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28 November 2012

Ms Emily Kirk
Headteacher
Gaskell Community Primary School
Thomas Holden Street
Bolton
Lancashire
BL1 2QG

Dear Ms Kirk

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Gaskell Community Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 27 November 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection.

The headteacher, formerly the deputy headteacher, took up her post in September 2012. Two new deputy headteachers were also appointed and took up their posts in September 2012. One class teacher left at the end of a fixed-term contract in July 2012.

As a result of the inspection on 29 February 2012, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Results for teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2012 showed an improvement in reading but a dip in mathematics performance when compared with the previous year. Unvalidated data indicate that outcomes at the end of Key Stage 2 improved significantly in 2012, both in terms of the standards pupils attained and in terms of the progress they made. The proportion of pupils achieving at least the expected level in both English and mathematics increased very significantly. More pupils also reached the higher levels. This is particularly notable given that the 2012 cohort had lower prior attainment at Key Stage 1 than the previous year's cohort. Progress measures show that pupils achieved well during Key Stage 2 with many making better than expected progress. Much of this progress occurred during the pupils' final year in the school, showing the impact of the school's targeted work, including interventions to plug gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Groups that achieved particularly well included girls, pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language. (The pupil premium provides schools with additional funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and students who have been looked after continuously for more than six months.) Pupils' work is assessed regularly and the data

January 2012



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

collated centrally. The data indicate that improvements in progress and attainment are evident across all year groups in Key Stage 2. Work scrutiny and observations broadly confirm this, but suggest that current rates of improvement are not as rapid as those achieved with the 2012 Year 6 cohort.

Rising standards are the result of better teaching. This has been achieved through a combination of generic staff training and specific support for individual teachers. In the Key Stage 2 lessons visited, very good relationships were evident and teachers took care to provide stimulating teaching approaches that engaged interest. Lessons are well planned with suitably challenging activities for pupils of different abilities. Teachers are alert to individual pupils' responses and adapt their planning or intervene with individuals appropriately. The quality of questioning is variable. In some cases it is effective but in others teachers miss opportunities to probe further and explore beyond pupils' initial answers. Teachers' explanations are clear and care is taken to develop pupils' vocabulary. Correct punctuation is also emphasised. The school has a strong focus on reading and is developing strategies to improve reading comprehension. The letters and sounds lessons visited were well taught and conducted at a brisk pace. Some pupils do not apply their knowledge of letters and sound in their spelling and teachers do not always give correct spelling enough emphasis. Marking is generally helpful with specific targets for improvement that are often followed up by pupils. However, in some books there is a tendency to give over effusive praise that is not specific. Some teacher-led sessions go on for too long, without enough pupil involvement beyond listening. Attitudes to learning are good and most pupils do persevere with the tasks set, but some, including some more-able pupils, lack independence and rely on the readily available adult direction and supervision. Attendance has improved, reflecting pupils' enjoyment of school.

Governors are providing clear strategic leadership. Their understanding of data and their implications has improved and they are increasingly able to ask suitably challenging questions. Performance management, including that of the headteacher, is recognised as an important mechanism for holding staff to account.

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school. The culture is now strongly focused on learning and expectations of pupils are much higher. Very challenging individual targets are set for all pupils and, although these are not always met, rates of progress are now faster, pupils are catching up and more are reaching age-related expectations. A wide range of policies has been introduced which clearly set out management expectations. Monitoring and evaluation are very thorough and findings are used to plan improvements at all levels. The outcomes for the 2012 Year 6 cohort demonstrate the success of the school's strategies. Performance management objectives for teachers include the academic attainment of pupils they teach and progress towards these is reviewed regularly.

The curriculum has been reviewed and is providing more interesting lessons in a range of subjects. A work scrutiny showed a few examples of the use of writing skills in other subjects. There is only limited evidence of pupils using their mathematics skills in problem-

solving, investigative and practical activities. It is recognised that more needs to be done to develop these opportunities to help further consolidation of basic skills.

The statement of action prepared by the local authority was found to be fit for purpose. The local authority had identified the school as in need of support before the inspection in February 2012. Support included the appointment of an executive headteacher to lead the school in the absence of a substantive headteacher. The new headteacher has access to a national leader of education (the former executive headteacher) for support and guidance. Advisers and consultants have worked with staff and the local authority has established links with successful schools for the sharing of good practice. Reviews have provided external assessments of the progress being made together with recommendations.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate their progress at Key Stage 2, particularly in mathematics and writing by:
 - maintaining the focus on improving teaching and learning
 - increasing the proportion of good and better lessons
 - ensuring that more pupils reach the higher levels in their work
 - using assessment information more consistently to ensure that lessons are based on what pupils know and can do and what they need to learn next
 - broadening the range of teaching styles to stimulate pupils' greater involvement in learning
 - providing more opportunities in mathematics for pupils to use and apply their skills in problem-solving, investigative and practical activities, and in writing to practise their skills in a range of subjects.