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13 July 2012

Mr Melloy
Oakhill Primary School
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Dear Mr Melloy

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Oakhill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11–12 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 in 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 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 Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

David Speakman
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching and accelerate pupils' progress so that their attainment is at least average by July 2013 by ensuring that:
 - all pupils are given tasks that improve their reading and writing skills in literacy lessons
 - pupils spend less time together on the carpet at the start of lessons and are quickly moved on to do work that is appropriately matched to their ability
 - pupils' progress is checked on more frequently in lessons and that work given to pupils is adjusted accordingly
 - teachers' marking checks that pupils have carried out corrections and are addressing areas identified as in need of improvement
 - pupils are given more opportunities to develop their mathematical skills in other subjects.

- Improve behaviour and substantially reduce the proportion of pupils being excluded by December 2012 by:
 - analysing the records of incidents more frequently so that emerging patterns of poor behaviour can be identified
 - providing support for pupils at the earliest possible stage.

- Ensure the more frequent assessment, collation and analysis of pupil progress data in order to:
 - identify underachievement as early as possible
 - target checks on teaching to pinpoint the key weaknesses that lead to underachievement
 - draw up sharply focused plans to address the weaknesses identified.

- Provide teachers with more opportunities to observe good and outstanding teaching in order that they can improve their own practice.

Special measures: monitoring of Oakhill Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 July 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, listened to pupils read and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, two governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority. The inspector completed five lesson observations jointly with the headteacher, observing all teachers and classes.

Context

This is a small primary school with pupils being taught in five mixed-age classes. Since the inspection in March, one teacher has resigned and leaves the school at the end of the current term. Two teaching assistants and the family link worker have been made redundant and will leave at the end of this term.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Attainment is improving but there is still much to do to tackle the underachievement reported at the last inspection. The results of the most recent end of key stage assessments are showing promising signs of recovery. There has been a significant improvement at the end of Key Stage 1 over the poor results in 2011. However, attainment still remains below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. At Key Stage 2, attainment is broadly average in reading and in mathematics, but below average in writing.

In lessons observed in the Early Years Foundation Stage, children made good progress. They are becoming competent in using their understanding of number to solve simple questions and to measure, such as measuring the growth of their bean plants. Strong focus is placed on developing children's vocabulary and this is effective. They are becoming confident speakers and answer the teacher's questions with levels of vocabulary appropriate to their age. They read simple words and sentences confidently. Early writing skills are emerging well.

Achievement is slower at Key Stage 1, as indicated by assessments that are below the national average at the end of Year 2. Pupils lack confidence when reading and are sometimes hesitant. They are better when they recognise words, but often struggle to build words using their knowledge of letters and sounds. They can recount a story, but not in sufficient detail. In writing, pupils' ideas are not developed to a sufficient length, there are common spelling errors and handwriting is not well enough developed.

The reading sample in Year 6 indicated similar weaknesses as those identified in Year 2. Reading is fluent when pupils readily recognise the words, but they still show

poor skills in reading unfamiliar words. They skip over the word, read incorrectly without self-correction or use weak phonic skills. This weak knowledge of letters and sounds is having an impact on pupils' spelling. More competent readers read with expression and are interesting to listen to. Samples of writing contain too many spelling mistakes and are poorly presented, with not enough care taken over handwriting. Having said that, punctuation is mostly used correctly and much of the writing shows ideas are developed well and is interesting to read. Work seen in mathematics books supports the broadly average end of key stage tests and assessments. Numeracy skills are used accurately to solve problems.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Improve teaching and accelerate pupils' progress so that their attainment is at least average by July 2013 – satisfactory.

The quality of teaching

Teaching seen during the visit was satisfactory overall. No inadequate teaching was seen and some good practice was observed in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Here, interesting activities, in this case tracking the growth of bean plants, were used well to promote the development of key skills: speaking and listening, reading, introducing writing and developing an understanding of number through measuring. This activity fully engaged children, who entered into discussion and answered well focused questions on how to measure their plants.

In lesson observations in Key Stages 1 and 2, some improvements since the previous inspection were noted. Teachers plan accordingly to meet the needs of pupils of different ages and abilities in each class. They have overcome the criticism of pupils listening to the teacher for too long. During the visit, introductions to lessons were of an appropriate length and involved pupils through directed questions. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the subjects taught and often learning was set into a meaningful context, such as designing an Olympic torch using electric circuits, or calculating the cost of a visit to the Olympic Games using ticket price charts.

