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11 October 2012

Diane Ashmore
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Ashmore

Special measures monitoring inspection of Westfield Community Primary School

Following my visit with Helen Bailey, Additional Inspector, to your school on 9–10 October 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in 15 March 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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 Hertfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Michael Sheridan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Ensure leaders and managers at all levels accelerate school improvement by:
 - regularly and rigorously monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' outcomes, and using the results to improve pupils' achievement
 - improving pupils' social and moral development consistently across the curriculum and eliminating the elements of unacceptable behaviour.

- Improve achievement in English and mathematics by:
 - ensuring that assessment information is used sharply to identify underachievement, especially in Key Stage 2, and providing effective support to accelerate pupils' progress
 - ensuring pupils' reading books are well matched to their reading ability in order to improve their reading skills.

- Improve the quality of teaching so it is good or better across the school by:
 - ensuring all lessons provide tasks that are closely matched to pupils' ability to improve the progress they make
 - setting clear targets that are regularly referred to in lessons and discussed and reviewed frequently with pupils, so they understand exactly what they need to do to reach the next stage in their learning.

Special measures: monitoring of Westfield Community Primary School

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 10 October 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors talked with a number of parents at the school gate and on the telephone, and considered their views alongside those expressed on the Parent View website and through one complaint to Ofsted.

Context

Two teachers have left the school since the previous inspection and two new teachers arrived in September. One of these new teachers has responsibility for leading reading in the school. The school has a specially resourced unit to provide support for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. This is known as 'the base'. In light of the inadequate judgement received at the previous inspection, the local authority has decided not to enrol any pupils from other schools to the base. Currently, the base is providing support to other schools as an outreach service. The long-term plans for this provision are not yet clear.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement is beginning to improve for different groups of pupils, particularly in reading. Leaders collect and analyse information about pupils' progress in English and mathematics more frequently and use this to identify groups and individuals who are not making enough progress. This has been significant in enabling leaders and teachers to see beyond the broadly average attainment overall and recognise the underachievement that exists for some groups and individuals. Provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is strengthening with increasingly accurate identification of need and useful specialist support, both in class and in additional 'catch up' groups. These additional sessions are also beginning to be useful in supporting pupils who have fallen behind in class.

Pupils are enjoying reading more. Books are better organised so pupils can access more interesting reading material at the appropriate level. Guided reading books have been selected to be more interesting and provide more challenge. Early reading is beginning to improve as pupils are learning the sounds that letters make with increasing confidence. Some lower-attaining pupils in Key Stage 1 are struggling to work out what words say in books. It is important that the additional support these pupils get continues to encourage them to decode words as often as possible.

While there is still some underachievement in Key Stage 2, last year's leavers made better progress in English. However, too few pupils reach higher levels in writing because they are not being challenged enough to develop their skills further.

In mathematics last year, too many pupils failed to make the expected progress. Teachers too often repeat work from previous years without having a secure enough understanding of pupils' existing achievements, knowledge and ability. Put simply, too many mathematics lessons are not challenging enough to move pupils forward. Some work is being done to identify and plug gaps in pupils' mathematical understanding, but it is too early to evaluate how effective this is.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving. More lessons are good and there are fewer inadequate aspects. In the best lessons, relationships are strong with pupils and teachers celebrating success and working well together to improve work. The use of questioning is improving in some classes, with more teachers asking questions that encourage pupils to think deeply and explain their answers more fully.

However, in some lessons teachers have not developed that same positive relationship with pupils. They are less supportive and give pupils fewer opportunities to explain their thinking. As a result, pupils feel less comfortable taking risks or answering questions. In these lessons, teachers often expect pupils to respond to their questions too quickly and this does not give pupils time to consider their answers fully. When pupils make mistakes, they are not always dealt with effectively.

In some lessons, the amount of challenge has increased considerably and pupils are thriving, particularly when the teacher has created a supportive, nurturing atmosphere. However, in others too much time is spent going over previous learning and pupils, while engaged, are not learning at the pace that they are capable of.

