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5 July 2012

Mrs N Miller
Headteacher
Blanford Mere Primary School
Mimosa Walk
Kingswinford
DY6 7EA

Dear Mrs Miller

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Blanford Mere Primary School

Following my visit with Jennifer Cutler, Additional Inspector, to your school on 3–4 July 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 1 February 2012. 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 – 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 Dudley.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2012

- Ensure that the more-able pupils in Key Stage 1 and all pupils in Key Stage 2 make good progress, particularly in mathematics in the latter stage, by improving the quality of teaching so that:
 - teachers use assessment information more rigorously and, as a consequence, work set meets pupils' needs and they are guided carefully through small learning steps
 - during lessons, teachers check regularly on pupils' learning, address any misconceptions, and ensure that pupils understand how to improve their work
 - the pace of learning in lessons is improved and teachers do not talk for too long
 - teachers' marking consistently provides pupils with clear and focused points for improvement
 - pupils are provided with more opportunities to practice and apply their academic skills, especially in numeracy, across the curriculum.

- Strengthen the capacity for sustained improvement by ensuring that:
 - leaders rigorously check how effectively pupils at all levels of attainment are challenged in lessons
 - all plans for improvement are focused sharply on improving pupils' achievement, have measurable outcomes and the effectiveness of the plan is monitored regularly
 - the governing body plays a more active role in monitoring and evaluating pupils' achievement.

Special measures: monitoring of Blandford Mere Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 3–4 July 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leadership team, groups of pupils, parents and carers, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. The inspectors observed nine lessons, including five joint observations with the headteacher. In addition, inspectors evaluated the school's learning environment during a guided tour with senior staff. At the time of the monitoring visit Year 6 pupils were visiting their secondary schools. The new reception children were in school and all classes from one to five were on their transition days ready for September.

Context

Since the previous inspection there have been no changes to staff.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills typical for their age and make good progress. In 2011, pupils made good progress in Key Stage 1, and by the end of Year 2 their attainment was above average in reading, writing and mathematics. School tracking information indicates that teachers have increased their expectations of what pupils are able to achieve. All teacher assessments have been moderated with the local authority, another school and within school and the school's judgements are secure. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are carefully monitored, extra support has been provided in the classroom and this helps them to make similar progress to that expected. Pupils are beginning to read more fluently and with expression. This is because they enjoy reading and are encouraged to borrow school library books and take them home to share with parents and carers. As a result, pupils' confidence in reading is increasing.

By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils' attainment was above average in reading and writing in 2011, but below average in mathematics. The school has reviewed the teaching of mathematics. It has identified gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding and has begun to address these weaknesses. As a result, the latest school data now indicates that the number of pupils achieving Level 4 or above has risen slightly. Disappointingly, despite the school's best efforts, Year 6 pupils' achievement in English is lower than at this point last year. In part, this is because of poor teaching when this class were in Year 4 and work not always carefully matched to pupils' starting points. However, more pupils are now making two levels of progress in mathematics. Extra support has been provided for Year 5 and 6 pupils in mathematics, which pupils say has helped them to improve. In English and

mathematics lessons observed, pupils were well engaged and enjoyed their learning. Teachers provided tasks that were suitably matched to pupils' starting points. Evidence in pupils' exercise books indicates that there is now a more systematic approach to teaching mathematics. Pupils are encouraged to identify weaknesses in their mathematical understanding, which are then addressed by staff. In the lessons observed, pupils with disabilities and those with special educational needs made similar progress to others. This is because pupils were carefully grouped together and this enabled them to discuss their work with the support of an adult when required.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is satisfactory overall. Learning often captures pupils' interest well and relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Teachers regularly mark pupils' work and make positive comments. Pupils are beginning to reflect upon their own learning and older pupils often write their own comments in response to teachers' marking. In particular, older pupils explained how they used the new assessment system to set their own goals for learning and reflect on how well they had met their targets. Teachers are using assessment information to ensure that work is better matched to pupils' starting points. The scrutiny of Year 6's work together with teachers' planning, indicated that in mathematics this was well matched to pupils' different starting points, but this was not always the case in English. The school have reorganised their teaching groups for September 2012. These new groupings are a positive change as they combine pupils of similar age and ability and this will make the planning task simpler for teachers. Work is now better matched to pupils' abilities and this is helping to narrow the gaps in achievement and attainment between different groups of pupils. For example, in a new Year 3/ 4 lesson pupils worked very well together interpreting a picture to help them identify opposites. A challenging list of adjectives encouraged them to widen their vocabulary. Pupils really enjoyed the challenging activity and opportunities to work together. Pupils are looking forward to the start of the new school year and their new classes.

