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7 June 2013

Mr Bradley Taylor
The Headteacher
Chiltern Gate School
Verney Avenue
High Wycombe
HP12 3NE

Dear Mr Taylor

Special measures monitoring inspection of Chiltern Gate School

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 June 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 December 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.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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 Buckinghamshire.

Yours sincerely

Hilary Macdonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching to good or better so that pupils make at least good progress by:
 - ensuring that teachers make clear to pupils what they will learn in each lesson so that they, and pupils, can see how well the pupils have achieved by the end of the lesson
 - ensuring that the work set in lessons matches the different needs and abilities of all pupils within each class and encouraging them, where possible, to learn to work with less support
 - providing teachers with the right learning resources
 - making sure that teaching assistants are clear about their roles and how they can support pupils' learning.
- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - establishing effective systems for checking how well the school is doing, including the quality of teaching, and pupils' progress and behaviour
 - ensuring that the outcomes of these checks are analysed, and strengths and areas for improvement identified and acted upon through effective planning for improvement
 - ensuring that governors are well informed about all aspects of the school's performance and check closely on the improvement the school is making.
- Improve assessment by:
 - ensuring that pupils know how well they are doing and what their next steps in learning should be
 - improving systems for recording the work of pupils, particularly those who are following the Early Years curriculum.
- Ensure that the pupil premium is used effectively to support pupils' learning and that this is closely checked by governors.
- Build upon the work started to improve the planning of what should be taught and when, and extend the opportunities for pupils to improve their reading skills.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 June 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, acting deputy headteachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. Informal conversations were held with teachers, teaching assistants and pupils throughout the visit. Eleven lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.

Context

Since the last visit the acting headteacher has been appointed to the post of substantive headteacher. The key stage leaders are temporarily acting as deputy headteachers and a permanent deputy headteacher has been appointed to join the school in September. Five members of teaching staff will be leaving the school at the end of term. All posts have been filled by appropriately qualified and experienced staff. The school will be organised into 11 classes from the start of next academic year.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Although progress through the school is erratic, pupils' overall attainment and rates of progress are showing clear signs of improvement. Higher expectations, challenging activities, more precisely planned teaching and targeted support are increasingly enabling pupils to make up for some of the previous lost ground. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have made a positive start to school. Their progress is good and well documented. It is fully accepted that school information on pupils' progress has been initially absent and then insufficiently accurate to be used as an effective tool to measure pupils' progress over time. This inadequacy has now been remedied, and senior leaders have introduced the systems required to assess pupils' learning levels, to set targets in English, mathematics and science and to monitor progress towards them. Improvements are being made to the system for checking upon the progress pupils make in their personal, social and emotional development.

Recent assessments, in English, mathematics and science, have been externally analysed. Results indicate that progress throughout the school is stronger in science and mathematics than in English and weaker in reading than in writing. In English, 58% of pupils met or exceeded their targets, with approximately half of all pupils meeting their reading target. This rose to 68% and 69% in science and mathematics respectively. This discrepancy in progress was borne out in lesson observations where teachers displayed insecure knowledge of English terminology and inaccurate production of letter sounds. As a result, pupils are not confident enough in identifying letter sounds to aid their reading and writing. Raising pupils' achievement in reading remains a priority. A number of actions including staff training and the

involvement of parents in weekly reading activities have been taken to address this. It is too soon to see the impact of these initiatives on improved reading levels.

The quality of teaching

Lesson observations during this inspection indicate that there have been improvements to the quality of teaching. However, too little is consistently good and a small minority of inadequate teaching remains. Most notably, there has been a transformation in the level of pupils' activity. Typically, teachers plan short introductions to lessons so that pupils are actively involved and no longer required to sit passively for long periods. Pupils of all ages and needs were observed working enthusiastically on a wide range of interesting activities supported by appropriate resources. Teaching assistant support has also been improved. Their comprehensive training has resulted in a positive impact on pupils' progress. Communication between teachers and teaching assistants is now fully effective and, throughout the school, pupils' independence, social and life skills are promoted seamlessly within all aspects of learning by all staff. For example, in a good mixed Years R and 1 lesson, the routine of snack time was used highly effectively as a lesson where children extended their communication skills through signing and use of communication boards. Children worked in three separate groups with different resources and for different periods of time. In this way they received exactly the right level of challenge and support and made good progress.

