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12 November 2012

Mrs Sue Cornall
Headteacher
Highfield Primary School
Wright Street
Chorley
Lancashire
PR6 0SP

Dear Mrs Cornall

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Highfield Primary School

Following my visit with Leszek Iwaskow, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 8 and 9 November 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 November 2011. 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 Executive Director for Children & Young People for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James

Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2012



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2011

- Improve the quality of teaching and thus raise pupils' attainment and achievement in all subjects, and particularly in writing, by:
 - making sure pupils know precisely how well they are doing in their work and know what to do in order to improve it
 - improving teachers' lesson planning and the use of adult support to ensure that the abilities and interests of each pupil are met
 - providing sufficient challenge in lessons to ensure that pupils achieve as well as they should.

- Improve the leadership and management of the school by:
 - taking effective measures to monitor and improve the quality of teaching
 - improving the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation procedures to accurately measure the impact of the school's actions
 - raising expectations of pupils' performance throughout the school
 - ensuring that the governing body challenges the school to address weaknesses and sustain improvement
 - rigorously applying systems and engaging with parents and carers to improve attendance.

Special measures: monitoring of Highfield Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 November 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, a group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection two teachers seconded to the school through arrangements with the local authority have returned to their own schools. Two class teachers have resigned. Two new appointments have been made: an assistant headteacher who also acts as the English coordinator and a senior teacher who is the mathematics coordinator. Both joined the school in September.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The 2012 unvalidated Key Stage 2 national test results showed a very small improvement in overall standards of attainment compared with the previous year. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected level for their age in both English and mathematics rose by three percentage points which was less than the equivalent rise nationally. The school figure remains well below average. Pupils' performance improved at the expected level in writing but it fell by a bigger amount in reading when compared with the previous year. Pupils' performance at the higher levels improved in writing and mathematics but fell slightly in reading.

Overall rates of progress during Key Stage 2 did improve on the previous year but they remained below the equivalent national figures, especially in mathematics. Value added data indicate that most groups made inadequate progress given their starting points in Year 3. Disabled pupils and those with specific learning or behavioural needs made slower progress than other pupils in the school and slower progress than similar groups nationally. The standards remained low for those at risk of not doing so well, despite the school receiving additional government funding to provide extra support for them. None of the interim Key Stage 2 attainment and progress targets set in the governors' action plan were met. The school did not meet the current government floor standards.

Overall standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2012 were lower than in 2011. There was a marked drop in standards in writing, a lesser drop in reading but a small rise in mathematics. Only just over half the pupils achieved at least the expected level in writing. No pupils exceeded the expected level for their age in reading and only one in writing and one in mathematics.

The standards reached by boys were not as high as those reached by girls at either Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2. At Key Stage 1, pupils for whom English is an additional language reached higher standards than those for whom English is a first language. The results of the Year 1 letters and sounds assessment were average.

The school's own assessment data show some improvement in terms of rates of progress within each year group. However, this is not well substantiated by inspectors' lesson observations and scrutiny of work. Broadly, progress is not rapid enough to ensure that pupils catch up and reach the levels they should be capable of for their age. The standard of pupils' written work remains low with weaknesses in punctuation, spelling, vocabulary, and sentence structure.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is not improving rapidly enough to ensure that pupils make the sustained good progress necessary to catch up and reach levels appropriate to their age. . Although in a minority of lessons there were examples of groups of pupils making good progress, this was not typical and some inadequate teaching was seen. Weaknesses in teaching include a lack of urgency, slow pace and some poor use of time. Many pupils find independent work difficult and, although most behave sensibly, they sometimes sit quietly without actually doing very much and so achieve little. This is not always picked up quickly and tackled effectively by the adults present. Teachers are often not explicit enough about how much work is expected so that while some pupils work steadily and productively, others do much less. On occasions teacher-led introductions go on for too long and pupils' attention wanders, especially when there is limited interaction with them. This leads to too little time being allowed for pupils to practise and develop their skills. Instructions are not always sufficiently clear so that pupils have difficulty understanding what is required of them. Children sometimes sit and wait for adult attention either because they have not been given enough to do or because they are stuck. Marking is of variable quality. Teachers tend to use praise readily, even when the standard of work is poor, and too many errors are left uncorrected. There is not enough specific marking that identifies the next steps pupils should take to improve their work. Where constructive feedback is given, it is not always followed up by pupils in later pieces of work. Teachers' behaviour management strategies are usually effective in ensuring that disruptive behaviour is rare. Relationships are good and teachers are caring, encouraging and supportive. Some teacher-led inputs are very clear and some effective individual help is given, both by teachers and by teaching assistants. Although teachers' expectations of pupils' capabilities are in some instances higher, resources are sometimes pitched at the wrong level and teachers are not sufficiently adept

