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18 October 2013

Mrs Kate Stuart
Headteacher
Langland Community School
Langland Road
Milton Keynes
MK6 4HA

Dear Mrs Stuart

Special measures monitoring inspection of Langland Community School

Following my visit to your school on 15 and 16 October 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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.

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 Milton Keynes.

Yours sincerely

Alison Storey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching so that it is at least good and leads to much better achievement for all pupils by ensuring that:
 - teachers focus specifically on what pupils are going to learn when planning lessons
 - work is matched to the ability of pupils so all are challenged in lessons and they do not find work too easy or too hard
 - introductions by teachers take less time and pupils spend more time on activities so that time in lessons is used well
 - teachers give clear feedback to pupils about how to improve their work
 - best practice in teaching is shared more widely in the school.

- Raise expectations of behaviour around the school site by:
 - ensuring the behaviour policy is followed consistently
 - establishing clear routines for the end of break and lunchtime
 - analysing incidents of poor behaviour and checking that actions carried out are effective so they do not recur
 - reducing exclusions so they are in line with national levels.

- Ensure that leaders and managers are more focused on raising standards and ensuring pupils, including those in the nurture group, make rapid progress by:
 - checking that development plans are sharply focused and have clear actions for improvement
 - making sure that observations of lessons are judged accurately, that next steps are identified for teachers and that these are monitored to ensure improvement occurs.

- Increase governors' knowledge and understanding about their role so they are able to hold senior staff to account more robustly to ensure improvement is rapid and sustained.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 October 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with: the headteacher, consultant headteacher, assistant headteacher and other key staff; the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body; and representatives from the local authority. She talked informally with pupils during lessons and at break times.

Context

A new senior leadership team, including one leader new to the school, has been in place since September. At that point, the consultant headteacher's support reduced to three days per week. Seven teachers have left since the last monitoring inspection and eight class teachers joined the school at the beginning of this term. A special educational needs coordinator was appointed to the school on a secondment for a year for three days per week from September. The nurture group has been suspended.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Senior leaders' analysis of the levels pupils reached in reading, writing and mathematics by July compared with their starting points last September shows that their rates of progress were too variable. In the main, the variations are between year groups and sometimes between classes within a year group. This matches the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning across the school and the turnover of staff over the course of the last school year.

There were pockets of good progress, particularly in Years 2 and 6. As a result, standards at the end of Year 2 were in line overall with those seen nationally. The proportion of Year 6 pupils reaching the expected level in mathematics was in line with national figures. However, too often pupils across the school did not develop their skills and knowledge at the rate they should, and certainly not fast enough to make up for underachievement in the past. Therefore, most year groups have started the new academic year at levels below those expected for their age.

On the surface there was no clear pattern of variations between reading, writing and mathematics. In any of the subjects, progress was strongest in at least one year group and weakest in another. However, it was more likely to be weakest in writing, where it was rarely better, and too often less than expected. As a result, standards in writing are low across the school, particularly for older pupils. The headline figures also mask different rates of progress for particular groups of pupils. While no group consistently made less progress than others, more often than not pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs did not make the same rate of progress

as those who do not. Similarly, those who are known to be eligible for free school meals do not make as much progress as those who are not. As a result, the gap between the most vulnerable pupils and others is not yet closing. There is more to be done to unpick the impact of interventions or additional support to improve these pupils' achievement and determine how well the additional funding for them is being used.

In the lessons observed, pupils' attitudes to learning and the progress they made were directly related to the quality of the teaching. Pupils are becoming more independent as they get used to working on their own or in groups for a much greater proportion of lessons. However, they are too dependent on adult support if it is available and will opt not to stick at a task they find difficult given the chance. It is early days, but pupils' work shows small steps in their learning over the first few weeks of term and there is some evidence of additional support helping targeted pupils to catch up.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching observed recently by the headteacher, senior leaders and local authority and during the monitoring inspection is less variable than the last school year. Inadequate teaching is more unusual, but there is not enough teaching that is consistently good or better to bring about the rate of progress needed to improve pupils' achievement.

Teachers are focusing more on what they want pupils to learn when they plan lessons rather than what they want them to do, although this is not always matched closely enough to what the pupils need to learn next. The use of published schemes helps teachers to plan a series of lessons to develop pupils' learning over time. In the better lessons, teachers use their knowledge of what pupils found difficult in previous lessons or where they have identified gaps in their learning. However, they do not all have the depth of subject knowledge to pinpoint and know how to address gaps in pupils' skills and understanding. At times, teachers rely too heavily on the published schemes. They follow plans to the letter rather than adapting lessons and the way they teach to make sure pupils are learning as much as possible. Where teachers do not take sufficient account of the range of needs, even within sets, for some pupils there is still insufficient challenge and for others the work is too hard.

