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Mrs 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 Karen Davies, Additional Inspector, to your school on 10–11 July 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 fourth 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 the previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed. One may be appointed in the Early Years Foundation Stage and one in Key Stage 1.

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 10–11 July 2013

Evidence

Inspectors visited all 15 classes, and observed 25 parts of lessons. Many of these observations were conducted with the headteacher. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents including pupils' work. They met with senior and middle leaders, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. Pupils' behaviour throughout the school day was also observed and an inspector met with a group of Year 6 pupils.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, one teacher has resigned, another has returned following a long-term absence, and one teacher remains on a long-term absence from school. All classes are being taught by permanent members of staff, apart from one class taught by a temporary member of staff. The academy sponsor allocated to the school has met with its leaders with a view to the school becoming an academy, but the consultation process has not yet started.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The improvements evident in the previous monitoring visit continue, and pupils' achievement is strengthening as a result of improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Accurate and up-to-date information on pupils' attainment and progress is recorded and presented in a way that allows for easy analysis. The most recent checks on pupils' performance in English and mathematics show that the steady improvement in attainment noted at the time of the last visit continues. By the end of Year 2 and Year 6, attainment is now broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. However, at the end of both year groups, too few pupils are attaining above the levels expected nationally for their age. This is especially evident in writing and mathematics. In mathematics in particular the most able mathematicians do not move on to challenging work quickly enough in lessons.

By the end of Reception approximately one third of the children have reached a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. This represents good progress from their low starting points in the Nursery, and from the situation when, at the start of the year in September 2012, no Reception children were on target for this good level of development. However, no children are exceeding this good level of development, and this reflects a lack of challenge for the more-able children.

The impact of the leader responsible for the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) can be seen in the outcomes of the Year 1 annual phonics screening check. This year 68% of pupils reached the expected standard, which shows a sharp increase from the previous year when only 41% reached this standard.

Pupils' achievement in lessons is dependent on the quality of teaching, and inspectors judged achievement to be good in at least half of the lessons seen during the monitoring inspection. Pupils made good progress in their learning in almost all lessons visited in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2. Progress was more variable in Years 3 to 6. There were examples of good and outstanding progress in both English and mathematics. However, in the lessons that required improvement, progress was slower because teachers did not insist on a high enough quality or quantity of work from the pupils. Also, more-able pupils were not always given work at the right level of difficulty, and it was sometimes too easy for them.

The pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils in local authority care, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or those who have a parent in the armed forces) achieve almost as well as their classmates. This is a significant step forward as the attainment gap continues to narrow. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are making faster progress, because leaders identify their specific needs well and provide suitable strategies and support to meet them.

Senior leaders and teachers have rightly concentrated on improving English and mathematics since the school was placed in special measures, but as a result pupils' achievement lags behind in other subjects such as history, geography and science. The next step for leaders is to improve the quality of activities and the progress pupils make in subjects other than English and mathematics, and to ensure that pupils have regular opportunities to practise their writing and numeracy skills in these subjects.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has improved steadily over the past year and as at the time of the last monitoring visit, no inadequate teaching was observed. An increasing amount is consistently effective, and some teaching is outstanding. Better teaching has been key in accelerating pupils' learning and progress, especially in reading. Proficient teaching of reading, and in particular phonics knowledge, is resulting in rising standards in literacy. The 'reading champions' and the phonics leader have been effective in raising the profile of reading across the school and supporting staff in improving their subject knowledge. Staff are positive role models, and pupils respond readily to their high expectations for good behaviour.

In English and mathematics, teachers are more flexible in their organisation of lessons. Work is now usually well matched to the needs of most pupils. In particular, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are usually given work that is just right for them, and get the support they need. The work set for pupils of middle ability is appropriate, but not so precisely focused on their needs. The more-able pupils are usually well catered for during independent work. However, they still sometimes spend too long listening to the teacher before starting their work, or are involved in discussions that are not challenging enough for their ability level.

In other subjects all pupils are sometimes given the same work, for example writing a letter about the Great Barrier Reef. Leaders recognise that more-able pupils throughout the school are not given enough challenging work or opportunities to develop independent thinking skills such as being able to infer, deduce, hypothesise and draw conclusions. Although support staff provide good support, at times they do too much for pupils and this restricts their independence and ability to solve problems for themselves. Also, leaders do not use these skilled staff to accelerate the progress of underachieving pupils. For example, in Year 5 there is a group of pupils who would benefit from particular support in mathematics.

Pupils are now consistently informed of the aims of each lesson and success criteria are referred to more often, so pupils know how to succeed and improve their work. However, as at the time of the previous monitoring visit, this practice is stronger in English and mathematics than in other subjects, as is the effectiveness of marking.

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

The behaviour of pupils continues to be good, and in lessons where teaching is most effective, attitudes towards learning are outstanding. Pupils work well in pairs and in larger groups to support each other's learning. They mainly follow adults' instructions and are eager to listen to each other's ideas. However, at times, when the teacher ask pupils to stop working and listen, a small number do not respond, as they do not think this break in their learning is relevant for them.

Pupils say that they feel safe, happy and well cared for. Pupils who are new to the school at different times of the year say are made to feel welcome and quickly feel a part of the Galton Valley family. Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying. They know how to keep safe beyond school and think CCTV cameras are a good idea. Attendance is above average at 96% and punctuality is good.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

There is clear evidence of improvement since the previous monitoring visit. The school is capably led by the headteacher and senior leadership team. These key leaders and the governors know that high-quality teaching is essential for effective learning. Senior leaders have tackled the underperformance seen in previous visits with resolve. Teachers have received support that is tailored to their individual needs, with an expectation that improvements will follow quickly. There is now a suitable system for managing staff performance, and a recent review of teachers' progress so far has informed leaders of any additional support that is needed. As yet, however, the outstanding practice within the school has not been shared widely enough with all staff.

The 'raising achievement plan' continues to help leaders manage time effectively and ensure actions are evaluated in terms of pupils' achievement. Monitoring and evaluation by senior leaders have mainly focused on English and mathematics, and they have not checked carefully enough that the good practice in teaching in these subjects has transferred into the teaching of other subjects. The leaders of other subjects continue to develop their skills and 'leadership logs' provide a good record of the strengths in subjects and the next steps needed to inform next year's action plans. For example, the leader of the 'thematic' curriculum (history, geography, art, and design and technology) knows that coverage is inconsistent, and pupils' books show that they are not building up their skills progressively. The information and communication technology leader has identified the need to be able to monitor pupils' progress throughout the school more rigorously. Although training has been available this term, it has been mainly for leaders to improve their leadership skills or for them to find out about the proposed new National Curriculum. Quite rightly, leaders recognise that staff now need time to embed the initiatives that have been introduced over the year.

The governing body continues to develop the skills of its members, and records of its meetings show that more governors are asking questions of the senior leadership team. The school effectiveness committee meets regularly and the discussion with the Chair and Vice Chair of Governing Body shows that they have a realistic view of the effectiveness of the school and what is needed to improve it further.

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

Over time the local authority has reduced its support as the school's ability to manage and direct its own improvement has strengthened. However, leaders know that support is available if requested, and termly monitoring activities ensure the local authority is kept up to date with the school's progress.