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Peter Hollis
Interim headteacher
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Dear Mr Hollis

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Oakhill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12–13 March 2013, 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 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 – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed. One newly qualified teacher may be appointed in any key stage.

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 third monitoring inspection on 12-13 March 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, members of staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and spoke to pupils informally during lesson observations. All teachers were observed in eight lesson observations, three jointly observed with the interim headteacher.

Context

This is a smaller-than-average sized school. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children attend Nursery in the mornings. Four-year-old children are taught in a Reception class and some work with nursery children in the mornings. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 follow a key stage timetable working in ability groups. Two teachers work with these pupils in the morning and one in the afternoon. Pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 are taught in two mixed-age classes and in Year 6 are taught in a single-age class.

The headteacher resigned his post and left the school in January. There is an interim headteacher who is the headteacher at nearby Hanbury's Farm Primary School and is a local leader of education. He has supported Oakhill leadership since the school was made subject to special measures. This term a teacher from Hanbury's Farm Primary School has worked with and supported Key Stage 1 teachers, who are both leaving the school at the end of the current term. Two experienced teachers have been appointed to work in Key Stage 1 from the beginning of the Summer term. A third teacher has been appointed to join the staff at the beginning of the Summer term. This will enable the reorganisation of Key Stage 2 into four single-age classes.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The latest progress information shows improvement in pupils' achievement. However, there is still some way to go to catch up on previous underachievement, particularly in Key Stage 2.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage continue to make good progress across all areas of learning. Children in Nursery make good progress. From very low starting points, attainment on entry to the Reception Year remains below but is much closer to that typical of their age. From a very early age children learn how to recognise letters and the sounds they make. This is built on successfully and children are confident to write simple and familiar words. They recognise a good range of simple words and build early-reading skills well. Children engage enthusiastically in a wide range of activities that enable them to learn through discovery and finding things out

for themselves. Through 'putting out the washing' children learn to recognise the numbers on the items of clothing and, with a little support and careful questioning, are able to peg them out in order. Children are fascinated by the new electronic tablets and concentrate very well on recognising and ordering numbers or learning how to form letters to help their writing. Their personal development is good. They concentrate well, stay fully occupied and are inquisitive learners. Much of their learning takes place individually and children do not automatically collaborate with other children or form themselves into working groups. They are not good at sharing and teachers have to sort out occasional minor squabbles over pieces of equipment.

Children in the Reception Year make notable progress and learn quickly through interesting and challenging activities. They learn quickly new letter sounds and rapidly write them into sentences, using their previous learning well to develop reading and writing skills. Children apply their knowledge of letters and sounds (phonics) accurately to their spelling. For example, after learning the new sound 'ure' they were quickly able to accurately write a nonsense sentence 'The secure manure smells.' Children applied their previous learning to spell the words correctly and reminded each other about full stops, capital letters and finger spaces. Staff constantly interact with children and engage them in conversation. Children respond well and, although they are enthusiastic speakers, their limited vocabulary makes it difficult for them to express their ideas and thoughts clearly. They do listen well and respond to requests quickly and confidently. By the end of Reception, attainment is broadly average.

The good foundation laid in the Nursery and the Reception Years puts pupils in a strong position to make at least adequate progress through Key Stage 1. Despite some weak teaching in the past, pupils are on track to achieve average results by the end of Year 2. Recent school assessment information shows pupils in both Years 1 and 2 are working at the appropriate level for their age in reading and writing, but are about a term behind where they should be in mathematics. With the help of a teacher from the partner school, children have made good progress in reading and writing and satisfactory progress in mathematics since the last monitoring visit. Pupils in Year 2 read satisfactorily at the level appropriate for their age. When they come across unfamiliar words they have limited strategies to work out how to read them. They have limited phonic awareness and are not familiar with the sounds different combinations of letters make. However, they recognise most words but have a limited understanding of the stories as shown by their book reviews. Reviews contain limited information on what they liked or didn't like about the book. Pupils still show limited ability to talk fluently and to present their ideas, for example about the books they have read, with ease and confidence.

