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9 July 2013

Mrs Rosalind Flanders
Headteacher
Parklands Community Primary School
Little Sutton
Ellesmere Port
Cheshire
CH66 3RL

Dear Mrs Flanders

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Parklands Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. 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 most recent monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged as having serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in December 2012. 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 the serious weaknesses designation.

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 Cheshire West and Chester.

Yours sincerely

Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and make sure that all lessons are at least good so that pupils make better progress and reach higher standards in all year groups by:
 - making sure that all pupils learn how to work on their own without relying too much on adults' support
 - improving teachers' skills in finding out what pupils already know and can do before trying to teach them new things
 - improving the quality of teachers' marking so that pupils are told clearly how well they are doing and what they need to do next to improve their work
 - providing more training and guidance for staff on the school's new policies for managing pupils' behaviour and for encouraging positive attitudes to learning so that all staff follow the policy in the same way.

- Raise standards in English, particularly in writing, by:
 - giving pupils more opportunity and real purpose to write longer pieces of work
 - teaching pupils about the features of different types of writing and showing them how to check the quality of their own, and each other's, work
 - making sure staff know how to help pupils develop their writing skills as they go from year to year.

- Work with parents to make sure that all pupils get to school on time so that they do not miss the start of lessons.

- Improve the impact of leadership and management by:
 - giving subject leaders more time and opportunity to check how well their subject is being taught and the progress that pupils are making
 - making better use of the available information about pupils' progress so that school leaders, at all levels, are better able to check how well pupils are doing and whether actions to boost progress have worked
 - making sure that the new systems and routines to check the quality of teaching and to set.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 9 July 2013

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss pupils' progress and the impact of action taken since the first monitoring inspection in March. The headteacher and inspector jointly carried out two observations of lessons in English and, with the two English subject leaders and the Chair of the Governing Body, looked at the work in English and mathematics from a sample of pupils.

Context

A classteacher left the school at the end of the spring term. An experienced teacher and manager has been seconded to the school for four terms and is leading the improvement programme in English. The school has reviewed and changed the provision in English; for example, it has introduced commercial programmes to develop pupils' skills in reading, writing and handwriting.

The number of governors has been reduced to 12 and a small group of governors has held responsibility for closely tracking the school's progress. The governing body has recently agreed that the school should convert to being an academy.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The determined, positive leadership of the headteacher has been the prime factor in the change of culture and in the progress made in each of the four areas for improvement. The headteacher has initiated action on many fronts, drawing on guidance from other headteachers, consultants and local authority advisors to heighten staff's awareness of good and outstanding practice. She has worked with teaching staff to develop their skills and build on their ideas. She has been astute in consulting staff, parents and pupils about possible changes and higher expectations. This approach of 'we are working together' has been highly influential in all embracing new procedures and playing a willing part in bringing about improvement. The quality of teaching has strengthened as a result of professional development sessions, especially in planning lessons, marking pupils' work in English and judging pupils' attainment. Staff with additional responsibilities are more pro-active in checking on pupils' progress and in improving provision. Having received an overview of pupils' progress over the year, governors have challenged senior staff about apparent anomalies and the factors that may account for them, including the quality of teaching and inaccuracy in assessments made in previous terms/years. Such challenge reflects a more tightly focused approach from governors in holding school leaders to full account and in evaluating the impact of action taken.

Throughout the school, standards are higher than in 2012 but remain below average. Most pupils have made at least expected progress, and some better than this to make up ground lost in previous years. The average gap between pupils' attainment and that expected for their age has narrowed. Parents' responses to the new style end-of-year reports indicate delight in the progress their children have made. Responses to a recent questionnaire were also highly positive with almost 100% agreement to every question. Parents are supporting

the school. Pupils' punctuality, for instance, has increased substantially; the walking bus has had up to 60 pupils, including some who previously were frequently late.

