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Mrs Elizabeth Burman
Headteacher
Hillside Primary School
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Kent
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Dear Mrs Burman

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Hillside Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 29 and 30 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2010. 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 and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

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 and Young People's Services for Bromley.

Yours sincerely

John Kennedy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Accelerate learning and achievement for all pupils so that by the time they leave in Year 6, they are attaining at least the expected standards in English, mathematics and science.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so more lessons are good and none is inadequate by:
 - checking that work and activities are matched accurately to the needs and abilities of individual pupils
 - ensuring teachers mark work and set personal targets that allow the pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning
 - giving pupils more chance for creative, lively and first-hand experiences.
- Improve levels of attendance to meet the national average for primary schools and reduce persistent absenteeism to the proportion for similar schools by July 2011.
- Develop the role of the middle managers in contributing effectively to school improvement by:
 - boosting their confidence in using assessment data effectively
 - increasing opportunities for them to observe teaching and learning.

Special measures: monitoring of Hillside Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 29 and 30 March 2011

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other staff, members of the governing body's scrutiny committee, representatives from the parent partnership group, a group of pupils, and the local authority's senior advisor, who is also the School Improvement Partner.

Context

A teacher in the Special Opportunities Unit was appointed to a permanent post in February 2011. One member of staff remains on long-term sick leave. There are five vacancies in the governing body.

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

The proportion of pupils working at the expected levels for their ages is rising. However, the rate of improvement is variable between year groups and classes and in subject areas. Evidence, for example, indicates that pupils in Year 2 are on track to reach the school's target in reading and will be close to it in writing, but they have further ground to make up in mathematics. Pupils in Year 6 are on course to exceed minimum national Level 4 targets in English and mathematics. Emphasis on writing is having a positive impact on raising standards across the school. The school is rightly giving more priority now to science as there is considerable variation in the levels of attainment between classes.

Pupils are more noticeably and actively engaged in their learning. This can be seen in discussions they have in pairs and groups and in the determined way they try and complete their tasks. Some struggle, for example in mathematics, to apply what they have learnt because they have a weak grasp of the process of working out the correct answer and find it difficult to apply what they have previously learnt. Pupils are well behaved and mostly enjoy what they are doing. The conversations between pupils are about learning. They take pride in their achievements and the staff encourage this, for example in English, where pupils publish their writing at the end of each unit. Pride in their achievements is not always reflected in the presentation of their work, and some pupils make some careless spelling mistakes. They have produced some very creative writing, exemplified in Year 4 poetry about predators, where pupils have painted creative and vivid pictures for the reader. In Year 6, their poems about environmental issues carry a real punch. In a Year 1 class, pupils were thoroughly engrossed in writing about animals, captured by one boy who bubbled with enthusiasm as he wrote and spoke about the characteristics of hedgehogs. Reliable assessment data and inspection evidence indicate that progress remains uneven between classes and for pupils who are receiving additional interventions.

