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Sarah O'Boyle
Headteacher
Galton Valley Primary School
Brasshouse Lane
Smethwick
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Dear Mrs O'Boyle

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Galton Valley Primary School

Following my visit with Janet Harvey, Additional Inspector, to your school on 20–21 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 in February 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 – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers should 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 Sandwell.

Yours sincerely

Lois Furness
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise achievement and the quality of teaching so that by July 2013 attainment is at least in line with national averages in mathematics and English, by:
 - ensuring that there is a systematic approach to teaching skills in phonics, reading, writing and mathematics, and providing opportunities for pupils to use and apply these skills across the curriculum
 - making effective use of assessment information to ensure that work is always well matched to pupils' abilities
 - assessing pupils' ongoing progress in lessons so that tasks can be adapted if necessary
 - using support staff more effectively to accelerate pupils' learning and to encourage pupils to work independently.

- Improve the effectiveness of all leaders and the governing body in order to secure rapid improvement by:
 - regularly and rigorously monitoring the quality of teaching and using this information to provide a coherent programme of professional development for all staff
 - regularly checking that assessments are accurate and tracking the progress made by all pupils, groups and classes in order to set challenging targets and to hold teachers to account for pupils' progress
 - training leaders so they have the skills to monitor their areas of responsibility using all evidence, including national data, and to accurately prioritise, plan and evaluate for improvement.

Special measures: monitoring of Galton Valley Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 20–21 March 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all 15 classes. Many of these observations were conducted with the headteacher. Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior and middle leaders, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. They also observed pupils' behaviour during the school day and spoke to them informally.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, three teachers have resigned. The deputy headteacher, who is responsible for the Early Years Foundation Stage and early reading, assumed her role at the start of the spring term. At the time of this monitoring inspection four teachers were absent, including two who have been on long-term absences. Three classes were being taught by permanent members of staff, and a temporary teacher was teaching the other class. An academy sponsor has been allocated to the school, but has not yet met with the school's leaders or begun the consultation process.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Improvements to the quality of teaching are having a positive effect on the achievement of pupils throughout the school in reading, writing and mathematics. The detailed tracking system shows that attainment is rising, and more pupils are now working at age-related expectations in all year groups. The majority of pupils throughout the school are now making good progress in lessons that is being sustained in the longer term.

Children in Reception are making good progress. Adults prepare a range of stimulating activities to promote learning. Children maintain concentration and interest in activities well, particularly when they are working with an adult. They are developing early reading skills well through daily teaching of the sounds letters represent (phonics). In Year 1, pupils' phonic knowledge has improved and they are now more confident in blending the sounds they now know well to read unfamiliar words. Approximately 60% of the pupils are on track to pass the Year 1 phonics test in the summer term.

In Year 2, the information on pupils' progress shows that the improvement seen in 2012 is continuing. Most pupils are working at age-related expectations, with more on track to attain the National Curriculum Level 3 in all subjects by the end of this

year. In Year 6 attainment is on track to be broadly average in English and mathematics at the nationally expected Level 4, but below average at the higher Level 5. Writing is the weakest subject area in Year 6, and is the focus of a forthcoming 'Easter school'.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs continue to make similar progress to their classmates. The gap in attainment between boys and girls is narrowing as the progress made by boys is accelerating. Pupils supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for children in local authority care, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, or those who have a parent in the armed forces) are making good progress. Extra individual help and guidance are having a good impact on their learning. As a result, the gap is narrowing between their attainment and that of pupils who are not eligible for the additional funding. The gap was approximately two and a half years in all subjects in 2011, but their attainment is now very close to that of other groups in reading, six months behind in writing and one year behind in mathematics.

The standard of presentation in pupils' work is improving, and they continue to have good opportunities to write at length. Pupils' handwriting is still an area of concern, and they are having regular lessons on how to form letters correctly and develop a neat, legible style of handwriting. Teachers do not yet encourage pupils enough to edit their own writing in order to identify simple errors in punctuation, spelling and grammar.

The quality of teaching

All staff are working hard to implement the changes introduced by the school. Most are doing this successfully, but a few are still some way from ensuring that their teaching is consistently good. Too much teaching still requires improvement, although an increasing proportion is now good or outstanding and no inadequate teaching was observed during the monitoring inspection.

