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27 September 2013

Mr Martin Clinton
Executive Headteacher
Istead Rise Primary School
Downs Road
Gravesend
DA13 9HG

Dear Mr Clinton

Special measures monitoring inspection of Istead Rise Primary School

Following my visit with Juliet Ward, Additional Inspector, to your school on 25 and 26 September 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 February 2013. 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 not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Kent.

Yours sincerely

Sheena Macdonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2013

Improve the quality of teaching in Years 1 to 6 by:

- ensuring that teachers set work for pupils that matches the whole range of abilities in each class and maintains their interest, especially for more-able pupils
- ensuring that teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics are accurate
- making sure teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to practise their skills in reading, writing and mathematics in different subjects
- ensuring that teachers check that pupils in Key Stage 2 know their targets in English and mathematics and how these targets can be achieved.

Increase rates of progress in Years 1 to 6 by:

- planning more effective support for those pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding
- raising teachers' expectations for what more-able pupils can achieve making sure that teachers' marking clearly identifies how work can be improved and providing opportunities for pupils to act on the teachers' comments.

Improve leadership and management by:

- increasing the capacity of senior and subject leaders to make accurate checks on teaching and provide clear feedback to teachers to help them improve the quality of their teaching
- ensuring that information from checks on pupils' progress is used to identify any dips in progress and is quickly followed up with effective action
- ensuring that school leaders at all levels take urgent and effective steps to improve communication with parents and carers, especially with regard to behaviour
- providing training for governors to improve their skills in checking on the school's performance and to ensure that the governing body consistently implements agreed procedures.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 25 and 26 September 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed teaching and learning in every class and carried out several shorter visits. They scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders, subject leaders for mathematics and literacy, the special educational needs coordinator, four members of the governing body and representatives from the local authority.

Context

There have been significant changes since the last visit. The head of school is now full time and existing members of staff have been promoted to the roles of deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. Another assistant headteacher and a special educational needs coordinator joined the school this term. Mathematics and literacy subject leadership roles have been reallocated. Six teachers left in July and have been replaced by new members of staff including two of those mentioned above.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils who left the school at the end of last term achieved less well in reading, writing and mathematics than in the previous year and attainment was significantly below average. The number of pupils who achieved the higher levels was also lower than in previous years. More than 3 out of 10 Year 6 pupils did not make the expected progress in reading and writing during their time in Key Stage 2. In mathematics, 4 out of 10 pupils did not make expected progress. At the end of Key Stage 1, the results were slightly up compared with the previous year; however, they remained just below average in reading and writing and well below average in mathematics. Pupils eligible for support from pupil premium funding achieved much less well than other pupils.

Senior leaders and local authority advisors had concerns about the accuracy of teachers' assessments last year and discovered that, in many cases, pupils were wrongly assessed too highly. This contributed to a false sense of optimism and teachers believed that pupils would achieve much better than they actually did in the end-of-year assessments. Testing was carried out, in every class, in May to establish an accurate baseline. It is evident from this that many pupils continue to underachieve and progress throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 is much slower than it should be. There were also wide variations in the rates of progress between classes. During the visit, there was also wide variation in how well pupils were learning in lessons, and the evidence in the pupils' books shows that, in many classes, they are completing too little work to help them catch up, particularly in writing and mathematics.

The quality of teaching

Local authority advisors and leading teachers from Meopham Community Academy provided intensive staff training on key features of effective teaching during last academic year. As a result, teachers' planning and lessons generally have clear objectives and activities designed to meet the needs of different abilities. Most, but not all, classrooms are bright, well organised and welcoming with useful displays to support pupils' learning. The assessment of pupils' writing has been used to set targets and these are on display and in the pupils' books. Most teachers are using learning ladders to share with the pupils what good learning will look like. Relationships are friendly and adults and pupils cooperate well together in lessons. Teachers conscientiously mark the pupils' work and in some classes the marking provides useful guidance to show pupils how to improve. In a very few classes pupils are involved in evaluating their own progress in lessons and respond to the teachers' marking.

Nonetheless, there remains far too much variation in the quality of teaching. During the visit this ranged from inadequate to good. Teachers' expectations about how much work pupils should complete and at what level remain too low in too many classes. Teachers do not always have a secure understanding of what good learning will look like and are therefore not able to question or prompt the pupils to develop their understanding. This was evident in a number of Key Stage 1 mathematics lessons during the visit. This problem is further compounded because the information gained from the mathematics assessments in May has not been shared with staff to help them pitch the lessons correctly. This means that pupils do not have targets in mathematics and teachers do not have a firm grasp of what pupils know already or the gaps and weaknesses in their understanding. Teachers have not had the opportunity to discuss in detail the attainment and progress, or lack of progress, of pupils in their classes. The quality of work in books confirms that, too often, pupils are not given the time or opportunity to complete enough work.

