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14 November 2013

Mrs Julie Irving
Headteacher
Arlecdon Primary School
Arlecdon Road
Arlecdon
Frizington
Cumbria
CA26 3XA

Dear Mrs Irving

Special measures monitoring inspection of Arlecdon Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 and 13 November 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 my previous visit.

My visit 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures

As at my previous visit we agreed that the school could appoint newly qualified teachers on condition that they receive highly quality support from a trained mentor and are given regular opportunities to observe good to outstanding practice. You confirmed that both conditions could be met as part of the partnership arrangement in place between your own school and Arlecdon.

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 Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve leadership, management and governance so as to secure rapid improvement in the school's performance and gain the full support of parents and staff by:
 - ensuring that leaders and managers have the necessary training to improve their ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the school, plan for improvement and improve teaching and behaviour
 - making sure that improvements in governance continue to be built upon, especially in the governing body's contribution to reviewing how well the school is doing and to improvement planning
 - ensuring that there is a formal and effective system to evaluate and improve the quality of teaching that includes clear, measurable targets for improvements in teachers' performance
 - making sure that remaining areas of weakness highlighted at the previous inspection are systematically and speedily addressed.

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good and improves pupils' achievement, especially in writing by:
 - making sure that teachers plan work that is appropriate for all pupils
 - making sure that pupils' work is always marked in accordance with the school's marking policy and that pupils know what they need to do to improve their work
 - raising expectations of the quality of pupils' writing and providing more opportunities for pupils to write imaginatively and at length.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 12 to 13 November 2013.

Evidence

During this visit I met, separately, with you and the senior teacher, three governors including the Chair of the Governing Body and two representatives of the local authority. I also took the opportunity to meet with all the class teachers and your delightful Year 6 pupils who were eager to share their experiences of school with me and show me the work in their books.

I analysed the school's test and assessment results for 2013, the school development plan and written evidence of the activities that governors are undertaking to monitor and evaluate the work of senior leaders to improve the school. I analysed, with you, the data you have collected on the progress that pupils are currently making and we scrutinised the work in a sample of books. This enabled us to evaluate the quality of marking, how well work is matched to pupils' capability and progress over time. I also observed seven part-lessons taught by four different teachers. One of those observations was carried out, jointly, with you. I also observed pupils during morning break and had informal conversations with pupils and members of staff.

Context

Your term as executive headteacher finishes at the end of this term and you are returning to your own school. With the help of the local authority, the governors have been successful in securing a partnership with a nearby effective school. Consequently, the headteacher of that school will become executive headteacher of both institutions. You have agreed to continue working with Arlecdon staff and governors, in the role of consultant, to ensure the smooth transition to the new arrangements, which commence on 1 January 2014. Since my previous visit a new school adviser has been commissioned, by the local authority, to work with you and your colleagues to support school improvement. The governors have appointed a Year 5 and Year 6 teacher who joined the staff in September. Additionally, an existing member of staff has been promoted to the post of senior teacher. This colleague has responsibility for coordinating mathematics, the reading and writing programme and deputising for you when you are working away from the school site.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Since my last visit the school's test and assessment results for 2013 have been analysed. The results of the phonics screening test, which is taken by pupils in Year 1 and used to measure their understanding of the sounds that letters make, have improved from below average in 2012 to broadly in line with the national average in 2013. In addition, although the girls outperformed the boys, the gap in performance is smaller than that found nationally. This improvement in results can be attributed to the structured approach to the teaching of phonics that you introduced soon after your appointment. Disappointingly, attainment in reading and writing at the end of Key Stage 1 declined in 2013 to significantly below average. This reversed a trend of improving results over the previous two years and was due, mainly, to the under attainment of boys. These results are a legacy of weaker teaching at Key Stage 1 which you have taken effective steps to address. Scrutiny of pupils' writing at Key Stage 1, both in lessons and in their books, shows that their progress in this subject is accelerating. This is a reflection of a new and effective approach to the teaching of writing that is being used in Years 1 and 2.

Attainment at Key Stage 2 was broadly average in mathematics, reading and writing. As were the results for the English grammar, punctuation and spelling test, introduced last year. Most pupils made the progress expected of them in mathematics and writing, with the majority exceeding expectations in reading.

The school's current data, which relates to pupils' achievement for the first half of the autumn term, is showing that almost all pupils are making the progress expected of them with some pupils doing even better than this. However the full range of pupils' work is not used to inform teachers' judgements on progress. For example, in writing, only selected pieces are used for this purpose. Consequently, the reliability of teachers' assessments is not secure.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is not consistent, as was the case at the most recent inspection. However, there is evidence that it is improving. In the best lessons pupils' progress is accelerated when teachers plan a variety of activities to meet the needs of the range of pupils in the class and appeal to the different ways that they learn. Teachers question pupils skilfully to make them think hard and deepen their understanding. For example, in one very good upper Key Stage 2 mathematics lesson, pupils were challenged to design a container for a Christmas gift, consolidating their earlier learning about polygons. The teacher had thought carefully about what she wanted the different groups of pupils to do, giving purpose to their learning by setting the work in a real-life context. The classroom was a hive of industry as the pupils, using their mathematical knowledge, designed their packages and prepared prototypes before constructing the final product. Consequently, the learning was very effective and all pupils made good progress.