There is a mixed picture at Key Stage 2. Progress since the last visit has improved, with mostly satisfactory or good progress being made in reading, writing and mathematics. However, there is much catching up still to do to compensate for past underachievement. Pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5, who have been taught in mixed-age

classes, are up to one and a half years behind where they should be in reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment in Years 4 and 5 is of greatest concern as they are between one and two years behind. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom the school receives pupil-premium funding make similar progress to other pupils in their year groups and the gaps in the attainment between these pupils and others are not yet narrowing quickly enough.

Some pupils struggle to apply their numeracy knowledge to solve problems. Because their knowledge of multiplication and division bonds is weak, they are not able to fully concentrate on methods to find fractions of numbers for example. Some more-able pupils in Year 4 worked out strategies to find a quarter of a quantity by halving and halving again, but were unable to explain what they did, freely admitting they found explaining hard. Some are not yet ready to move onto written calculation and only fully understood finding fractions of numbers when they used cubes or counters to calculate practically. Older pupils are able to solve number problems well, but the presentation of their work is disorganised and does not accurately record their methods. It is not easy to follow what they have done or where they may have made a mistake.

Pupils' writing is improving satisfactorily. Pupils in Years 4 and 5 learned how to punctuate accurately sentences containing speech. Those who struggle with this work were able to punctuate accurately with some support while those who were capable of harder work punctuated sentences where the spoken words were split with descriptive text. Pupils' work books show some more-able pupils are writing at length well, such as note taking from non-fiction text or the internet and developing these ideas into descriptive writing on tropical birds for example. However, frequent use of worksheets limits some other pupils' opportunities to write at length. Pupils read generally accurately but still show limited skills to work out difficult and unfamiliar words. They still find difficulty in speaking out their ideas clearly and concisely.

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 – satisfactory.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has improved significantly since the last visit. Any inadequate teaching seen at the last visit has been improved. Most teaching is now good, and there are some outstanding aspects to some teachers' work, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Teachers use assessment information well to plan tasks that match pupils' learning needs and build well on what they have learned before, including in the mixed-age classes. This means that pupils are mostly confident in their learning and are making

mixed but better progress than before. Tasks are interesting to pupils and encourage their enthusiasm for learning. The whole-school focus on 'Traction Man' is used well to base learning across different subjects and helps teachers make links that help pupils see the relevance of what they are learning.

Although the timing of activities in lessons has improved since the last visit, time allowed for pupils to complete their work in some lessons is still insufficient, because introductions to a topic or the teaching of facts and techniques take too long. Additionally, too many worksheets for pupils to complete limit opportunities for them to organise their work for themselves and to develop presentation skills. There is no structured approach to supporting the development of pupils' speaking skills. Although teachers recognise that this is a barrier to some pupils' learning and often causes frustration, they do not yet do enough to improve pupils' speaking skills. This is started off well in the Early Years Foundation Stage, but is not carried through Key Stages 1 and 2 well enough. Similarly, some teachers' have poor knowledge of phonics and how to teach this area, and do not carry through the good practice seen in the Reception Year into Key Stage 1 and beyond.

Occasionally, teachers use methods that are not appropriate for the stage and level at which pupils are confident. Sometimes, teachers expect pupils to be able to cope with written methods, such as solving questions in mathematics, when they still need a more practical approach to secure their understanding of basic ideas. In other lessons, teaching assistants use a practical approach, which helped pupils who were struggling to develop a clear understanding. Inappropriate approaches to learning do not help narrow the attainment gap between different groups.

Marking of pupils' work mostly, although not always, gives pupils clear ideas about how to improve and what they need to do next to move onto the next steps. However, pupils do not always respond to the advice given or to where mistakes have been highlighted and this is not always picked up by teachers.