However, teaching still lacks a consistent quality across the school, and even within some classes. Some lessons move at a brisk pace, while this is still a concern in some classes. In a phonics lesson, one teacher developed pupils' knowledge of sounds and letters well, moving pupils on quickly, while a teacher with another group in the same class allowed pupils to colour pictures. This did not allow all pupils in the class to make similar progress in developing reading skills. Occasionally, reluctant learners or those who lack confidence are allowed to sit idle for too long without being challenged, and the progress of these pupils is sometimes too slow. This means that teaching is not yet as effective as it could be in ensuring that attainment gaps between the lowest attaining pupils and others are closing.

However, teaching assistants do work satisfactorily with target groups of pupils to help them achieve.

It is clear that many pupils have not had sufficient opportunity to develop effective skills in independent learning and this is still an area of weakness. For example, in a mathematics lesson pupils were asked to mark each others' work and to make a comment on how it could be improved. These attempts at 'peer assessment' failed because pupils did not receive enough guidance or advice and were not clear about how to complete this task satisfactorily.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Improve teaching and accelerate pupils' progress – satisfactory.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

During the visit, almost all pupils behaved appropriately and settled well to their work. Very little challenging behaviour was seen. This was not disruptive behaviour but involved a small number of pupils who were reluctant to get on with their work. This was adequately managed by adults, but did slow the progress of the pupils concerned. In lessons, teachers are able to get on with teaching, without having to pay too much attention to managing pupils' behaviour. Relationships between pupils and teachers and between pupils are friendly and relaxed. Most pupils appear to be keen to learn. However, samples of work show that pupils do not pay enough attention to ensuring that their work is presented well.

The number of exclusions has fallen. Since the previous inspection, two pupils have been excluded, both for justifiable reasons. There are fewer incidents recorded in the behaviour logs and some entries are for minor incidents. The senior leadership team monitors behaviour records half termly and class teachers weekly. Any worrying trends are spotted early and action taken. The school has tightened up on supporting pupils on individual behaviour plans. All staff are aware of the targets, and support is more consistent across the staff. A staff member has opened 'Oakey's Den', where pupils who find lunchtimes outside difficult, are able to work on computers, play board games, work with jigsaws and play with other toys. This has eased the pressure outside and has resulted in fewer lunchtime incidents. Pupils say behaviour is better.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Improve behaviour and substantially reduce the proportion of pupils being excluded by December 2012 – satisfactory.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and senior leadership team have responded to the issues raised at the previous inspection and have had some impact. However, as yet, there is still much to do to secure a greater pace of improvement.

The staff have demonstrated that they are working together to try to develop provision so that achievement can improve and standards rise. Links with a number of local schools have been established so that teachers are able to work in partnership and develop their own good or better practice. For example, the deputy headteacher has established a link with the Year 6 teacher in another school. He has already observed two sessions, has looked at opportunities for shared planning, and there are plans to compare standards, moderate work and develop common leadership skills. Teachers in Key Stage 1 and Year 3 have observed good practice in guided reading and are establishing links with parallel staff in other schools.

Staff share an ambition to improve school performance. Early Years Foundation Stage staff are exploring ways to extend their cross-curricular approach across the school so that core literacy and numeracy skills can be strengthened in other subjects and learning experiences made more interesting.

The headteacher has made a start in improving the tracking and monitoring of the school's performance. Joint observations with the inspector raised no concern over the accuracy of the headteacher's lesson observations. He has made a start in tracking pupils' performance, so underachievement can be identified and addressed early. A computer-based tracking system has been installed and recent data entered. This is, however, just the start. There has been some doubt about some assessment data and claims of exceptional pupil progress. This undermines confidence in the accuracy of teacher assessments and the senior leadership team needs to be convinced of the accuracy through expecting teachers to support claims with secure evidence taken from each pupil's work. Staff are keen to use assessments to set targets, to track progress and to be held accountable, but readily admit they need training to be clear about how they will use the systems reliably.

The governing body is small and its members have had difficulty in recruiting the full complement. They are aware of some of the school's weaknesses and some members are more involved than others. Although appearing to be supportive, at present the governing body does not challenge the school enough, track its progress or hold leaders to account for school improvement.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Ensure the more frequent assessment, collation and analysis of pupil progress data – inadequate.
- Provide teachers with more opportunities to observe good and outstanding teaching in order that they can improve their own practice – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has established its commitment to support through a challenging programme of regular monitoring. Its statement of action is well focused, with the key issues for the school drawn into a coherent set of priorities. The statement of action has been assessed by Ofsted as fit for purpose. The local authority staff keep a close watch on the school's development and provide the necessary support and challenge. Implementation of the statement of action has been effective so far. Minutes show the initial visit was rigorous and provided good advice to the senior leadership team, although minutes indicate no members of the governing body were present. Report back from the visit is thorough and contains clear evaluation of strengths and areas for development.

An independent consultant has worked alongside the headteacher and staff and has provided advice that is regarded highly by the school's leadership.