Nevertheless, some teaching is still not good enough to ensure that pupils achieve well. In the weakest lessons a 'one-size-fits-all' approach is adopted with all pupils being given the same activity to do. This neither challenges the more-able pupils nor enables those pupils who struggle with their learning to make good progress. In lessons such as these pupils spend too much time on low-level activities such as 'cutting and pasting' and too little time on developing their understanding. Consequently, expectations are not high enough and pupils' progress is slow.

When you joined the school you recognised that the teaching of reading, writing and phonics needed to be strengthened. Accordingly you introduced a more structured approach to the teaching of these subjects and made sure that your colleagues received appropriate training in order to help them become more effective teachers of literacy. Evidence of the impact of this new approach can be seen in the improved results in phonics at the end of the last academic year and more recent improvements in the quality of pupils' writing.

Senior leaders have introduced a revised policy for marking of pupils' work. Books are now marked regularly and pupils are given a key role in the assessment of their work. This involves pupils evaluating the quality of the tasks they have completed, with their teachers then moderating these judgements to ensure that pupils' self-assessment is reliable. However, some teachers' comments could be more incisive, giving pupils succinct and clear guidance about how a piece of work could be improved and then making sure that they follow this up.

The curriculum for mathematics is not well structured. Aspects of mathematics are taught in discrete blocks and so it is difficult for pupils to see how their learning in this subject fits together. Evidence in pupils' books shows that the approach to the teaching of the four basic methods of calculation is not consistent. This is because the school does not have a calculations policy. Consequently, development of some pupils' understanding of the key ideas in mathematics is slower than it should be. In addition, pupils are not given enough opportunities to carry out mathematical investigations and solve problems in real-life contexts, even though inspection evidence shows that when pupils are allowed to work in this way they make rapid progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

In social situations pupils show care and concern for each other. Behaviour around school is orderly and there are well understood routines for managing pupils' behaviour which are consistently applied by all staff. Since your arrival staff and pupils say that behaviour has improved and that the school is a calmer place of learning. All of the parents who responded to the school's recent questionnaire agree. In those lessons where teaching fires their enthusiasm pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning showing commitment and tenacity. However, where teaching is less than inspiring pupils are passive and their engagement with learning is weak.

When asked, pupils said that there was little bullying in school and this was supported by the school's behaviour log. This indicated that two incidents of bullying have been recorded since my previous visit and both have been resolved effectively. Conversations with pupils about types of bullying however revealed gaps in their knowledge. Although they knew about cyber, physical and emotional bullying they knew less about homophobia, racism and other prejudice-based discriminatory behaviour. Consequently, they did not have a good understanding of the impact such conduct can have on the people subject to it.

The system for recording rewards and sanctions is under developed. There is no central record which enables senior leaders to easily monitor how well pupils are behaving and as a result quickly identify those who may require additional support.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The pupils, staff and governors recognise and value the work you have done to improve the school. On joining the staff you recognised that improving pupils' literacy was a key priority and you have effectively led improvements in the quality of teaching in this area of the curriculum.

From September you ensured that the school was compliant with its statutory duty to manage teachers' performance. However, it is too early to assess the impact that this is having on pupils' outcomes.

You have restructured the leadership team and the appointment of a senior teacher from the existing staff has enabled you to share your responsibilities. This has allowed you to prepare the school for the transition to new management arrangements that will be in place from January 2014. When you leave Arlecdon at the end of term to return to your own school you do so in the knowledge that the school is much better placed to continue its journey of improvement than it was when you arrived.

Governors under the leadership of the Chair of the Governing Body have worked very hard to secure the senior leadership of the school from the start of the spring term. As a result they have forged a partnership between Arlecdon and a local successful school with the headteacher assuming responsibility for both schools. In addition they are exploring the possibility of extending this partnership to two others. However, there is still work to be done to clarify and secure the detail of the partnership arrangements in order to maximise its impact.

The progress being made against each of the targets in the school development plan is being monitored by a committee of governors. Committee members are regular visitors to the school. They collect first hand evidence of the impact of the work being done to bring about improvement, which is enabling them to increasingly hold senior leaders to account.

The school website is well designed and a good source of information for parents. However, it is not yet fully compliant with statutory requirements. For example, there is no information about admission arrangements or how the additional funding the school receives from the pupil premium or the school sports' grant is spent. The pupil premium is money the school receives to support the learning of pupils who are in the care of the local authority, those entitled to free school meals and the children of service families.

External support

Since my previous visit the local authority have assigned a new school improvement officer to work with you and your colleagues. Working with governors he has been instrumental in helping secure the arrangements for managing the school from the start of the spring term. Soon after he was appointed to work with you, he and one of his colleagues carried out a review of the school. This review endorsed the reliability of your self-evaluation and confirmed that the actions being taken to improve the school were the right ones. However, although the review highlighted some weaknesses in teaching the pace at which these have been dealt with at both school and local authority level has not been quick enough.