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Ian Melloy
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Melloy

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Oakhill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12–13 December 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in 5 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 – inadequate

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – inadequate

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 second monitoring inspection on 12–13 December 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the senior leadership team, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. The inspector heard pupils read and looked at the work in pupils' work books. The inspector completed seven lesson observations jointly with the headteacher, observing all teachers and classes.

Context

This is a small school. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children attend Nursery in the mornings and four-year-old children are taught in a Reception class. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are taught in single-age classes in the mornings and together in a mixed-age Key Stage 1 class in the afternoons. Both teachers in Key Stage 1 have taken over these classes since the previous monitoring visit. Pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 are taught in two mixed-age classes and in Year 6, they are taught in a single-age class.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Children respond well to the lively teaching and quick pace in the Reception class. Children are happy to be in school and settle in well at the beginning of each day. They enjoy exploring the number and shape of the week, developing language well throughout these activities. They use the correct names for solid shapes such as 'cuboids' and 'sphere'. Children develop early reading skills well, recognising common words, such as days of the week. Because of children's limited reading skills, the use of picture cues, such as a 'visual timetable' to keep all children informed of the day's activities, is effective.

From this point, progress slows down. The most recent Year 2 national curriculum assessments improved slightly on previous years, but still show that pupils are over a year behind where they should be in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress across Key Stage 1 remains, inadequate. Pupils currently in Years 1 and 2 have limited vocabulary and find difficulty in speaking and writing in well-constructed sentences. Even pupils who are capable of doing harder tasks are working at levels below where they should be for their age. Handwriting is untidy and the spelling of some common words is inaccurate. When reading, pupils recognise the more common words, but they are not yet able to use their knowledge of letters and the sounds they make to work out how to read unfamiliar words. They are not yet fluent readers and only have a simple understanding of what they are reading.

Although Key Stage 2 pupils are now making satisfactory and sometimes good progress, standards still remain well below those expected for their age. The latest data on pupils' attainment and progress show that less-able pupils, pupils with special educational needs and those entitled to claim a free school meal are progressing slightly better than others. The school is beginning to close the attainment gap between these groups and that of most other pupils. In the 2012 national curriculum assessments, standards in English and mathematics, although still broadly average, were lower than in the previous year. The school's current assessment data show pupils are working at levels that are well below where they should be for their age at this point in the school year.

Pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 are at least a year behind in their writing, and in reading and mathematics about two terms behind what is expected. Pupils are not used to writing at length and longer pieces of writing are not well constructed. Spelling is inaccurate, for example, even of some simple words such as 'alright', 'because' and 'reach' are written incorrectly. Handwriting is not as well developed as it should be and the presentation of written work shows too little care. Because mistakes are not corrected and untidy presentation is not addressed, progress and the pace of improvement in pupils' books are too slow. Pupils enjoy reading and mostly read accurately. They have a clear understanding of the stories they read. Pupils are able to calculate correctly. Although they do not readily know answers to multiplication and division questions, they work out answers accurately. However, when the same questions are put into word problems, pupils lose confidence and find difficulty in working out ways to solve problems.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Accelerate pupils' progress so that their attainment is at least average by July 2013 – inadequate.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching and learning is not as good as at the time of the previous monitoring visit when no inadequate lessons were observed. An increased proportion of satisfactory and inadequate lessons were seen during this visit, and at Key Stage 1, teaching was poor. Teaching was good in the Early Years Foundation Stage and, at Key Stage 2, it was either satisfactory or good. At present, teaching is not good enough to help pupils catch up from past underachievement.

Teachers do not always prepare work to improve pupils' reading, writing and mathematics. Tasks are not set at the right level for pupils at different ages or ability. Teachers are not using their knowledge of what pupils can do to plan lessons that move them on. In a literacy lesson, Year 1 pupils sat for too long constructing

pieces of writing about how Santa would deal with a problem with his sleigh on Christmas Eve. In a Year 6 lesson, pupils had too little time to complete the piece of writing set. Pupils in Year 2 were given literacy tasks that were not set at the right level for them. The words used were too difficult and the task was too hard. As a result, pupils soon lost concentration and produced little writing of an acceptable quality.