The headteacher, deputy headteacher and Chair of the Governing Body are well aware that there remains much yet to do to secure pupils' good achievement in each year group and across the curriculum. Much is in place to ensure that the new school year gets off to a strong start, building on the foundations laid this year. The headteacher is clear in how 'the pieces in the jigsaw will fit together' and in her raised expectations of middle managers to take responsibility for driving improvement, and of classteachers in their accountability for pupils' progress. The Chair of the Governing Body is committed to handling the school's conversion to an academy.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Staff are willing to act on advice to strengthen their teaching. They have visited other schools, worked with consultants and shared effective practice, including the development of displays in classrooms to support pupils' learning, such as mathematical problems to solve and a list of possible opening words and phrases for stories. Regular observations of teaching have highlighted common strengths and points for development. The headteacher's judgements are accurate and identify well the links between teaching and learning. All development points raised in this inspection were known to the headteacher and are priorities for the next school term.
- The easy, warm relationships between staff and pupils and pupils' very good behaviour are now core strengths of the school. Praise is to the fore and values such as perseverance and determination are reflected in pupils' conduct. Pupils are happy to be at school and are willing to learn; they know and follow routines and rules, are keen to tell what they know and to show off their work which is usually neatly presented.
- The sharing of success criteria and the focused marking of pupils' writing gives pupils a clearer picture of what they have done well and what they need to do better next time. 'Fix it time' allows pupils to act on these comments.
- The assessment of pupils' attainment and progress is now more reliable. Sessions with staff from the local authority and within school to moderate judgements have increased teachers' accuracy in attributing a level of attainment.
- Pupils' knowledge of the links between letters and sounds is strengthening because of consistent, structured teaching. Year 2 pupils confidently read and spelt words ending in 'ear' and knew that in some letter combinations, one letter may be 'silent' as in 'mb' and 'wh'. An increased emphasis on sharing books, print and how to write means that Nursery and Reception Year children, particularly girls, are moving earlier than before into making marks and independent writing. Pupils are developing a repertoire of writing skills.
- Governance is more robust and rigorous than previously as a result of governors' work with a consultant. The number of governors has been reduced, roles and responsibilities reviewed and clarified, and procedures agreed to ensure governors challenge from a well-informed position. For instance, staff with particular responsibilities are compiling updates for the governing body.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- In planning and delivering lessons, teachers are not challenging well enough the more-able pupils by identifying precise expectations of these pupils in class, group and independent work. Although more pupils than previously have gained the level expected for their age in each year group, only a small number have done better than this. Staff are aware of the need to up their expectations of what pupils can do to secure catch-up, to draw out potential and enable pupils to excel.
- A weaker element in teaching is the tendency of adults to over-direct pupils. The high expectation of pupils to organise themselves in the classroom is not equally evident in how they are expected to learn. Teachers often talk too much for too long, answering their own questions, explaining and highlighting what pupils need to know but not encouraging pupils to comment in depth on what they understand. Chances are missed to allow pupils to explain their thinking and to justify the strategies they use.
- Although teaching assistants are taking a key role in leading small groups and supporting learning, there are times in class and group sessions when their skills are not used well enough.
- Marking in mathematics is not as focused or as consistent as in English. Pupils are not always given clear information on what they have done well or where they have gone wrong and why. The school has rightly identified pupils' skills in solving mathematical problems and facility with number as key areas for improvement.
- Improvement planning, although arising from a review and analysis of need, does not consistently identify the expected impact of the action on pupils' learning.

External support

The input from advisors from the local authority, external consultants and other schools, has been influential in raising awareness, developing key management skills and guiding change. The literacy consultant, for example, has worked with staff to look at pupils' writing and to develop an approach to marking. Action suggested by the Early Years advisor has strengthened the provision and also boosted the confidence of the Early Years Foundation Stage leader in interpreting and using data as part of improvement planning. The local authority has also conducted its own balanced reviews of the school's progress.