Some good teaching was seen in all year groups. The most effective teachers use assessment information well to plan lesson activities that match pupils' ability levels. Any pupils at risk of underachieving are now identified more swiftly and are generally given effective additional support. Teachers' questioning and explanation skills are good, as seen in Year 6 when the teacher used errors in writing to further pupils' understanding. Good support in planning the teaching of phonics means that they are now more secure in their subject knowledge and clearer about what is expected from pupils. Almost all support staff are given clear roles in supporting learning in the classroom, and understand them well. Even so, at times pupils rely too much on staff to help them rather than tackling problems for themselves.

All teachers ensure that learning objectives and success criteria are clearly displayed. They are now clear about the difference between intended learning and the activity to be completed, but do not always refer to the success criteria sufficiently regularly during each lesson to help pupils with their ongoing learning. Pupils now have more

opportunities to assess their own work and respond to teachers' comments in marking, but this practice is still more effective in English and mathematics than in other subjects. Also, teachers miss opportunities to help pupils make better progress by challenging and extending their learning.

Teachers use the interactive whiteboards well to motivate pupils, to demonstrate new concepts, and particularly to show what good writing looks like. In Year 5, for example, the teacher showed pupils how to write a plan using a character's opinion of the action. In Year 1, good modelling of an information text enabled pupils to tackle this type of writing with confidence.

Teachers' planning shows that assessment information is being used well to group pupils and set tasks at an appropriate level of difficulty. Pupils are taught in ability sets for English and mathematics, although at times teachers do not expect enough from the more-able pupils, who could be making faster progress. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are generally given appropriately challenging work.

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

- raise achievement and the quality of teaching so that by July 2013 attainment is at least in line with national averages in mathematics and English – good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils talk about the improvements to their learning over the last year. They say the 'learning walls' in English, mathematics and science provide a useful resource to help them if they are stuck in their work. They think lessons are more interesting, and thoroughly enjoy participating in tasks that require cooperation. They say that work is sometimes too easy, but also say that when this occurs the teacher usually moves them on to something more challenging.

Pupils conduct themselves well around the school, at playtime and lunchtime. Behaviour is typically good. Pupils continue to say they feel safe, and that once alerted, staff will always address any incidents of bullying or misbehaviour effectively. They show a good awareness of internet safety. All who responded to the school's recent parental questionnaire say their child is kept safe in school. Pupils' attendance is slightly above average and punctuality is good.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and senior leaders have brought about greater consistency in teaching and secured the commitment of the staff to improve further. Their evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching and learning is open and honest, and they have identified accurately the next steps they need to take in the school's improvement journey. The sharply focused 'raising achievement plan' gives a clear overview of this journey and is helping them to manage time effectively.

As at the time of the last monitoring visit, middle leaders are developing their skills and complementing the work of the senior leadership team. The science leader in particular has improved pupils' education by supporting teachers' planning and ensuring a greater emphasis on scientific investigation. The newly appointed deputy headteacher has introduced half-termly tracking of phonic knowledge to keep a close eye on pupils' developing reading skills. She has also encouraged a 'plan-do-review' approach to learning in Reception, which is involving children much more in managing their own activities.

The inclusion manager has influenced the way teachers plan learning for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, but has not as yet had the opportunity to observe the teaching of these pupils. Staff training continues to be given a high priority. The variety of courses in the spring term has included the 'improving teacher' programme, 'planning the learning journey' and science investigations.

Although no inadequate teaching was seen during this monitoring inspection, the school leaders and governors recognise that there are still weaknesses in teaching and leadership that need to be rectified. As yet, they have not carried out a half-yearly review of progress towards staff objectives to support the performance management system in identifying and eradicating weaknesses.

The effectiveness of the governing body continues to improve. Governors have attended training on how to interpret performance data, and are fully aware of attainment throughout the school. Meeting records show that they are asking questions about the attainment of different groups of pupils, and if the gaps in attainment are narrowing. They have clear documentation to show how pupil premium funding was spent during the current financial year, and a good evaluation of its impact on the achievement of Year 2 and Year 6 pupils in English and mathematics. This now needs to be extended to other year groups. Governors are also holding the headteacher more to account for managing the weaknesses in teaching and leadership.

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

- improve the effectiveness of all leaders and the governing body in order to secure rapid improvement – good.

External support

The local authority has continued to support improvement by carrying out activities such as learning walks, advising on planning, meeting subject leaders and supporting them in monitoring and evaluating their areas of responsibility. However, it has reduced direct support this term so the school's leaders can become more self-

sufficient, and has appropriately adopted a quality assurance role. The staff from the partner school have continued to provide advice and support as requested.