Pupils know their targets and these are being used with increasing frequency in lessons to remind pupils about how to improve their work. However, in some classes, teachers have set targets but do not make regular use of these in pointing out the most important improvements that pupils should make.

Teachers are using additional adult support with varying effectiveness. In some lessons, teaching assistants are very well briefed and have a clear understanding of how to support individuals and groups. Additional support has been made available for underperforming groups and early indications are that this is beginning to close the attainment gap between these pupils and their peers. In some lessons, teaching assistants give too much support and this prevents pupils from thinking for themselves.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The poor behaviour that was described in the last report was not evident on this inspection. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has improved, with most pupils making good choices about their behaviour and creating a positive learning environment.

Pupils are very positive about behaviour in school. They say that they enjoy school and their lessons. Some pupils say that the playground can be dangerous because of the number of balls flying around and the inappropriate use of play equipment. Inspectors agreed with pupils in that some equipment was being used inappropriately and the school did not have suitable safeguards to protect pupils from flying balls. The school recognised this concern and started to change the practice at playtime during the inspection. Inspectors will consider the safety and organisation of the playground at the next inspection.

Behaviour in classes is good. In a small number, teachers are too harsh in dealing with very minor indiscretions and do not build the same positive, trusting relationships that are evident in most other classes. This has a direct impact on the work ethic and pupils' enjoyment of lessons. Most pupils say that bullying is dealt with effectively although some pupils and one parent of a Year 5 pupil said that an ongoing problem with name-calling is slow to get better.

There are no pupils attending the base at present. While school leaders say that pupils in the base are usually well integrated into school life, evidence supplied by the school shows that this has not always been the case. It is important that the long-term future of this provision is determined before the school is removed from special measures, so inspectors can consider the impact of the base on behaviour and safety in the school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The most significant improvement in leadership has been the increased analysis, understanding and use of progress data. Leaders have started to use information about progress to inform planning for different groups, making sure that underperformance does not go unchallenged. Leaders explain convincingly how they intend to measure the impact of the resulting changes made since September. However, it is too early for them to be able to show significant improvements in pupils' performance.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) has completed the nationally recognised training for this role and has developed a clear understanding about how she wants to further improve provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Her work on this so far is impressive and demonstrates an ability to plan strategically.

Leadership still has some way to go to be fully effective, but the headteacher has developed a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses within teaching and has credible plans for continuing to develop individual competence. English and mathematics leaders are yet to complete any significant monitoring or contribute to school improvement. These leaders have started to identify priorities for development. It is important that they are demonstrating a positive impact on school improvement by the next visit.

The governing body does not yet deal with complaints effectively or fully hold leaders and managers to account. Governance is weak despite the efforts of some governors to better organise their work. Inspectors recommend that the local authority should organise an external review of governance at the earliest opportunity and take action to improve its effectiveness.

Most parents and carers who spoke with inspectors were very positive about the work of the school. They say they are happy with the way the school communicates with them and the rates of progress their children are making. A minority raised concerns about the work of the school and the attitude of some staff and leaders towards parents and pupils. A few felt that their concerns were too often dismissed by leaders without full consideration. It is clear that leaders and governors will need to work hard to rebuild trust with some sections of the community. Concerns raised by some parents after the inspection are being examined by the appropriate bodies.

External support

Ofsted judged the local authority's statement of action as fit for purpose prior to this monitoring inspection. Local authority advisers have worked in school alongside teachers and leaders in developing competence and capacity. The local authority support leaders in their use of data and in gathering evidence about the quality of teaching. Joint lesson observations have taken place so leaders know what to look for in a successful lesson. Some teachers have received support in developing their practice and this is beginning to have an effect on the quality of teaching.

The local authority has brokered further support from a National Leader of Education who is the headteacher of an outstanding school. This partnership has had limited impact to date because it has very recently been organised. The school and local authority are aware of the potential to use this link in developing the competence of leaders and teachers.

The local authority has not taken any action to improve the effectiveness of the governing body. It is essential that it now moves quickly to identify and remove weaknesses so that governance can be effective in fulfilling statutory duties and holding the leaders of the school fully to account.