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27 September 2012

Abigail Birch
Executive Headteacher
Vale View Community School
Vale View Road
Dover
Kent
CT17 9NP

Dear Ms Birch

Special measures monitoring inspection of Vale View Community School

Following my visit with David Webster, Additional Inspector, to your school on 25 and 26 September 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 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 Kent.

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Accelerate pupils' progress and raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics so that it is at least average by the end of Year 6 by:
 - _ ensuring that pupils consistently apply phonic skills when reading and writing
 - _ improving pupils' skills in spelling, sentence writing and punctuation
 - _ identifying and addressing gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding of mathematics
 - _ improving their mathematical problem-solving skills.

- Urgently eradicate all inadequate teaching and improve the overall quality of teaching to at least good by:
 - _ more frequent teaching of literacy skills in Key Stage 1, and ensuring time is used more productively in lessons
 - _ using assessment information effectively to ensure lesson activities are planned so that they always build on what pupils have already learned
 - _ ensuring that reading books are well matched to pupils' abilities and are meaningful for those learning English as an additional language
 - _ ensuring that the least-able pupils have daily opportunities to read and to be heard reading.

- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - _ developing the skills of the senior leaders and working in full partnership with the executive headteacher to lead and improve the school
 - _ developing the roles of middle leaders so they take a full part in improving the quality of teaching and pupils' attainment and progress
 - _ developing the skills of the governing body so that the governors hold the school fully to account.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 25 and 26 September 2012

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents such as assessment information, monitoring records, and minutes of meetings held by the governing body and local authority. They met with the executive headteacher and other senior staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors carried out eight lesson observations and a further series of shorter visits to all classes. All teachers were observed.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been a small number of staff changes, including the appointments of phase and subject leaders and a special educational needs coordinator.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Although attainment in all subjects is still too low and well below national averages, the downwards trend has been reversed and attainment is now edging upwards. There is some variability in the achievement of different classes, however, across the school. About 25% more pupils are working at the levels expected for their ages than was the case a year ago and almost one third of pupils made very good progress over the year. The improvement is particularly noticeable in reading because of a more systematic approach to teaching early reading skills, including the sounds that letters make, known as phonics, and increased opportunities for all pupils, especially the least able, to read regularly. During this visit, there were good examples of pupils using their reading skills to sound out and write unfamiliar words.

Pupils are enthusiastic learners, especially when they are fully involved and the lessons are interesting. This was particularly evident in two science lessons where pupils carried out a range of experiments. The activities generated a lot of discussion and pupils were able to accurately use vocabulary such as dissolved and filtered. However, during the visit, much of the learning seen in lessons was not good enough to really speed up the pace of pupils' learning. One reason for this is that, although teachers carefully plan lessons which cater for different abilities, in practice, the match between activities and abilities is not quite right. In some cases, the work is too hard and for others, it is too easy. On occasions, particularly in mathematics, the adults are not sufficiently clear about the mathematical strategies and concepts being covered in the lesson. Another reason why learning is slower than it should be is that adults often give the pupils too much support and over-direct activities so that pupils do not have to think for themselves and do not develop good independent learning skills.

The quality of teaching

Well-organised routines, careful planning and warm relationships have already been established throughout the school. Some features of good teaching are evident such as careful planning, including opportunities for pupils to discuss their learning. There are examples of teachers probing children's understanding through careful questioning. This was seen in a Year 2 mathematics lesson where pupils were clearly having 'eureka moments' when they realised that knowing that 8 and 2 equals 10 made $8+3+2$ a very easy calculation. Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously and their comments are linked to the learning objectives and next steps. All of this provides an important platform on which to build improvement and is enhanced by teachers' willingness to reflect on and improve their practice.

However, the quality of teaching in most lessons seen during the visit was not effective enough because, although teachers are developing the features of good teaching, they are not yet proficient at putting them into practice. For example, although adults ask probing questions, they are less skilled at using the pupils' responses to build on and extend the learning. Also often in lessons, too much time is taken up by adults talking, leaving too little time for pupils to practise and develop their skills. This is evident in the books where often the teachers' comments take up more space than the pupils' work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave well and cooperate in lessons with each other and with the adults. The school's focus on developing good learning behaviour is paying off and it is clear that, despite the early point in the year, pupils are responding well to the good routines which have already been established.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The executive headteacher and the head of school have established good working relationships and a clear sense of purpose and direction. The governing body is contributing to the forward momentum. Governors are increasingly knowledgeable and influential, and carefully scrutinise the work and progress of the school in fortnightly meetings. Records of meetings show that governors ask pertinent questions and hold the senior leadership to account.

Senior leadership has been enhanced by the appointment of a special educational needs coordinator who ensures that pupils with particular difficulties are accurately identified and, as a result, their specific needs are beginning to be addressed more effectively. Middle leadership has also been strengthened with phase and subject leadership roles now clearly defined. This group are relatively new but already beginning to have a positive influence. They are all involved in monitoring activities

and so are beginning to build a realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses across the school.

The school improvement plan is detailed and practical with ambitious end of year targets sharply based on pupils' achievement. The school regularly assesses and evaluates progress towards these targets but there is no break down of the targets to provide milestones against which success can be measured at various points throughout the year. Information from rigorous monitoring including lesson observations, pupils' books, teachers' planning and termly assessments is well used to gain a full picture of where and why pupils' progress is speeding up or slower than it should be. This is followed up with whole-school training or individual coaching and teachers are increasingly using assessment routines more rigorously so they can be held to account for the progress made by the pupils in their classes.

External support

The local authority effectively fulfils its monitoring and evaluation role as well as providing support and training for specific aspects of teaching and learning such as mathematics. Its statement of action has been amended to address the weaknesses identified when it was submitted to Ofsted. There is still further amendment required to clarify targets at various points during the year. The federation is providing substantial and influential support, particularly through the developing partnerships between teachers and subject leaders across the schools.