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4 July 2013

Mrs Sue Cornall
Headteacher
Highfield Primary School
Wright Street
Chorley
Lancashire
PR6 0SP

Dear Mrs Cornall

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Highfield Primary School

Following my visit with Sheila Mawer, Additional Inspector, to your school on 2 and 3 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 November 2011. 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 – satisfactory

Newly Qualified Teachers may 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 Interim Executive Director for Children & Young People for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James

Her Majesty's Inspector

January 2012



Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2011

- Improve the quality of teaching and thus raise pupils' attainment and achievement in all subjects, and particularly in writing, by:
 - making sure pupils know precisely how well they are doing in their work and know what to do in order to improve it
 - improving teachers' lesson planning and the use of adult support to ensure that the abilities and interests of each pupil are met
 - providing sufficient challenge in lessons to ensure that pupils achieve as well as they should.

- Improve the leadership and management of the school by:
 - taking effective measures to monitor and improve the quality of teaching
 - improving the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation procedures to accurately measure the impact of the school's actions
 - raising expectations of pupils' performance throughout the school
 - ensuring that the governing body challenges the school to address weaknesses and sustain improvement
 - rigorously applying systems and engaging with parents and carers to improve attendance.

Special measures: monitoring of Highfield Primary School

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection on 02 and 3 July 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, listened to pupils read, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other senior leaders, a group of pupils, two members of the governing body and two representatives from the local authority.

Context

A temporary teacher is covering the long-term sickness absence of one class teacher.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Teachers' expectations of the levels pupils can achieve are rising and this is helping to raise standards of attainment, although they remain below average. Teachers' assessment data for pupils in Year 6 suggest much improved outcomes this year when compared with previous years, with higher proportions of pupils reaching age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. The school data are also indicative of increasing proportions having made the expected progress since Year 2. Rates of progress in most year groups are improving, although the picture is uneven and the legacy of historic underachievement has not been completely eradicated.

The most-able Year 6 pupils have received extra lessons in mathematics from an outstanding partner school to support their entry for the highest level formal mathematics assessment. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils confidently tackled challenging ratio problems, working confidently and diligently. A real sense of achievement was evident when they succeeded in working out correct solutions to thought provoking, challenging problems.

Standards in Key Stage 1 are also rising. School assessment data for Key Stage 1 show that pupils are making better progress from their below average starting points. More pupils are reaching age-related expectations but few are reaching higher levels. The improvement for pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is particularly notable. Their attainment is catching up with that of similar pupils nationally and the gap between this group and other pupils is narrowing. In the letters and sounds screening check, the percentage of pupils who reached the expected standard rose significantly in 2013 when compared with 2012 and there was a particularly notable improvement in results for pupils eligible for the pupil premium.

Most pupils apply their knowledge of letters and sounds when they encounter unfamiliar words in their reading and they talk enthusiastically about the books they are reading.

There is plenty of pupils' written work on display and this is encouraging pupils to take more pride in their work. Presentation has improved, following a focus on handwriting and legibility. Although the school is working on spelling and it is improving, this remains a weakness for many pupils.

The quality of teaching

Teaching continues to develop and improve and one outstanding lesson was observed. Nevertheless, a substantial minority of lessons require improvement. The better teaching is increasingly having an impact on pupils' progress. Time in the better lessons is well used. Most classes have well established routines to avoid time wasting. Many teachers provide suitably challenging work for different groups of pupils but there are differences in teachers' skills in adapting this in the light of pupils' responses. In one Year 3 mathematics lesson, a well-planned plenary session drew learning points together before the teacher set questions of differing levels of difficulty so that all pupils were challenged but could succeed. The teacher was astute in quickly identifying those who needed individual help.

Individual target setting is now in place across the school. Pupils know their targets and understand what is required to achieve them. Marking has improved, although school policies are not implemented with complete consistency. Constructive feedback is now a feature of much marking, although it is not always specific enough to enable pupils to act quickly on it in the short sessions allocated for pupils to follow up teachers' comments.