In all the lessons observed, teachers regularly checked pupils' understanding. For example, in a new Year 5/6 numeracy lesson, the teacher skilfully adapted her planning to fully challenge higher attaining pupils in the group. This approach maintained their interest and raised their learning to the next level. In the majority of classes, teacher's re-organised work during the lesson to address misunderstandings. Occasionally, opportunities are missed to reinforce pupils' learning in literacy and numeracy. In the good lessons observed, the pace of learning was brisk and teachers understood the need for all pupils to fully understand their learning before the next step was introduced. Teachers are increasingly confident in planning work which is challenging and this allows pupils to achieve at a higher level, but this is not yet consistent. Occasionally, teachers talk too much and so pupils lose interest.

Teaching in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is good overall. In the Early Years Foundation Stage learning journals are used effectively and are closely linked with the early learning goals. Children read key words well. Numeracy is well resourced and children have plenty of opportunities to develop their skills. In Key Stage 1, pupils are developing their independent learning skills well. Pupils' personal, social, health and emotional understanding are developed well because of the good relationships with staff, and pupils co-operate well. For example, in a Year 1 lesson pupils' imagination was captured by the teacher 'sprinkling magic dust' which stimulated lots of talk, and this was further developed by the teacher's effective questioning.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- ensure that the more-able pupils in Key Stage 1 and all pupils in Key Stage 2 make good progress, particularly in mathematics in the latter key stage, by improving the quality of teaching – satisfactory.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

In all the lessons observed, pupils worked well together in their new groups, shared ideas and happily took turns. Pupils moved around the classrooms sensibly. At playtime in Key Stage 1 pupils played well together; they quickly lined up when the bell rang for end of play and walked sensibly into school, holding the door open for others. Pupils reported that they feel safe in school and that bullying rarely occurs. Pupils were confident they could go to any adult if they had a concern. Parents and carers spoke very positively about the care and nurture their children receive. Pupils' attendance is in line with the national average and punctuality is good.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and senior team are working with energy and determination to address all of the issues from the previous inspection. The school now has an accurate view of its strengths and areas for development. Staff have confidence in the school leaders and managers. Monitoring of the school's work is more rigorous because the school and the governing body are clear what the issues for improvement are. Plans are sharply focused and are evaluated and regularly updated. Tracking systems for monitoring pupils' progress have been tightened and shared effectively with class teachers. The school has identified, and has plans to address, the inconsistencies that remain in the use of information to support improving pupils' writing. The governing body now plays a more active role in monitoring the work of the school, which they are keen to develop further. Members of the governing body understand the school's tracking data and they use a wide range of information to hold senior leaders to account. Communication with parents and carers has improved and they now receive regular bulletins from the governing body.

Staff development has been a priority and all staff have benefited from a wide range of training. All staff have clear roles and responsibilities. There are appropriately high expectations of all staff which are reflected in the new performance management systems. Clear and measurable targets for improvement are set for all staff and these are linked to raising attainment. This has enabled the careful targeting of staff training. Weaknesses in teaching are swiftly identified and support provided. All lesson observations focus on raising achievement. Evaluations of lesson observations and work scrutinies are regularly shared with the staff. Staff now more confidently assess pupils' work and understand the need for all pupils to make good progress in lessons. This has raised teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve. Consequently, the proportion of good teaching has improved but opportunities are missed to share good practice across the whole school.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- strengthen the capacity for sustained improvement – good.

External support

The local authority has provided high quality and sensitive support to the school. This has helped staff grow in confidence. Support has been effectively matched to staff performance management needs. The local authority's statement for action is fit for purpose.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that the school is using the good practice it has identified to further improve teaching.