The progress being made by pupils in a few classes is too slow and intense tailored support is in place to improve the quality of teaching. The more general picture indicates that greater proportions of pupils are making or exceeding expected levels of progress. For instance, in Year 6, the vast majority are making expected progress and some are making more significant strides in their learning.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Accelerate learning and achievement for all pupils so that by the time they leave in Year 6, they are attaining at least the expected standards in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory progress.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Despite a dip in attendance during the second half of the autumn term, primarily caused by heavy snow and illness, overall attendance levels are back on track and currently at 93.9%, which is in line with the school's end-of-year target. Comparisons at every level show that attendance levels are higher than for corresponding periods and class groups last year. However, this much-improved picture masks some difference between attendance levels in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. All classes in Years 3 to 6 have attendance levels which are at least 94%, and in some classes much higher. Attendance levels in Years 1 and 2 have improved but remain too low. The number of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced and currently 12 pupils have attendance which is below 80%, mostly in Key Stage 1. The school, well supported by the education welfare officer, is working hard with a small number of families to encourage better school attendance. The impact can be seen in the fact that the attendance levels of most of the targeted pupils is improving. A number of factors are contributing to these more positive developments. The staff are making effective use of the rich data they hold to enable parents, carers and pupils see the links between good attendance and better academic progress. Pupils were able to quickly work out for the inspector that missing one day a week amounts to 39 days over a whole year, almost two months! The school has developed a staged and rigorous approach to promoting attendance and tackling absence. Incentives and the 'Spike' project continue to have positive impact. School leaders are reviewing these incentives to continue setting expectations for 100% attendance while at the same recognising those pupils who sustain consistently high levels of attendance. The school is giving priority to working with parents of the younger children, including those in Reception, to enable them to see the impact of regular attendance on learning.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve levels of attendance to meet the national average for primary schools and reduce persistent absenteeism to the proportion for similar schools by July 2011 – good progress.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is improving, although weaknesses remain in a small number of classes, and there is evidence that staff are keen to improve their practice further. Teachers know their pupils well and what gaps they have in their learning. They are making more effective use of assessment information to plan meaningful and creative activities that meet pupils' differing abilities and engage their interest. The sharper focus on learning is evident in the way that teachers create opportunities for pupils to explain what they have learnt and are capable of doing. Teachers and support staff use perceptive questions to enable them to gauge if pupils have grasped what they are expected to do and to check on their learning. Pupils benefit from plenty of opportunities to share ideas and learn from each other, and staff purposefully move around the class keeping an eye on which pupils need encouragement or a helpful steer to keep them on task. These strengths are not consistent in all lessons. At times pupils are passive for too long or the activities do not fully engage them, and as a result one or two struggle to remain attentive. Teachers fail to spot that some group or paired activities need to be adjusted to stretch those who are capable of doing more, or to spend time with others to make sure that they have really grasped the learning. This variation in teaching is directly related to the unevenness in the progress in different classes.

Teachers are more consistent in applying the school's marking policy and there is evidence of frequent and helpful written comments or questions, for instance in Year 5, which highlight the next steps for pupils. Some good practice is evident where teachers combine encouragement with challenge: 'I like the way you've set out your summary but feel you could have said more about both sides.' Teachers use pink and green comments to indicate the difference between work which needs further development and instances where pupils have done well. Pupils spoke positively about this, one referring to 'pink to make you think' and another to 'green for go go go!' Some marking is not of this quality. Comments are cursory, and there is a lack of encouragement or helpful guidance and little evidence of links with personal targets.

Progress since the monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so more lessons are good and none is inadequate – satisfactory progress.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

'Confidence' is the word that captures the continued improvement in leadership and management at all levels and in particular in the contribution of middle managers. This confidence is grounded in increasingly secure and accurate data. Systems are now securely in place to hold staff at all levels to account for the progress that each and every pupil is making. Regular progress meetings and the rigorous and sharp monitoring of outcomes require staff to show evidence of progress in their own

performance and that of the pupils. Leaders have an accurate understanding of where remaining weaknesses lie and these are now the focus of action plans which combine tailored support and professional challenge, with high expectations for performance. Middle managers are more confident and are playing an increasingly effective role in the school. However, as in other areas, performance is uneven. For the most part, middle managers are taking a more strategic and proactive lead, perhaps best summed up by the following comment: 'We clearly have leaders now – we have had managers for some time.' They contribute to improvements in teaching through their lesson observations and support for staff development. Subject leaders see themselves as ambassadors for their subject, role models for staff and key players in partnership working with parents. Comments from the parent partnership group reflect the positive impact. The stronger role that middle managers are playing has freed up the headteacher to make more effective use of her considerable skill and expertise. The ability of the deputy headteacher and other leaders to smoothly manage the school during a period of time when the headteacher was absent earlier this term exemplifies strengthening capacity. Governors are also developing greater confidence in asking searching questions about performance. The parent partnership group meets regularly and provides a strong voice for parents and carers and contributes in no small way to the journey of improvement. They are pleased about the changes they are seeing, for example in the frequency and quality of communication with parents and carers, and the increased visibility of staff. The group asks important questions about performance, for instance, the quality and support for children who are more able. Leaders listen to the voice of parents and this is reflected in the development of a homework policy.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection in the areas for improvement:

- Develop the role of the middle managers in contributing effectively to school improvement – good progress.

External support

The local authority continues to provide responsive and effective support underpinned by a very accurate understanding of the steps the school has taken and what further action is needed to drive improvement. The senior advisor is particularly valued for her expertise and challenge. A recent audit of provision and its impact has helped the school identify where to focus. The ongoing support from the education welfare service contributes positively to the school's work in tackling absence. A range of local authority consultants have contributed to improving the quality of teaching by working with staff on the use of assessment, planning, team teaching and lesson observations.