The time spent in teaching which is direct instruction at the beginning and throughout lessons varies from class to class. In a mathematics lesson for Year 4 and 5 pupils, the teacher used time efficiently and set each group to their tasks immediately they were ready. Pupils' learning was closely monitored and when they started to struggle, the teacher called them together and went over the idea so they progressed in their learning confidently. In other lessons, the teacher spoke for too long and allowed pupils too little time to practise their learning.

The marking of pupils' work does little to help them improve. Although teachers usually check work, the comments made do not let pupils know what they have done well and what they need to do next to improve. Teachers do not comment enough on the poor spelling in pupils' work and poor presentation is not corrected. Teachers do not set a good example to pupils to improve the presentation of their work; during the lessons observed, teachers made spelling mistakes when writing examples of 'describing words' and, in mathematics, untidy drawings representing fractions, did little to help pupils build ideas that fractions are equal parts. Too much work remains unfinished and pupils are not made to follow up any mistakes they have made.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve teaching and accelerate pupils' progress – inadequate.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour in lessons observed was at least satisfactory and more often good. Only when tasks fail to fully stimulate them, do pupils lose concentration. Even then, behaviour does not disturb others in class. A number of pupils wrote notes to say how much behaviour has improved and others confirmed this in their conversations with the inspector.

There have been fewer instances where pupils have not been allowed to go to school for a short period because of poor behaviour. Pupils come into school well before the beginning of lessons so they have time to settle at the beginning of the day, talk to their friends and discuss any difficulties with teachers. Other pupils speak highly of Oakley's Den, where pupils who may have difficulty coping with longer breaks, can stay in school and play games under supervision. However, there is no opportunity for those children whose circumstances make them more

vulnerable than most, to experience a supported and calm beginning to the day with specially trained adults.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- 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

Senior leaders are monitoring improvement and have drawn up plans to evaluate the impact of new initiatives on pupils' progress. Through careful checking of pupils' learning, they are now more aware of how much needs to be done to help pupils catch up and achieve the standards of which they are capable. However, some of the school's self-evaluation overestimates how much the school is improving.

School leaders have improved how they measure accurately the progress pupils are making and how standards compare nationally with those expected for each age. This has worked well and senior leaders now have a clear picture of standards and progress in each year group. Through careful analysis of progress data, school leaders are aware of the challenge facing them but have done too little to improve progress through ensuring good or better teaching on a day-to-day basis. There have been changes in staffing, but the variation in the quality of teaching seen during lesson observations clearly shows that governors and senior leaders have not made their minimum expectations of the quality of teaching in each lesson clear.

There have been significant moves to give teachers the best circumstances possible in which to improve pupils' progress. The pupil premium (additional funding for children in local authority care, those known to be eligible to claim free school meals and any with a parent in the armed services) has been spent wisely to keep class sizes small and to provide additional adult support. Key Stage 1 classes, for example, have 11 and 14 pupils and Year 6, 14 pupils. Even so, teaching is not yet promoting good or better progress.

Governors are not sufficiently aware of what is taking place in classrooms. They are not challenging the senior leadership team enough to answer for the lack of progress in school improvement since the last monitoring visit. They are looking too much at the long-term future of the school and not enough at the day-to-day improvement through, for example, checking on how well teachers help pupils make good or better progress.

After a slow start, teachers are now benefiting from their links with a partner school, where good and better teaching can be observed. This is evident in the Early Years Foundation Stage, for example, where teaching is consistently good.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

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

External support

The school has benefited from well-judged, good-quality support from the local authority. The focus of additional support has been to improve the quality of teaching and the impact of leadership and management. The local authority has been instrumental in organising good-quality training, and providing links with an effective school with pupils from similar backgrounds.