In addition, the impact of staff training is evident in the classroom in many ways. Planning now complies with a consistent format, which includes using assessment information to inform teaching and better match learning tasks to pupils' needs and abilities. There is clarity regarding the role of all adults and frequent dialogue with pupils about what they are learning and why and how well they are getting on. Pupils regularly take part in reviewing their own learning and progress during, and at the end of, lessons and make a contribution to decisions about what they should practise or learn next. Observational notes of pupils' progress for children following the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and beyond are now consistently made by all staff. Photographic evidence is also widely used in addition to more formal systems which record where in a particular programme of work each pupil has reached.

Whilst this progress is commendable, the impact of these new approaches is often reduced as teachers need to improve their own skill and understanding. For example, in one lesson, pupils completed a self-assessment activity colouring a square in red pencil for 'not confident' and green pencil for 'very confident' and these squares were then stuck into home-school contact books. From observation, it was clear that some pupils selected pencils because they preferred the colour. The self-assessment aspect was lost and resulting information shared with parents inaccurate. School leaders are well aware of the aspects of teaching, including the teaching of reading, that need to improve further. All staff are included in the programme of phonics (the link between letters and sounds) training and wider reading training that has already commenced.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

In the main, behaviour in lessons and around the school is good and well ordered. There is a positive and happy atmosphere and pupils say that they like school, feel happy, safe and well looked after. Most pupils engage positively with learning and, at times, they behave well in lessons even when teaching does not meet their learning needs effectively.

The school's approach to behaviour management has been reviewed and a new policy is due to be introduced. Behaviour support plans exist for a large proportion of pupils. Every pupil's behaviour is considered and detailed on an individual information sheet. Triggers for poor or challenging behaviour and guidance for managing such incidents are given.

The recording, monitoring and analysing of incidents of more challenging behaviour are now systematically carried out. During this visit all staff modelled positive behaviours and were observed using a range of techniques, including offering pupils choices, giving unequivocal instructions and using sanctions and rewards to manage the range of behaviours to good effect. Pupils are kept safe and only rarely are lessons significantly disrupted. Staff training has included specific opportunities for the behaviour leader to visit other schools.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher has worked skilfully and successfully to bring about a range of school improvements and has not been diverted by the major building works or significant financial negotiations. It was not possible to realise the intention of seconding an experienced deputy headteacher to strengthen leadership during the summer term. Therefore, the key stage leaders have taken on additional temporary responsibilities and are currently acting as deputy headteachers. They have provided good support to the headteacher and have shown immense commitment to their roles, not shying away from tasks that ideally they should have received further training for. Leadership development remains a priority and needs strengthening at senior and, most particularly, subject leader and class teacher levels.

The Chair of the Governing Body adds strength and capacity to overall school leadership. He provides strong support to the headteacher, offering guidance, advice and challenge. The governing body is well informed through detailed headteacher reports, frequent school visits and dialogue with staff and participation in review meetings. Improvement plans are reviewed by senior leaders as well as at regular meetings with the local authority. The impact of actions is evaluated and recorded. Priorities and further actions are planned or redefined when necessary. Systems for monitoring how well the school is doing and how well pupils progress and behave are clearly established. These processes are still new and their introduction has been accompanied by high levels of staff training, including regular opportunities for staff to participate in moderation exercises. Other measures, including visits to other schools and advice from the local authority, have contributed to strengthening staff

skill in assessing pupils' progress. As a result, an accurate picture exists of current attainment and recent progress and teachers and teaching assistants have an improved understanding of their own accountability in ensuring that pupils achieve well. Although data is broken down by class, gender, key stage and ethnicity, this information has not yet been used address all gaps in achievement. Senior leaders have a firm platform from which to plan, measure and secure further improvement.

An action plan, agreed with the governing body, has been developed to ensure that pupil premium funding is more effectively directed to supporting the most potentially vulnerable pupils. Current funding has enabled identified pupils to take part in riding lessons and to employ a teaching assistant with the specific remit of promoting pupils' social skills.

Improving teaching and learning has been the central focus of the school's work over recent months. Regular, rigorous reviews of the quality of teaching are conducted. Strengths and areas for improvement are identified in fortnightly lesson observations and teachers and teaching assistants take part in discussion with senior leaders about their next steps. Performance management systems have successfully remedied most inadequate teaching and are helping more staff teach increasingly active and interesting lessons. Planning and use of assessment to verify pupils' understanding and progress have also improved. The teaching of reading continues to be a priority for improvement and there is more to be done in terms of planning what should be taught when and how across the school as a whole.

External support

In general, the local authority has provided good and extensive support to the school. In particular, this has included financial support, brokering mentoring support for the headteacher from a local experienced headteacher, joint lesson observations for senior staff as well as facilitating opportunities for staff to visit other schools to observe good teaching and learning. This has contributed to the improving quality of teaching.