lessons, is not as good as it was at the time of the last monitoring visit. In particular, pupils' learning in Key Stage 1 has deteriorated. Pupils in this key stage are not sufficiently engaged in whole-class sessions and appear bored and 'switched off'. The result is that when they are asked to work on their own, they do not know what they are supposed to be doing. This deterioration is recent and is not reflected in the school's tracking data and Key Stage 1 assessments. In fact, the 2010 assessments for the end of Key Stage 1 show an improvement in pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics, though not in writing, compared with 2009. Over the academic year, the school's leaders, particularly successive temporary associate deputy headteachers, have intervened to compensate for any deficiencies in the teaching provided by supply teachers involved with that class. This high level of input and support cannot be maintained indefinitely and so the broadly adequate progress indicated by the tracking data is not sustainable.

In Key Stage 2 there are some strengths in learning. Pupils' progress in Year 6 continues to improve and pupils make up ground at this stage. Pupils in the mixed Year 3 and Year 4 class have made better progress in the latter part of the year and one of their lessons revealed real enjoyment in developing their skills in information

and communication technology. In the last monitoring letter, doubts were expressed about progress in one class in Key Stage 2. At that time there was insufficient data to be sure that this was a genuine weakness. The school's own analysis of its more recent data shows that progress in the mixed Year 4 and Year 5 class in reading and mathematics is inadequate. As one pupil said, 'My reading has gone backwards.'

The 2009 national test results at the end of Key Stage 2 were unusually high for this school because the year group had a relatively high number of more-able pupils and a significant number of those pupils had come from other schools during Key Stage 2. A fairer comparison is with the 2008 results. The provisional 2010 results for English show a significant improvement on those for 2008, largely due to accelerated progress in Year 6. Nevertheless, pupils' overall attainment remains low.

The progress of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage was satisfactory at the time of the inspection of November 2008 and has remained so.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Raise standards and improve achievement for all pupils in all subjects – inadequate

Other relevant outcomes for pupils

Attendance has risen significantly this term, from 88% to 94%, as a direct result of the school's strong focus on improving attendance levels. Pupils are motivated by the weekly and family awards and confirm: 'The system works for us.' Pupils also arrive more punctually because they are keen to win the punctuality trophy. Behaviour continues to improve but it is better in some classes than in others. Pupils indicate that teachers operate different systems of rewards and sanctions to ensure satisfactory behaviour. Not all these arrangements comply with the school's behaviour policy. Younger pupils have learnt the art of sitting very quietly but not fully listening to what the teacher is saying. Older pupils behave very well when lessons challenge and interest them. There have been no exclusions since February 2010. Pupils respond enthusiastically to enjoyable assemblies which target their particular concerns and make use of their own musical and artistic preferences.

Progress since the last visit on the area for improvement:

- Increase the efforts to improve attendance – outstanding

The effectiveness of provision

Since the last monitoring visit, the proportion of inadequate lessons has increased. The situation is worst in Key Stage 1. However, in Key Stage 2 where teaching had previously been at least satisfactory, some inadequate lessons are now observed.

Evidence also indicates that, in some classes, teaching is significantly better when the teachers know they are likely to be observed than when they are working normally. Scrutiny of pupils' work and analysis of the tracking data reveal the resulting longer-term weaknesses in pupils' progress.

In the good lessons teachers generate keen interest, often using interactive technology most effectively. In these lessons teachers are absolutely clear about what they require and good questioning skills ensure that all pupils are fully involved. In a lesson in the Early Years Foundation Stage, very good story telling meant that children concentrated hard so as not to miss a thing. Features of less successful lessons are a slow pace and lack of clarity both in demonstrations and in expectations of what different pupils are expected to learn. All too often pupils of different ages and abilities do the same tasks. Teachers do not use assessment well enough to pinpoint where pupils have gaps and what they need to learn next in order to move their learning on.

The curriculum is now giving pupils more variety as teachers are beginning to link different subjects together more productively with a strong focus on literacy. The number and range of extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors coming into school have improved steadily to extend pupils' experience. The curriculum in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved since the last monitoring visit, especially outdoors. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader has identified that there is more to do to increase provision for problem solving, reasoning and numeracy skills and developing more open-ended large-scale activities outside.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and ensure that assessment information is used to match work to pupils' needs more closely to enable them to learn more effectively – inadequate
- Ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils, through improving the range, challenge and variety of learning activities – satisfactory

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school's temporary leaders have continued to be ruthlessly accurate in their self-evaluation. They have identified every weakness as it has arisen and worked skilfully to remedy those deficiencies. Examples of the effectiveness of their work are described in detail elsewhere in this letter. They have maintained pupils' progress in Key Stage 1 despite major staffing difficulties. They have made very significant improvements in attendance in a short time. Under their guidance, some teachers have developed well and improved their skills. The learning environment has improved dramatically and the curriculum is much better than it was. However, every time one problem is solved, another emerges, often, though not entirely, the

result of changes to and problems in staffing. Leaders' efforts have also been hampered by a lack of accurate assessment data from earlier years which has made it difficult, until recently, to identify accurately weaknesses in pupils' progress. Despite much support and advice, some teachers do not teach lessons that are consistently at least satisfactory throughout the year and it is this weakness that has caused the school to lose ground. Attempts to take strong remedial action have been unsuccessful.

There are also longer-term problems with the leadership of the school. Temporary leaders have placed great emphasis on developing the leadership skills of those with permanent leadership posts. There have been some successes but insecurities in the teaching skills of some of these permanent leaders make it very difficult for them to fulfil their leadership roles effectively.

The shadow governing body is very aware of all the problems and shares the frustration at the recurrent weaknesses in the quality of teaching. Governors and the school's temporary leaders, together with representatives of the local authority, have worked hard to develop plans for the school to become part of a federation but have not yet received a decision on the proposals. The acting headteacher retires at the end of this term; the associate deputy headteacher's contract ends in January and the executive headteacher's role is not secured. There are no firm plans for the future leadership of the school. In such circumstances, together with the re-emergence of weaknesses in teaching, the school's capacity for further improvement is insecure and therefore inadequate.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Ensure that leaders, managers and governors rigorously monitor all aspects of the school's work and take effective and swift action to remove weaknesses – inadequate

External support

Since the first monitoring visit, the local authority has kept its promise to provide long-term support for the leadership of the school. The temporary appointments of the executive headteacher, acting headteacher and associate deputy headteachers have been well judged and effective. However, the local authority has not provided the school with enough guidance to ensure that important staffing issues have been successfully resolved. Ultimately, it is this failure which has led to the regression in teaching quality that has been noted on this visit. Similarly, the local authority has failed to provide a secure plan for the future of this school, despite a proposal which was available in outline at the time of the last monitoring visit. Hence, despite the strengths, the overall support provided must be judged to be inadequate.

Priorities for further improvement

The priorities for further improvement remain the same as those identified at the school's inspection in November 2008. The additional priority to improve attendance, identified in the third monitoring visit, is no longer a major priority for the school.