Tasks and activities set by teachers in lessons are increasingly engaging, providing interest and motivating pupils but there are still examples of mundane activities that do not stimulate interest. Where pupils find these uninspiring and become bored or restless teachers sometimes persist rather than changing the activity and learning is slow. Occasionally work is too difficult and little progress is made. Teachers sometimes spend too long talking to the whole class before giving pupils opportunities to practise their skills or apply their knowledge.

Assessment data are now being used better by class teachers. Underachievement is identified following the regular half termly assessments and this is followed up through pupil progress meetings with senior staff. Teachers are increasingly held to account for pupil outcomes.

Teaching assistants often provide effective support both to individuals in lessons and in small intervention groups. In one example observed during the inspection a small group of pupils had support to develop their writing skills. They learned different ways a sentence could be phrased by rearrangement of clauses using a practical activity cutting up sentences. However, teachers do not always manage their teaching assistants effectively. For example, during lengthy teacher expositions teaching assistants are expected to help less attentive pupils to concentrate but this sometimes leads to two adults talking at the same time which is confusing and distracting.

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

- improve the quality of teaching and thus raise pupils' attainment and achievement in all subjects, and particularly in writing - satisfactory

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils typically behave sensibly around school. They are polite and respectful towards each other and adults. In lessons, attitudes to learning are influenced by the quality of teaching. In the best lessons where pupils are engaged and motivated they tackle their work enthusiastically and show concentration and perseverance. No disruptive behaviour was seen in the lessons observed. Where teaching is weaker and pupils have to listen to the teacher for too long or the tasks set are inappropriate, attention wanders and pupils make less productive use of their time. In group and independent activities, teaching assistants are often helpful in supporting pupils who find it hard to concentrate.

Attendance is improving as a result of the concerted efforts of the school. The number of persistent absentees has fallen and the number of days missed by persistent absentees has reduced considerably. Pupils understand why they should attend regularly because of the high profile given to it in school. During the inspection, an effective assembly was observed where high levels of attendance were celebrated and the class with the best attendance was rewarded.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The monitoring and evaluation carried out by senior leaders are carefully planned and carried out thoroughly and are having an impact in improving teaching. Staff development has been largely tailored to the needs of specific individuals. Strong links with partner schools provide a valuable source of advice, guidance and staff development opportunities. Support plans for teachers where observations have found teaching to be less than good are leading to improvements, at least in the short term, although this is not always sustained over the longer term.

Curriculum planning shows an increasing emphasis on English and mathematics across the curriculum. More written work is evident in topic books. There are more enrichment opportunities that help to promote pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about a recent visit from a storyteller which had sparked their interest.

Pupil premium money is appropriately allocated and is having some impact. The learning mentor has worked with eligible pupils and their families, resulting in attendance improving and persistent absence reducing. School assessment data show improving attainment for eligible pupils, especially in Key Stage 1 where the gap is narrowing. In Key Stage 2, although attainment is rising and the proportion of pupils making at least expected progress is increasing, the gap between eligible and non-eligible pupils persists. Leaders recognise

the need to do more to tackle this and are planning to use funds for an additional teacher next year to boost achievement.

The governing body is taking a clear lead in critical strategic decisions, for example, the actions to be taken following the resignation of the deputy headteacher. The chair of the staffing committee is utilising his extensive experience in human resources work to ensure that performance management processes are rigorous and hold teachers to account for the outcomes of the pupils they teach. There is a clear strategy to manage the many staff changes for the next academic year, although it relies on the support of the local authority. Minutes of governing body meetings make it clear that governors are asking searching questions when presented with information and data.

The school is vulnerable in terms of its capacity to improve partly because of the recent resignations of two senior members of staff. Plans have been put in place to minimise the associated risk. Some of the intended arrangements involve capable staff from other local schools being moved to the school on a temporary basis. These are short-term measures rather than permanent appointments. A strategy is also in place to borrow experienced teachers from other schools to ensure that all classes have suitable teachers in September where class teachers have resigned or are taking maternity leave. The school remains dependent on local authority support.

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

- improve the leadership and management of the school - satisfactory

External support

The local authority continues to provide very effective support. The specialist school improvement adviser, the school adviser and consultants have all provided valuable advice and guidance and staff training. Support has been adapted in the light of changing circumstances and the authority has played a key role in helping the school to find suitable staff for September 2013.