at planning for different abilities, or adapting their planning during lessons in the light of pupils' responses.

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

- improve the quality of teaching and thus raise pupils' attainment and achievement in all subjects, and particularly in writing – inadequate

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Around school pupils are polite and friendly. They move around calmly and are helpful to visitors, for example, by opening doors. In lessons, although overtly disruptive behaviour is rare, pupils' attitudes to learning are variable. Some find it hard to concentrate for long without much adult attention and supervision and so do not achieve as much as they could. Positive relationships and teachers' supportive attitudes help to foster self-esteem. However, this is not always associated with high enough expectations in terms of volume and standard of work. Attendance is improving, reflecting pupils' enjoyment of school and the school's work in this area. The recent appointment of a learning mentor is helping to improve communication with parents and carers.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

While some of the school's improvement strategies are beginning to prove effective, others are less so. Attendance is being tackled successfully. The checking of pupils' work is now more structured. However, there has been insufficient evaluation of the impact of the school's strategies on standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. There has been a tendency to give more attention to the progress made within each year group rather than to the standards achieved. Regular testing is carried out and the school has an established progress tracking system. Following each round of tests, pupil progress meetings are held with individual teachers to identify pupils who are not making enough progress. The system is helping to improve rates of progress but still has some way to go to ensure that all make rapid progress. Strategies to improve teaching are not effective enough to ensure that teaching improves quickly. The regular checking of teachers' performance is not always precise enough. For example, the fact that basic errors are not routinely and consistently corrected has not been picked up and addressed, so that low standards persist. Records of lesson observations sometimes focus too much on what the teacher is doing rather than the actual learning and progress of the pupils.

The new English and mathematics coordinators have a sound understanding of the key issues and the need to develop strategies to tackle these. For example, the weakness in spelling was immediately acknowledged. However, as yet, there is no whole-school policy to improve it. Leaders and managers recognise that reading needs to be prioritised and are developing strategies to improve engagement and motivation, especially of boys but it is too early to assess the impact of these. The management of arrangements for disabled pupils

and those with specific learning and behavioural needs is not sufficiently focused. Strategies to enrich the curriculum are helping to improve pupils' engagement but opportunities for pupils to apply their English and mathematics skills through work in other subjects are not well planned.

The governors' standards and effectiveness committee meets termly to review progress in relation to the action plan. Governors recognise that performance management of school staff is critical in school improvement. Changes to the system are planned and performance objectives will include specific measurable targets relating to the achievement of relevant teaching groups. The Chair of the Governing Body, who is himself a primary headteacher, has a clear understanding of the relevant data and of the current position of the school. Records of meetings show that governors have questioned the school's failure to meet the interim targets set in the action plan. Nevertheless the extent of the challenge provided by governors is not clear from the minutes.

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

- improve the leadership and management of the school – inadequate

External support

The local authority has continued to provide much appropriate support. Paired lesson observations have been undertaken with local authority advisers. Training has been provided for all staff on the role of the subject leader. With consultancy support, termly action plans have been developed and implemented by the subject leaders for assessment, numeracy, literacy, teaching and learning, curriculum and special needs.

Teaching and learning, and literacy and numeracy consultants have worked with individual teachers and with groups of teachers to develop teaching skills. The training provided has been wide ranging. The literacy consultant has provided training in the teaching of letters and sounds for teachers and training in reading for teaching assistants. The teaching and learning consultant has provided both whole-school training and targeted support for individual members of staff. This has been focused on developing teachers' understanding of the criteria for good teaching and their ability to put it into practice. Inspection observation evidence shows that this training has not been fully consolidated in day-to-day classroom teaching.