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Mrs Kate Stuart
Headteacher
Langland Community School
Langland Road
Milton Keynes
MK6 4HA

Dear Mrs Stuart

Special measures monitoring inspection of Langland Community School

Following my visit with Martin Marsh, additional inspector, to your school on 22 and 23 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher to the Reception Year.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Milton Keynes.

Yours sincerely

Alison Storey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching so that it is at least good and leads to much better achievement for all pupils by ensuring that:
 - teachers focus specifically on what pupils are going to learn when planning lessons
 - work is matched to the ability of pupils so all are challenged in lessons and they do not find work too easy or too hard
 - introductions by teachers take less time and pupils spend more time on activities so that time in lessons is used well
 - teachers give clear feedback to pupils about how to improve their work
 - best practice in teaching is shared more widely in the school.

- Raise expectations of behaviour around the school site by:
 - ensuring the behaviour policy is followed consistently
 - establishing clear routines for the end of break and lunchtime
 - analysing incidents of poor behaviour and checking that actions carried out are effective so they do not recur
 - reducing exclusions so they are in line with national levels.

- Ensure that leaders and managers are more focused on raising standards and ensuring pupils, including those in the nurture group, make rapid progress by:
 - checking that development plans are sharply focused and have clear actions for improvement
 - making sure that observations of lessons are judged accurately, that next steps are identified for teachers and that these are monitored to ensure improvement occurs.

- Increase governors' knowledge and understanding about their role so they are able to hold senior staff to account more robustly to ensure improvement is rapid and sustained.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 May 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with: the headteacher, consultant headteacher and other key staff, a group of teachers and the Chair of the Curriculum and Standards Committee of the Governing Body. They talked informally with pupils during lessons and at break times. The lead inspector held a telephone discussion with a representative from the local authority.

Context

The deputy headteacher went on maternity leave at February half-term. Since the beginning of March a consultant headteacher has provided leadership support for four days a week. Two teachers joined the school on temporary contracts after February half-term; two others have recently left. Their teaching responsibilities are currently covered by other staff. One learning mentor has left and been replaced.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Information from the most recent checks on pupils' reading, writing and mathematics levels shows variation in their rates of progress this school year. There are differences in the progress they make in different subjects, between year groups, and between classes in the same year group. The picture the school's information gives may not be completely accurate. First, it has not been updated since April. Second, it is difficult to make comparisons because concerns about the accuracy of previous information have led to changes in the way pupils are assessed since the first monitoring inspection. Nonetheless, it fits with the variations in the quality of teaching and learning seen by the headteacher and local authority adviser, and during this monitoring inspection.

There are some positive features. Pupils are making at least the progress they should in reading. The school's records show that the majority of pupils have made some progress in their phonics (the relationship between the way that letters are written and the sounds they represent) and comprehension skills since a new way of teaching was introduced in February. Some pupils are making good progress, but this is not enough to make up for past underachievement and so overall, pupils are not reading at a level appropriate for their age. Pupils in Year 2 are making at least the progress they should, and sometimes better, in reading, writing and mathematics.

The school's information and inspectors' observations of lessons show that in Years 3, 4, 5 and 6, pupils' progress in writing and mathematics is too slow. Pupils are not developing their skills and understanding at the rate they should, and certainly not fast enough to make up for previous underachievement. As a result, standards,

which have been below average in recent years, remain low, particularly in writing. It is highly unlikely that the ambitious targets set for pupils to reach by the end of the school year will be met.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are not making as good progress as was seen at the inspection in November 2012. In part, this is a result of staffing issues, which have also had an impact in Year 1 where progress stalled but is starting to pick up.

Because underachievement is so widespread and senior leaders have not analysed the information, it is not clear whether there are any improvements in the progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, including those in the nurture group. Senior leaders have looked at the achievement of pupils eligible for free school meals, but not in sufficient depth to give an accurate picture of how far there is to go to close the gap between them and those who are not eligible. There is more to do to unpick the progress of different groups of pupils so that by the next monitoring inspection the school can demonstrate if it is helping them to catch up.

In the lessons observed, the quality of pupils' learning was dependent on the quality of teaching and, in particular, whether the activities had the right level of challenge. Learning in mathematics is held back when teachers are not sure how to build on pupils' skills and understanding. Pupils find writing difficult because in the past they have not developed the skills they need. As a result, they are often reluctant to get on with the task and do not take enough care with their presentation and handwriting, particularly where teachers do not set a good example.