In the older Key Stage 2 classes, expectations are higher and pupils show that they are well able to rise to the challenge. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson, the teacher used very effective questioning to prompt and extend pupils' understanding and kept up a good pace of learning so that they all achieved well. In a Years 3/4 lesson the teacher gave pupils good opportunities to explain their answers, challenged their thinking and encouraged them to use appropriate mathematical vocabulary. These examples are important because they show that there is expertise in the school which can be shared.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are polite, friendly and respectful. They say they like coming to school and very few pupils were absent during this visit. They are responding well to the focus on different values and keen to achieve the star badges awarded to pupils who demonstrate values such as sharing and respect. Where the teaching is good, the

pupils are enthusiastic learners who are beginning to have confidence in themselves and are keen to do well. However, even in these classes, many pupils have a rather slapdash approach to their work, with scruffy writing, scribbling and doodles fairly common. This is not helped because there is no consistent approach to handwriting and presentation. In lessons which are inadequate or require improvement, behaviour and attitudes understandably deteriorate and pupils become chatty and lose their focus on learning.

A relatively high proportion of pupils with identified special educational needs have particular difficulties with behavioural, emotional and social needs. There is no evidence that the school records incidents, tracks or analyses their behaviours or has put into place strategies to address their needs. This is beginning to be addressed this term.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The focus of leadership and management since the first monitoring visit in May has been to establish a clear leadership structure and to begin to train new leaders. There are now curriculum teams, each led by a senior leader and involving subject leaders. In this way senior leaders aim to involve leaders at all levels in sharing responsibilities and expertise, planning the next steps and taking responsibility for making sure that agreed actions happen. This is all at a very early stage of development and the impact of this restructuring on teaching and learning is not yet evident; however, staff and governors say that there is a clearer sense of direction throughout the school. A comprehensive improvement plan is now in place but it does not focus sharply enough on the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection, the targets are not generally measurable and already some actions are behind schedule. There are very few measurable milestones so that it will be difficult for staff and governors to know whether the school is on track to meet its end-of-year targets. Several new staff joined the school this term and, although all have undergone appropriate safeguarding checks, they have not received specific school safeguarding training nor have they received staff handbooks with information about school policies and procedures or detailed information about how well their pupils achieve.

There is insufficient urgency in tackling the areas for improvement which relate to pupils' achievement or the quality of teaching. Several leaders are new this term and, although they have plans to improve the quality of provision in their areas, they have not been able to check whether actions which have been agreed are happening in classes. While they are understandably finding their feet, no other senior leaders have carried out checks either. No monitoring of pupils' books, teachers' planning or lessons has happened this term and there is no evidence that pupils' work or lesson planning have ever been checked. Lesson observations did take place last term, with local authority support. The quality of teaching has been judged on individual lesson observations, and information about how well pupils are actually learning has not been used to check the quality and impact of teaching over time. Neither is there

any evidence that senior staff are working alongside the teachers helping with planning and teaching to improve the quality.

Senior leaders ensured that accurate assessments of reading, writing and mathematics were carried out in May and are supporting staff to become more accurate in making their assessments. However, the information gained from these assessments has not been used effectively with staff to either hold them to account for pupils' low attainment and progress or to discuss with them how to address the weaknesses. The organisation of the curriculum is weak and there is very little evidence that pupils have the opportunity to develop their literacy and mathematics skills in other subjects.

The review of governance carried out as a result of the inspection highlighted major weaknesses. Some of these are being addressed through individual governors completing training. Governors are linked to the new curriculum teams and are enjoying greater involvement in the school. They can show how parents and carers are also much more involved through regular communication and by attending school events in high numbers. The records of governor meetings show that they are now being given detailed reports and are asking some probing questions. However, the lack of simple, measurable milestones for improvement makes it difficult for them to accurately evaluate how well the school is doing. Although governors agreed the restructuring of leadership and the promotion of two members of staff and the appointment of another senior leader, there remains some confusion about the roles of these senior leaders and what impact governors might expect from their appointments.

External support

The local authority has amended its statement of action so that it is now fit for purpose. It covers a longer time span and also includes activities related to mathematics. Throughout the spring and summer terms advisors and consultants delivered a series of training events, monitored the quality of teaching and provided support for particular teachers or groups of staff. Some of this support was not built on effectively and on some occasions visits were not used as well as possible because key staff were not available. As Meopham Community Academy assumed greater responsibility in the latter part of the summer term, the local authority has reduced its involvement, although it continues to fund consultancy support, for example by enabling a leading teacher of mathematics from Meopham to work in the school. The local authority continues to carry out its monitoring and evaluation role and, following this visit, will resume more regular visits to support senior leadership. As well as senior leadership, Meopham Community Academy staff are also providing regular support particularly to develop the skills and knowledge of subject leaders.

As a matter of urgency, senior leaders should ensure that teaching is improving, pupils are making faster progress and agreed actions are happening by:

- rigorously and regularly checking the quality of planning, teaching and the work in pupils' books
- supporting teachers to use information on pupils' progress effectively by planning lessons and teaching alongside them.