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24 October 2013

Mrs M Pickles
Principal
Ackton Pastures Primary School
College Grove
Whitwood
Castleford
West Yorkshire, WF10 5NS

Dear Mrs Pickles

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ackton Pastures Primary School

Following my visit with Lyn Field, Additional Inspector, to your school on 22 and 23 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

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 Wakefield.

Yours sincerely

Steve Isherwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Eliminate inadequate teaching and improve the proportion that is at least good in order to rapidly accelerate pupils' progress by:
 - ensuring teachers in each class plan lessons that meet the needs and abilities of all pupils
 - reducing the amount of time that pupils spend sitting down and listening to teachers so that they can more quickly become actively engaged in learning
 - providing more tasks and activities which interest pupils so they are less likely to lose concentration.

- Raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 and ensure pupils make at least the expected progress in English and mathematics across both key stages by:
 - implementing consistent approaches to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics, monitoring their impact and taking prompt action to address any emerging weaknesses
 - making sure teachers know how well pupils are doing and plan lessons that help pupils to learn more, and more quickly
 - planning lessons that capture pupils' interest and give them more time to speak, contribute, do things for themselves, and opportunities to cooperate and work with other pupils.

- Improve the impact of the school's leaders by:
 - developing their ability to check and improve the quality of teaching
 - developing all teachers' ability to analyse how well different groups of pupils are making progress and adapting plans, where needed, to ensure more rapid progress for all
 - providing leaders of all subjects and aspects of management with the knowledge and skills to lead and manage their areas effectively
 - implementing more robustly the strategies to improve the attendance of pupils who are persistent absentees.

- Improve the effectiveness of governance by:
 - improving governors' knowledge of the school's work, including the quality of teaching
 - ensuring governors carry out checks on the impact of the school's actions and the extent to which these are accelerating pupils' progress and raising their attainment
 - ensuring governors hold senior leaders to account for their effectiveness.

An external review of governance is required.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 October 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders, groups of pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, two members of staff have left the school and four new members of staff have been appointed. In addition, a co-head of school has been recruited to work alongside and support senior leaders. Staff absences have continued resulting in changes to year groups and areas of responsibility.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' work in lessons and in their books, together with the school's own tracking information, shows that the progress for some pupils is beginning to accelerate. For example, the percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard at Year 1 in recognising the sounds that words make is above the national average. In addition, the progress pupils are making by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 is increasing in reading and mathematics. This is because the school has successfully introduced several new strategies to improve pupils' achievement which in turn are leading to improvements in classroom practice. There are clearer expectations of the progress pupils should make. The regular reviews of how well pupils are achieving are empowering staff and holding them to account for the progress their pupils are making. Following extensive staff training, teachers are more aware of what constitutes effective practice in teaching and learning and have improved their knowledge of the levels pupils reach, particularly in writing. This means that teachers are gaining confidence in judging the level of pupils' work and are acting more decisively in their analysis of data. This also means that the planning of support and intervention for individuals and weaker groups of pupils is much sharper.

However, the progress of pupils across the school is still uneven, particularly for middle to higher-attaining pupils and in writing. There are still areas of underachievement and in certain classes, most noticeably in Year 6; pupils are behind where they should be due to poor learning in previous years. This is also because of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and variability in how assessment information is used to plan work for pupils of different ability. As a result, in some classes some groups of pupils tread water and their potential remains

largely un-tapped because the work presented to them is either too easy or lacks challenge.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is getting stronger but remains variable. Although senior leaders have taken decisive action to significantly reduce the amount of inadequate practice, some still remains and there is still some way to go to ensure that learning is good in every lesson. Crucially, the proportion of good and better lessons is not strong enough yet to overcome past underachievement and to make up for the gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Nevertheless, senior leaders have made some headway in placing pupils' learning at the heart of their planning and have strengthened their procedures for checking on the quality of teachers' work in classrooms. For example, teachers are provided with clear pointers for improvement as required and targets are linked to the progress pupils make. Further improvements are required in how senior leaders make judgements on the achievement of pupils and groups of pupils in lessons and in pinpointing with precision the impact of teaching on pupils' progress.

In the better lessons, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do; there are clear systems in place to guide pupils to improve their skills and make good progress; teaching assistants provide an effective layer of support, particularly for those who find learning difficult; teachers spend less time directing and talking so that pupils can actively get on with the task in hand.

In the less effective lessons, some pupils underachieve and not enough is expected from all of them; many of the tasks lack sparkle and not enough is done by teachers to ensure that all pupils get a buzz out of lessons; work is not always matched well enough to pupils' different needs; too many worksheets are used, particularly in mathematics; insufficient time is given for pupils to discuss and share their ideas; less attention is given to the development of pupils' independent and thinking skills and not enough attention is given to encourage pupils to use and apply their skills in practical, investigative and problem-solving activities.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are generally polite and behave appropriately around school and in class. They usually try hard and persevere even when activities are less engaging. However, where teaching fails to motivate them sufficiently and where tasks in class lack demand, stimulus and activity, some pupils understandably become restless and their interests wanes.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is improving with an increased emphasis by staff on rewards and incentives and in stressing the importance to pupils and their families about attending regularly and arriving to school on time.

Pupils' views on the quality of their learning and behaviour were mixed. 'Our work is interesting some of the time', 'sometimes our work is too easy particularly in maths', 'behaviour is usually fine in school', 'sometimes we feel less safe on the yard', were typical of their comments. The views of parents concurred with these mixed responses. Some were very pleased with all aspects of the school, others less so, mainly around their perceptions of pupils' mixed behaviour at lunchtime and at break times.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior staff and governors are very clear about the direction the school must take to secure its momentum. They know that the key to resolving the issue of underachievement lies in the regular accurate assessment of pupils' progress and in maintaining the focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. No time has been lost and excuses for the school's past deficiencies have not been tolerated. Middle leaders are far more confident and aware. Their ability to influence colleagues has increased with training and support in checking on the quality of lessons, in scrutinising pupils' work and in completing action plans for their areas of responsibility. Further work is required to increase their skills in the analysis and interpretation of school and national data and their knowledge of how different groups of pupils are achieving.

Governance is moving forward well following the external review of its work. Governors are improving their ability to form their own independent view of how well the school is performing and are increasingly confident to ask searching questions of senior leaders and hold them to account. They are developing their awareness of what goes on in school through a more regular pattern of visits to see for themselves how improvements are progressing.

While taking heart and encouragement from recent improvements and in setting the school on the right path, all parties are in no doubt that much further work is required to realise the potential of all pupils and improve the quality of their learning.

External support

The local authority is providing an effective level of support and challenge to the school and this is coordinated well by the School Improvement Partner. On-going work is carefully targeted towards the needs of the school and is helping to strengthen leadership, raise pupils' achievement and improve the quality of pupils' learning.

Priorities for further improvement

- Maintain the focus on improving the quality of teaching to accelerate pupils' progress further.
- Increase the proportion of good and better lessons.
- Use assessment information more consistently to match work more closely to pupils' needs, particularly for the more able.
- Ensure there are increased opportunities for pupils to work independently and use their thinking skills.