Time is better used in lessons. Introductions are shorter so that pupils move on more quickly to activities, although on occasion teachers do not take enough time to make sure that pupils know exactly what they have to do. Teachers are using marking and feedback to let pupils know what they have done well and what they need to improve. Sometimes, but not consistently, they give pupils opportunities to respond to marking to improve their work. Where teaching is stronger teachers are explicitly teaching pupils how to improve their work.

Teaching assistants do not always make an effective contribution to lessons. Sometimes this is because the classteacher has not made sure that they are clear what the pupils should be learning and how best they can support and challenge them. At other times it is because teaching assistants give too much help to pupils and do not encourage them to think and work things out for themselves.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The decision by senior leaders to change early morning routines so that teachers meet their class on the playground and bring them into school is having a positive impact. There is a calmer and more orderly start to the day. Throughout the day, pupils have a greater incentive to 'do the right thing' and take responsibility for their own actions following a review of the behaviour policy. Changes made mean that they now have the chance to make up for minor incidents and make a fresh start. Observations in class and around school mostly show that pupils and staff know what is expected. Pupils respond well to individual and class rewards for good behaviour and understand that there are consequences of moving up through the levels. Staff are positive in their approach with pupils and quick to praise good behaviour. However, the new systems to manage unacceptable behaviour at the lower levels are not yet consistently applied in all classes.

The school is building on its success in reducing the number of incidents of more challenging behaviour seen at the last monitoring inspection. The number of pupils excluded for a fixed number of days so far this term is much lower than the same time last year.

The recent focus on improving attendance and punctuality has had some initial success. Allocating learning mentors to year groups has helped to target pupils with low attendance, using strategies such as early morning telephone calls to remind them to come to school. Attendance figures for the beginning of term are back to where they were at the same time last year. 'Early bird' rewards which encourage pupils to arrive at school on time are helping to reduce the number of pupils who are late.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Systems for regularly monitoring the quality of teaching and learning by observing lessons and checking teachers' planning and pupils' work are becoming established. However, not enough attention is paid to whether what the teacher wants the pupils to learn is matched closely enough to what they need to learn. Teachers are given feedback to help improve their practice and there is evidence that individuals are taking this on board. Feedback does not routinely take account of teachers' knowledge of the subject so opportunities to identify individual development needs are missed. Plans are in place to formally link different information, including data on pupils' progress, to give a more accurate picture of teaching and its impact on

learning over time. However, these are at an early stage and currently too much weight is given to the most recent lesson seen as an indicator of how good teaching is in any class.

The senior leadership team are settling into their new roles. They are clear about the purpose of their role: to improve teaching and hence pupils' progress, and behaviour and attendance in the year groups they have overall responsibility for. They know what needs to improve in English and mathematics across the school and how they will work together to achieve this. It is too early to judge the impact of their work on teaching, but joint observations with the local authority adviser indicate that they can identify both the strengths and points for improvement in teaching.

Senior leaders' analysis of information on pupils' progress is much clearer. They can readily demonstrate the progress pupils make and the standards they reach in each subject and year group, and the performance of key groups, except for those who are more able. Targets are set for individual pupils, clearly identifying those who need to make faster progress to get to a level expected for their age. There is more to be done to check teachers are taking account of these target pupils when planning their lessons.

The improvements seen in the improvement plan at the last monitoring inspection have not been sustained. The revised plan has lost the sharp focus on the key actions needed to improve teaching and learning. It focuses too much on what will be done rather than the difference it will make to the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Separate action plans are too often simply a list of what needs to be done without being clear why and what the impact will be. There is a lack of agreement about who is responsible for the plan and what should be included in it. This needs addressing as a matter of urgency to ensure that there are clear plans in place which continue to focus on the priorities for the school.

Governors have clear systems in place to enable them to keep a check on pupils' achievement and the school's progress against its priorities for improvement, as well as take account of routine and wider issues. They are starting to consider their longer-term aims for the school. However, they acknowledge that they are not yet looking at evidence in enough detail. They have focused on pupils' attainment at the end of Years 2 and 6, rather than pupils' progress in different subjects and year groups. They have not looked closely enough at whether the gaps are closing for specific groups of pupils. Their current view of the quality of teaching is not based on up-to-date evidence. Although they see the link between the quality of teaching over time and the progress pupils make they are not routinely linking the two when they monitor the school's progress.

External support

Since the last monitoring inspection the local authority has continued to provide a range of support to improve teaching and behaviour. It has moved forward in its long-term plans for the school to convert to an academy. However, this has taken longer than originally anticipated, and details and timings are a long way from being confirmed. The support available to the leadership of the school in the interim is unclear. The time the consultant headteacher gives to the school and the focus of the local authority improvement partner's work are due to reduce and change. However, there are no firm plans in place for the transition period. It is crucial that plans are confirmed as a matter of urgency so that the focus on improvement is not lost.