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19 November 2010

Ms Falconer
Medway Community Primary School
St Stephens Road
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Dear Ms Falconer

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Medway Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on Wednesday 17 and Thursday 18 November 2010, 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 April 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 – inadequate

Newly Qualified Teachers may not yet be appointed. However the school have been invited to discuss the possibility if the opportunity arises.

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 Leicester City.

Yours sincerely

Ceri Morgan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise achievement in reading, writing, mathematics and science by:
 - improving the accuracy of teachers' assessments
 - making sure teachers use assessment information effectively to plan work that matches the learning needs of different groups pupils, especially the more able
 - ensuring the curriculum has sufficient opportunities for pupils of different abilities to develop their literacy, mathematical and science skills

- Improve the quality of teaching throughout the school so that it is mostly good or better by;
 - using marking that helps pupils understand what they need to do next in order to make progress towards their targets
 - ensuring lessons move at a quick enough pace, especially at the start
 - raising teachers' expectations of pupils' capabilities and ensuring the level of challenge they provide for pupils is sufficiently high, especially those who speak English as an additional language.

- Improve attendance so that it is line with the national average.

- Ensure leaders and managers at all levels, and governors, rigorously evaluate and monitor the schools' work to bring about rapid improvement by:
 - making effective use of the schools' data to monitor and evaluate pupils' progress across cohorts, groups and subjects to inform decisions about how pupils' achievement can be improved.
 - holding staff to account for pupils' learning and progress
 - providing teachers with systematic feedback on what they need to do to improve their practice.

Special measures: monitoring of Medway Community Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on Wednesday 17 and Thursday 18 November 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with all staff, two groups of pupils, a representative from the local authority and the Chair of the Governing Body. In addition, inspectors observed 19 lessons and held detailed interviews with the headteacher and the senior leadership team and completed a scrutiny of a sample of pupils' workbooks.

Context

There have been significant changes, particularly at leadership level since September 2010. The school is now led by an executive headteacher, a deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher. All of these are new in post this term. The interim headteacher has been appointed for two years from a nearby school. Several members of the teaching staff left during the summer term and have been replaced by some permanent appointments and temporary cover. As a result of these changes, many teachers in school are new to their roles. Numbers on roll remain high, at around 460.

A buildings refurbishment programme has been implemented and although much has been achieved already, there are some major premises works to take place in the near future.

Key support personnel from the local authority have also changed since September 2010. There are no formal plans to change the status of the school but a close working partnership with the previous school of the new headteacher is emerging. That school is judged to be outstanding by Ofsted and is situated in very close proximity to Medway Primary.

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

Pupils enter school with language skills that are well below levels found in most other schools and a high proportion is in the very early stages of learning English. Levels of attainment by the time pupils leave school at age 11 remain low. In 2010 only half of the pupils reached the expected levels in both English and mathematics and very few reached the higher levels, either at age 7 or 11. The school is unable to produce any reliable data for performance in science.

Pupils have a satisfactory grasp of number skills. They can add simple decimals by age 11 and recognise shapes. However they are unable to apply these skills in wider contexts such as problem solving, data handling or in explanation. Pupils can

construct sentences and understand simple basic grammar. However, none of these basic skills are used at an advanced level and spelling is poor. Similarly pupils use a limited vocabulary in their writing or speech. The presentation of work, including handwriting, varies considerably between classes but is often scruffy, leading to casual inaccuracies.

Pupils' progress remains inadequate. This is especially evident for more able pupils and those who are in the early stages of learning English. Recent analysis by senior staff shows that in most year groups fewer than half of the pupils are making satisfactory progress in mathematics and English. Levels of attainment and progress in science over time are unquantifiable as there is no reliable data from 2010 and the science lessons observed during this inspection were more reliant on writing up tests than experimentation. In too many lessons observed, pupils did not securely make progress in learning what was identified as the core purpose of the lessons. Achievement is thus inadequate.

There is a limited and pedestrian curriculum. Teaching is either inadequate or barely satisfactory with few opportunities for pupils to speak at length, investigate exciting subjects and explain their understanding. Despite this, pupils say they enjoy their lessons and show high levels of enthusiasm. They express pleasure even when tackling tasks that are too easy or too routine.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Raise achievement in reading, writing, mathematics and science – inadequate.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils enjoy lessons, work well together and are happy to share resources and collaborate. Behaviour is generally good but reflects the quality of teaching closely. When pupils are engaged and stimulated in class they respond with exemplary attitudes. However when bored or disaffected they quickly get off task and chat. The pupils themselves report that bullying is minimal and quickly sorted out by teachers and that racism and aggression is almost non-existent. They also express concern however that behaviour at lunchtimes could be improved by the greater involvement of lunchtime supervisors.