The quality of teaching

The main reason the quality of teaching is variable is that teachers do not focus consistently on what pupils need to learn. Senior leaders have introduced a simpler format for planning since the first monitoring inspection which should prompt teachers to identify what pupils will learn in each lesson. However, teachers sometimes focus more on what the pupils will do, and then teaching tends to focus on making sure pupils finish the tasks set by the end of the lesson rather than what they will learn. Changes to the way pupils are assessed mean that teachers have a more accurate picture of the level of their pupils' work. However, they are not always clear what pupils need to learn next, so sometimes the work set is either too easy or too hard, particularly where there is an over-reliance on published schemes. Teachers do not always ask the right questions or follow up pupils' answers well enough to know what they understand. Too often they do not pick up pupils' mistakes or misunderstandings during lessons. Sometimes this is because there are weaknesses in their own subject knowledge in mathematics or English.

There are some positive features of teaching to build on. In some lessons teachers are planning what they want pupils to learn, keeping a check on how well they are

doing and adapting lessons if they realise there are problems. Teachers try hard to find ways to make lessons interesting. Training in the new way of teaching reading and writing skills and the introduction of a new mathematics scheme are showing teachers how to structure lessons. Pupils are spending more time on activities because introductions to lessons take less time. 'Hot marking' has very recently been introduced as a way of helping pupils understand how well they are doing during lessons, although it is not used consistently across the school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

It is evident in lessons and around school that there have been improvements in behaviour since the last monitoring inspection. Senior leaders have worked with staff to simplify the school rules and put a new behaviour policy in place with clear systems which everyone understands. Children are taking more responsibility for their own behaviour because they know that good behaviour will be rewarded, and what the consequences of moving around the 'behaviour wheel' will be if they misbehave. Staff know that they are responsible for managing pupils' behaviour in their class.

The new approaches are reducing the number of incidents of more challenging behaviour. The number of pupils excluded for a fixed number of days has dropped month by month. More recently, the number of internal exclusions, where pupils work away from their classroom, has also dipped. However, despite trying a range of strategies, two pupils have been permanently excluded since the last monitoring inspection.

Senior leaders know that they cannot be complacent about what has been achieved and that improving the quality of teaching and learning is key to further improvements in behaviour. They are keeping a check on the number of incidents of poor behaviour and have recently started to analyse the causes to try and prevent them happening again. They also have to focus on improving attendance, which has fallen below average, and ensuring that all pupils arrive at school on time.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The consultant headteacher brings much needed leadership experience to the school. She was quick to see what was working and what was not, particularly the way that behaviour was managed, and ensured that pupils' levels of work were assessed. Working with the headteacher and staff she has helped to review and simplify systems so that they are fit for purpose and everyone is clearer about what is expected. Staff have a better understanding of the progress pupils in their class need to make because review meetings focus on individuals and each teacher has been set targets to increase the progress made by pupils in their class. The consultant headteacher has supported the headteacher to rewrite the school's improvement plan so that it is focused more sharply on the actions needed to

improve teaching and learning, and hence pupils' attainment and progress. Regular reviews of the plan help to keep track of what has been done and what needs to happen next, although they do not always pay enough attention to the difference it is making in the short term.

Being in school four days a week the consultant headteacher has been able to take on some day-to-day senior management responsibilities. This has freed the headteacher to work more systematically at improving teaching and learning. The headteacher observes lessons, feeds back to teachers what went well and what needs to improve and discusses with them the support they need. She then identifies the member of staff best placed to help them improve and following this support goes back to observe to see if teaching has improved. Judgements on the quality of teaching observed in lessons are more accurate and increasingly take account of pupils' learning. However, not enough attention is paid to checking whether the tasks set are at the right level to challenge pupils. Senior leaders realise that the information about the progress pupils make over time and the quality of teaching and learning seen in individual lessons does not always match. They know they need to consider this more carefully when deciding how good teaching usually is.

Governors have appropriate systems in place to keep a check on the school's progress and hold senior leaders accountable for their work. The Curriculum and Standards Committee focuses on pupils' achievement, while the Chairs' Committee meets monthly to monitor the progress of the school's action plan and keep an eye on routine issues. Governors are starting to ask more challenging questions but are well aware that the information they have received so far has not necessarily been accurate. Nor does it allow them to compare like with like. Much falls to a small core of governors at the moment, but it reflects their commitment to the school's improvement that all the Chairs attended the inspection feedback.

External support

In the main, the local authority has been responsive to the school's needs. It arranged for the consultant headteacher to work with the school and has provided a range of support to improve the quality of teaching and learning, although it is too early to see the impact of this work. Monthly meetings hold the school's leaders and local authority officers to account for the school's progress. However, there is not enough focus on securing strong leadership in the long term. The review of the effectiveness of the governing body focused more on paperwork than its actual work. There are no firm plans for continuing to build and sustain the leadership capacity of the school beyond the summer. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.