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Mr A Brown
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Brown

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Higham Ferrers Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 9 March 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2010

- Improve attainment and progress in English and mathematics, by:
 - simplifying and making sure that processes for assessing the progress of pupils are accurate, valid, regularly completed, and enable the progress of individual pupils from Years 3 to 6 to be shown easily; using this information to identify and remedy underachievement
 - developing teachers' expertise in mathematics
 - ensuring pupils take pride in presenting written work to a high standard, are productive throughout all lessons and improve basic numeracy by learning their times tables up to 12 by the end of Year 4.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - developing teachers' expertise in information and communication technology and its use as a tool to motivate and help pupils assess their own learning
 - making sure that pupils fully understand what they are required to learn in lessons, are given more independent, challenging work and their learning is checked by the end of the lesson
 - ensuring that marking and target setting are used effectively to enable pupils to understand fully what they need to do to attain higher standards
 - sharing the good practice already present in the school to help eliminate the current inconsistency.

- Improve the impact that leadership and management has on the quality of education provided by:
 - rigorously monitoring the learning of pupils of all abilities in the classroom and making sure that teaching is fully meeting their needs
 - consistently demonstrating and promoting high standards in all aspects of provision, and expecting equally high standards in all outcomes for all pupils in all classes
 - developing the roles of the newly appointed literacy and numeracy coordinators
 - improving the role of the governing body in holding the school to account for its standards.



Special measures: monitoring of Higham Ferrers Junior School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 9 March 2011

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including twenty lessons and four reading sessions. They scrutinised documents, including the school's Raising Attainment Plan, the governing body's action plan and the minutes of its meetings, and records from the Progress Evaluation Group, which has representatives from the local authority, the governing body and the school's senior leadership team. They checked the school's single central record of adults who work or volunteer in the school. Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the literacy subject leader, the special educational needs coordinator groups of staff and pupils, representatives of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since the last inspection a Year 3 teacher has retired and a Year 6 teacher is currently on long term sick leave. The local authority has appointed an additional member to the governing body. A permanent appointment has been made to take over the Year 3 class. The Year 6 class is being shared between a part-time advanced skills teacher, who has returned from maternity leave, and the deputy headteacher, who normally shares teaching of a Year 4 class. The deputy headteacher is also acting as mathematics subject leader. A temporary part-time appointment has been made to cover the Year 4 class. At the end of the 2011 spring term another of the Year 6 teachers will take up a post in another school. Her replacement has been appointed and is currently taking a Year 6 mathematics group on a part-time arrangement, prior to taking over fully after Easter.

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

Across the school, pupils' progress so far this year shows a small improvement compared to previous years. Improvements in the consistency of assessment and the management of assessment data have meant that pupils who are falling behind can be identified sooner. Consequently, interventions such as catch-up sessions and one-to-one tuition have been better targeted. Standards are rising in reading, writing and mathematics. In Years 3 to 5, attainment in core subjects has improved to meet age-related expectations, except for writing in Year 3. However, the school is not anticipating that attainment in the forthcoming end of Key Stage 2 tests will be better than last year. This is because many of the present Year 6 pupils, particularly the boys, have not been able to make up for their slow progress in previous years.

Pupils' learning and enjoyment was good in six of the observed lessons, satisfactory in ten and inadequate in four, where pupils were not sure what they needed to do.



Progress is satisfactory and sometimes good in literacy lessons, but more variable in mathematics because some teachers are still developing their subject expertise. In the best lessons, progress was good because the tasks engaged all pupils, giving opportunities to share ideas and work independently. A good history lesson on the life of Anne Frank helped to develop pupils' empathetic writing. In satisfactory and inadequate lessons, pupils had more passive roles and progress was slower.

Judgement

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- improve attainment and progress in English and mathematics – satisfactory

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils show interest in their work and usually maintain their concentration. Their enjoyment of school is evident in their above average attendance and the generally sensible and safe behaviour around the school. Pupils' personal development is evident in the increasing maturity shown in older year groups. For example, older pupils are better at taking turns when giving their views.

The effectiveness of provision

The school has improved the regularity and accuracy of assessment. Teachers are more confident in their use of assessment criteria and they have a better understanding of how to use this information to inform their planning. In the majority of lessons, pupils were grouped on the basis of these assessments and so the level of challenge was varied accordingly. Teachers' use of information and communication (ICT) has improved through the use of the recently purchased visualisers. These allow children's work to be projected onto the whiteboard, to show pupils how to improve their work. Pupils' work is marked regularly and this provides some helpful guidance to students. In the best cases, the teacher expects pupils to respond or to make corrections. The curriculum has improved because teachers are working together in literacy and mathematics teams to establish a common understanding of what they are trying to achieve. The school has revised its processes for assessing whether pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, reducing the proportion so designated from over 40% to 12% while still seeking to ensure that individual needs are met. Previously, the school had incorrectly included pupils without special educational needs, but who needed an element of individualised support and were underachieving. This clarification means that support is better targeted, reflecting effective identification.

These improvements help explain the modest improvements in pupils' progress this year. Nevertheless, the quality of teaching has not improved sufficiently and remains inconsistent, particularly in mathematics, and ICT. Several of the weaknesses noted



in the last inspection report are still evident, such as overlong introductions by teachers and limited opportunities for pupils to check their own and classmates learning. In a literacy lesson pupils wrote slowly because they had been overburdened with instructions about features they needed to include. In mathematics pupils were not always given a context in which to base their thinking. For example, in one lesson, pupils were told to discuss problem solving strategies without being given a problem on which to focus.

Judgement

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning – inadequate.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school has made significant improvements to monitoring and evaluation. Since the last inspection, each teacher has had two lessons observed with appropriate feedback. In addition senior leaders scrutinise pupils' work and analyse data on a regular basis. They report their finding to a Progress Evaluation Group set up by the local authority and to the governing body through its new school improvement committee. The governing body is therefore now better equipped to hold the school to account and keep parents informed.

Pupils' progress has improved, but the leadership of teaching and learning is mainly reactive, with senior and middle leaders responding to advice, rather than driving improvement directly. The literacy and mathematics subject leaders and the SENCo have had some useful support from local authority advisers, but arrangements for their longer term development remain too vague. Opportunities to visit to other schools and establish contact with successful practitioners have not yet materialised.

Judgement

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- improve the impact that leadership and management has on the quality of education provided – satisfactory.

External support

The impact of external support is satisfactory. The local authority's statement of action meets requirements. It is coordinated well with the school's raising achievement plan so it addresses each of the areas for improvement. The local authority is evaluating the impact of its work effectively through its Progress Evaluation Group. Despite some staffing difficulties on both sides, the school has received appropriate support from local authority advisers. This has led to more accurate assessments of pupils' work in mathematics and English.