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

- Improve teaching and accelerate pupils' progress – good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour has improved since the last visit. In all lessons observed it was good. There was no low-level disruption, pupils joined in activities enthusiastically and there was a 'busy' atmosphere in lessons. Pupils have good relationships with adults and freely talk to them, asking questions about their work and for help when required. They respond to teachers' behaviour management quickly and lessons run smoothly, without interruption.

The school has a number of pupils with identified behavioural issues and who come from backgrounds that make them vulnerable. Good care, guidance and support

helps these pupils adjust to daily routines and conform to the school's high expectations of their behaviour. There have been no instances of pupils not being allowed to come to school because of poor behaviour since the last visit. Attendance remains close to the national average and most pupils come to school punctually.

Break times are times when pupils burn off their surplus energy and are often boisterous. However relationships between pupils are good and there is no evidence of poor behaviour. Pupils generally enjoy these times and are safe in a school that is free from aggressive and threatening behaviour.

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 – good

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

New leadership has been a key factor to the good progress made since the last visit in addressing the issues identified in the school's last full inspection. Since taking over in January, the interim headteacher, in conjunction with the governing body and staff, has quickly formed an accurate view of what needs to be done to help the school catch up from the slow improvement made prior to his appointment. He has developed a realistic plan of action aimed at improving the quality of education, particularly teaching. New resources for the teaching of reading have been purchased, but training to improve teachers' skills in this area is planned but is yet to take place. New staff have been appointed to join the school in the next term. He has been very effective in involving the staff in the improvement process and thereby creating amongst all staff, a determination to succeed. Through honest and rigorous evaluation, all staff and governors are aware of what needs to be done and of the need for a quick pace of improvement. Rigorous and brisk implementation of the action plan is already showing some impact on the issues identified at the previous inspection and the school is confident of accelerated progress next term.

Leadership has been devolved. A new senior leadership team has been created, which meets weekly to discuss strategies for improvement and the impact these are having. Communication has improved considerably and weekly staff meetings take place a couple of days after senior leadership team meetings so all staff are aware. Staff meetings have a fresh purpose. Many of them are interactive for the staff. They share their concerns and celebrate their successes. They take part in moderation of pupils' work, discussing how pieces of writing for example fit into National Curriculum levels and learning from each others' ideas. They have refined their ideas about what assessment information tells them about progress and have become better at using this in planning work for the range of pupils' learning needs. They discuss and plan whole school initiatives, such as how 'Traction Man' is to be written into planning to excite and engage pupils in learning. A strong, unified and determined approach to school improvement is evident in the work of the school.

Monitoring of teaching by the headteacher has improved the quality of teaching and learning significantly. Teachers in Key Stage 2 continue to include advice given to them through observation of good and better teaching and through feedback given to them after lesson observations by the interim headteacher. This has led to improved teaching at this key stage. At Key Stage 1, a teacher of proven skills supports teachers and often leads by example, effectively improving the quality of teaching and learning at this key stage.

Senior leaders evaluate assessment information from class teachers very well to create a profile of how standards in reading, writing and mathematics in each year group compare to the nationally expected level. They know exactly how far behind each cohort is and how much progress each year group has made over the last term. This provides a very secure starting point for next term. Class teachers know exactly how much progress their class needs to make to secure improvement.

Governors responded exceptionally well to the last monitoring report. They took decisive action to improve the leadership and management of the school so that improvement became a possibility. This has proved to be very effective. The Chair of the Governing Body is involved in developing strategies for improvement. Other governors visit the school and visit classrooms to report to governors what is taking place. Governors are now more challenging and they have supported the school improvement well in the last term.

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

- Ensure the more frequent assessment, collation and analysis of pupil progress data – good

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

External support

Intervention by the local authority, working in conjunction with the governing body, has been crucial to moving the school forward since the last visit. The local authority has supported the governors in putting in place leadership that is active, which has established a clear and realistic plan for school improvement and which has created optimism for the future. Progress evaluation visits take place each term, through which the local authority evaluates achievement, teaching, behaviour and leadership. They report honestly and in detail and support the interim headteacher's views on what the school needs to do to improve.