Attendance remains lower than national averages, at almost 94%, but is improving. There has been significant success in re-engaging some persistent absentees and recent analysis shows that the monthly rates of attendance are improving. The school is working hard on this by a mix of rewards and sanctions alongside home visits and liaison with community partner organisations. The school has made no exclusions in the last three years.

Despite the concerns regarding attainment and progress, this is a very caring school. Relationships between adults and pupils are positive and encouraging. Pupils feel safe and are encouraged to maintain healthy lifestyles. Safeguarding procedures are satisfactory but under more rigorous review. A particularly strong feature is the close working relationship with local community organisations. The emerging partnership with the 'sister school' nearby, in which pupils share activities and adults collaborate on professional development, is especially promising.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Improve attendance so that it is line with the national average – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is inadequate but with emerging improvements. There is, for example, a commitment to change, good relationships with pupils and good use of resources, including technology. Teachers plan satisfactorily for a wide ability range and support those pupils who are in the early stages of learning English well.

Despite this, there are some key weaknesses. The quality of marking is inadequate. It is not always up to date and spellings are not corrected even when it is core vocabulary specific to that lesson. Few examples show pupils how to improve their work and there are too many quick congratulatory comments. Teachers are too closely focussed on what they will teach rather than what they expect the pupils to learn leading to complex lesson objectives.

Assessment during lessons via probing questioning is weak. In many lessons teachers moved quickly from one pupil to another seeking a correct answer to a question without checking on the thinking behind the initial answers. This allows misconceptions to remain and does not secure accurate assessment of pupils' true abilities. The level of challenge and expectation is too low for all pupils, especially for the more-able. Lessons are 'safe' and routine rather than imaginative or exciting. In too many classes teachers dominate the session rather than allowing pupils to get on with their work. This restricts learning time and the pace of sessions. It also means the curriculum the pupils actually receive differs from that which is planned and is unsatisfactory. A key priority is to iron out the variation between classes in the quality of teaching and learning.

The way teachers record pupil progress has been recently improved. Each month teachers upload the progress of their pupils to the school portal. These are checked by senior leaders. There is now a termly pupil progress meeting at which individual pupils are discussed. This is linked to teachers' performance targets.

Teaching assistants are supportive and deployed effectively in classes although they are sometimes passive during lengthy introductions. They are not used to assess

pupils understanding or record progress on targets specifically, except within Early Years Foundation Stage. They are occasionally over dominant when speaking, causing confusion for some pupils about who to listen to.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Improve the quality of teaching throughout the school so that it is mostly good or better - inadequate

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leadership has been through very significant change in recent months. The new headteacher shows an energetic and visionary approach allied to crisp and hard edged evaluation. She is a powerful and very positive ambassador for change with a deep knowledge of the local community and high ambition for the school. She has secured the full support of colleagues and the local community very quickly. The pupils think she is 'great'. With help from the newly appointed senior leadership team, key strategic school plans are now in place, with high levels of accountability. Monitoring is regular and accurate. As a group, they have generated an atmosphere of energy and ambition across the school. A new team of phase leaders are keen to embrace their roles and have clear responsibilities. They acknowledge that, despite the promise, the changes are too new to have secured a sustained improvement in pupil progress as yet.

Governance is improving. The governing body has received recent training and know the community well. Although supportive, they have not yet contributed to the schools' strategic direction but have a shadow arrangement with the partner school that provides additional capacity.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Ensure leaders and managers at all levels, and governors, rigorously evaluate and monitor the schools' work to bring about rapid improvement - satisfactory

External support

External support to the school is satisfactory. The local authority statement of action was judged to be satisfactory and does not require revision. Support includes the contribution by an independent consultant and the school welcomes the generous level of resources and the quality of support from the local authority now in place.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop the **curriculum** to provide more excitement by increasing the opportunities for active investigative tasks, particularly in mathematics and science.
- Ensure that all planned activities focus on **pupils' learning** and not teachers actions. Achieve this by clearer lesson objectives and better evaluation of learning during and after each lesson.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - improving questioning skills to better assess understanding and promote deeper thinking
 - provide greater opportunities for pupils to explain and articulate their thinking at length
 - improve the pace of learning and the levels of challenge and expectation.