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22 March 2012

Mrs G Bush
Headteacher
Sowerby Village CofE VC Primary School
St Peter's Avenue
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Dear Mrs Bush

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Sowerby Village CofE VC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20 and 21 March 2012, 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 June 2011. 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

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 Interim Executive board, the Diocesan Director of Education for Wakefield Diocese and the Director of Children and Young People's Services for Calderdale.

Yours sincerely

Declan McCauley
Additional inspector

March 2012



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2011

- Raise attainment and improve achievement in all subjects, but particularly in writing, by:
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to practise their basic skills in a range of subjects
 - using assessment information from the Early Years Foundation Stage to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is at least good throughout the school by:
 - making sure pupils know how to improve their work through better-quality marking and feedback
 - ensuring work planned takes account of pupils' previous learning and reflects pupils' interests and abilities
 - ensuring teachers use the skills of teaching assistants more effectively.

- Improve the leadership and management of the school by:
 - setting challenging targets that are clearly based on pupils' standards when they join Year 1
 - embedding the tracking of pupils' performance so that rapid action can be taken to tackle underachievement
 - ensuring that leaders and managers set a clear direction for school improvement
 - applying school systems rigorously and working more effectively with parents and carers to improve pupils' attendance.

Special measures: monitoring of Sowerby Village CofE VC Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 20 and 21 March 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with school leaders, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), an independent educational consultant employed by the school, a representative of the local authority and a Local Leader of Education (LLE) who is a local headteacher. The inspector also spoke with pupils and staff in classrooms and around the school. He observed eight lessons and scrutinised pupils' work around school and in exercise books. Internal and external evaluative reports including a local authority review were also scrutinised.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, a Key Stage 2 teacher resigned from her post in December 2011, she was replaced by a newly qualified teacher on loan to the school from Todmorden CE (VA) Junior and Infant School until the end of this academic year. This teacher receives professional support from staff in her donor school. Another teacher from Key Stage 2 has been absent since earlier this month and a supply teacher is teaching her class. A teacher with a supporting role in Key Stage 2 was absent for six weeks this term. A teaching assistant joined the school in December 2011 and an additional special educational needs support assistant, appointed in February 2012, is supporting a pupil with a statement.

Achievement of pupils at the school

School data show many pupils making progress in learning across school with many identified as making accelerated progress; direct observation of pupils in lessons and scrutiny of their exercise books does not support this view. In a few year groups it is possible to verify progress suggested by the data; however, this is not the case throughout the whole school. Progress made by the school in the robust use of assessment, moderation and target-setting is weak.

Improvement in achievement for all pupils has progressed at a slow pace since the previous monitoring inspection. Staff absences and inconsistencies in the quality of teaching have slowed the rate of improvement. Leaders and managers monitoring of pupils' achievement focuses mainly on English and mathematics, they do not monitor pupils' progress sufficiently in other subjects to have a full overview of achievement. Targets for individual pupils in English and mathematics have been revised in light of ongoing assessments although some targets remain beyond the reach of pupils. Pupils are beginning to benefit from practising their basic skills in a narrow range of other subjects although this is not consistently the case in all classes. In a science topic, pupils were given the opportunity to measure the elasticity of elastic bands and record information in a line graph. Some progress is now apparent in writing because of the focus on bringing about improvement. In the Early Years

Foundation Stage children rapidly develop their skills because of activities and independent learning opportunities which are very well matched to their individual needs.

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

- Raise attainment and improve achievement in all subjects, but particularly in writing – inadequate

The quality of teaching

Teachers' use of questioning is improving in lessons and many are now better at testing out what pupils know and understand. In some classes 'working walls' provide a valuable reference for pupils to support their learning. In a small number of creative and engaging lessons, where their imaginations are fired, pupils make good progress because of effective teaching. The use of teaching assistants in lessons as active partners in promoting learning has improved well since the previous monitoring inspection. They are now more directly involved in observing and assessing learning appropriately. Support by senior leaders to bring about rapid improvement in teaching in one of the classes has had limited impact despite much time and effort been invested.

Throughout school the quality of teaching continues to be inconsistent overall. Too much satisfactory teaching was observed during the monitoring inspection preventing pupils making the good progress of which they are capable. A few teachers plan learning activities taking account of pupils' prior learning. Lesson plans identify how different groups of pupils will be challenged during lessons, although, in some cases the activities are insufficiently challenging for all pupils, particularly those who are more able. In a mathematics lesson, more-able pupils were observed routinely completing a large number of calculations before beginning more challenging tasks when they could clearly have embarked on independent learning activities much sooner. Some Key Stage 2 exercise books contain many examples of pupils working on over-repetitive mathematics problems, which reduce opportunities for learning independently. Many pupils know their targets for improvement although this is not consistently the case throughout school.

Marking is beginning to identify the next steps in learning so pupils know how to improve their work. Some younger pupils struggle to read what their teacher has written and therefore do not understand what they should do next to improve. Pupils are now more involved in assessing their own work in exercise books and during lessons, although, this is not consistently the case. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is underdeveloped in the majority of lessons. Where ICT is used well pupils make good progress. In a Key Stage 2 class, a pupil was observed using software, at a fast pace, to reinforce their understanding of capacity measures.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is at least good throughout the school – inadequate

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils feel safe in school and report few instances of any type of bullying or misbehaviour. Pupils are confident that adults within school deal with any concerns which arise effectively.

Attendance has improved from the beginning of this academic year until mid March 2012 when compared to the same period of time during the previous academic year. This is because of the way in which school has worked effectively with outside agencies to promote the importance of all pupils attending school regularly.

All staff and volunteers working at the school undergo appropriate safeguarding checks before they are permitted access to the school. This process is well managed and fully meets requirements.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

There are some signs of improvement in achievement and the quality of teaching although they are insufficiently rapid. Leaders and managers have a shared desire to drive improvement and are working hard to bring this about. Senior leaders have put in place a number of strategies to bring tackle weaknesses although there is much more to do if progress is to be advanced sufficiently.

Members of the senior leadership team have identified rightly that time is needed to embed systems so they can be effective. They have endeavoured to ensure staff are not overburdened by a vastly increased workload although they have had insufficient impact in achieving this aim. The headteacher has an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses of teaching within lessons and was observed by the inspector sharing these effectively with staff. The curriculum does not meet the needs of all pupils, particularly those who are more able. Parents' and carers' responses to a questionnaire circulated by the school demonstrate a sense of the school working closely with them to support and enrich their children's learning.

There is a general view among senior leaders and managers that aspects of the review of progress undertaken by the local authority were inaccurate. However, inspection findings support the findings of this review. The school's view is based mainly on their own self-evaluation and school data. Nevertheless, leaders and managers recognise the overall accuracy of much of the local authority review report that suggested the school's progress since being judged to require special measures was inadequate.

The IEB is determinedly focused on bringing about rapid improvement to ensure the best quality of education for all pupils. School leaders are held to account robustly. In addition to information provided by the local authority and these monitoring inspections, members of the IEB successfully undertake a wide range of monitoring activities enabling them to accurately judge the pace of improvement.

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

- Improve the leadership and management of the school – inadequate

External support

The school has been very effectively supported by the local authority since the previous monitoring inspection. Literacy and numeracy consultants have supported staff well in developing resources and strategies to support learning. Members of the inclusion and behavioural support teams have worked with the school to bring about improvement. As a result, attendance has improved. The LLE continues to provide valuable support to the headteacher and senior leaders to strengthen the capacity of leadership. A local authority review to assess the rate of progress since the school become subject to special measures was undertaken and findings shared with senior leaders.