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24 October 2013

Mr D Vallier
Executive Headteacher
Telscombe Cliffs Community Primary School
Telscombe Cliffs Way
Telscombe Cliffs
Peacehaven
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Dear Mr Vallier

Special measures monitoring inspection of Telscombe Cliffs Community Primary School

Following my visit with Susan Jackson, 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 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 appoint one newly qualified teacher 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 East Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching by making sure that:
 - teachers have sufficient subject knowledge in writing and mathematics to be able to adapt plans and respond quickly to pupils' needs in lessons
 - the pace of lessons is always good, pupils are engaged in their work and are moved on quickly to their next steps in learning
 - teachers ask questions that deepen pupils' understanding and involve pupils of all abilities
 - pupils have more opportunities to use and apply their mathematical skills in all subjects
 - all pupils make good progress from their starting points by setting work that always matches their needs and abilities, especially for the less-able pupils, disabled pupils and those who need extra support with their learning.

- Improve the impact of leaders and managers by:
 - ensuring that plans for improvement include regular opportunities to check and measure the impact of the action taken
 - making regular checks on the quality of teaching and ensuring that points for improving teaching are followed up with teachers
 - developing the skills of all staff with leadership roles so that they can contribute fully to making the school better
 - making better use of information about pupils' progress and attainment to accurately evaluate what works well and what needs to be improved
 - providing the governing body with accessible information about the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement so that it can fully understand the school's strengths and weaknesses in order to better hold leaders to account
 - undertaking an external review of governance.

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

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and spoke with the executive headteacher, members of staff, pupils, the co-Chairs of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors observed assemblies and lessons across the school, some jointly with the executive headteacher, and looked at pupils' work. They evaluated the school's information on pupils' progress along with other documents, including the school improvement plan. No parents and carers had submitted their opinions on Parent View, on the Ofsted website, this term.

Context

In September, a new executive headteacher began work. He is currently also headteacher of another local school and normally works for three days a week at Telscombe Cliffs. He has been appointed full-time substantive headteacher from January 2014.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement in English and mathematics continues to improve. For example, the clear developments in pupils' writing noted in the last monitoring visit have continued. Pupils have more opportunities to write for longer. In many lessons, pupils learn from interesting tasks. In a good Year 2 mathematics lesson, pupils carefully measured classroom objects, using centimetres. They worked out independently how to answer a range of different types of questions, which included vocabulary such as 'height order' and 'how much longer is...?' The quality of their thinking and learning was good. However, in too many lessons, tasks are still not challenging enough and the most-able pupils, in particular, do not always make the progress of which they are capable. In a mathematics lesson in Year 5, although pupils thoroughly enjoyed the investigations and puzzles, these did not extend their mathematical thinking far enough.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, in 2013, children's attainment was above average in most areas, but girls very significantly outperformed boys, whose performance was below average. In the 2013 Year 1 phonics screening tests, pupils fared much better than average, with all groups, including those pupils entitled to pupil premium funding, doing well.

At Key Stages 1 and 2, the 2013 results in reading, writing and mathematics were slightly above average. This shows a notable improvement in both cases, although, as the executive headteacher rightly pointed out, such standards should be the minimum expectation in this school. Furthermore, boys did notably less well than

girls. Too few pupils reached the higher levels. In Key Stage 2, the results in reading dipped.

This term, pupils' progress is improving, but mixed. Across all year groups, there is no gap between the progress of those entitled to pupil premium funding and their classmates. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs also progress at least as well as their peers. This reflects the strong and improving management in both of these areas of work.

In subjects outside English and mathematics, pupils do not achieve well enough. For example, in a Year 1 geography lesson, pupils' mapping skills were insufficiently developed. Pupils sing enthusiastically, but the quality of their singing, as heard by inspectors, is below expectation. Too often, pupils do not pitch notes correctly.

The quality of teaching

Teaching observed by inspectors ranged from inadequate to good; this accords with the school's own analysis. The strongest teaching is in English and mathematics, though this is not a fully consistent picture across the school.

The executive headteacher has introduced a revised system in which teachers share learning objectives and success criteria with pupils in each lesson. This has the positive effect of ensuring some consistency of practice and providing a useful framework in which teachers plan.

Much teaching is imaginative and engages pupils well. For example, in a good Year 2 writing lesson, pupils all enjoyed finding alliterative phrases. Work was well set, based on pupils' needs, with challenging work for all and more difficult tasks for the most able. The teacher carefully checked how well pupils were learning throughout the lesson. In a Year 4 English lesson, which required improvement, pupils really enjoyed acting in pairs, to help them find more interesting words (such as 'initially' instead of 'first'). However, the tightly controlled written planning task which followed this had the effect of narrowing their thinking and impeding progress as pupils did not have the opportunity to write down the interesting words they had said. There was too little challenge, especially for the most-able pupils.

In subjects beyond English and mathematics, teachers' expectations remain too low. This is largely because leadership in most subjects is ineffective. In a Key Stage 1 geography lesson, pupils made simple maps of the area around their classroom, but the work was easy for them; opportunities to introduce simple geographical elements, such as a key were missed. In a discussion afterwards, the teacher recognised this. A religious education lesson included much too little about the religious meaning of harvest. Yet these lessons showed something positive too; namely that, through the new 'learning journeys', the curriculum is becoming richer. Subjects are more important in their own right, and are not simply a vehicle for literacy, as was often the case at the last monitoring visit.

Marking is increasingly thorough and follows the school's policy, but there remain some inconsistencies in some classes. Pupils are very appreciative of the support and kindness shown by teachers, which helps their learning.

On some occasions, inspectors noted that staff used poor grammar or speech in front of pupils (for example, by dropping 'g's at the end of words) and were occasionally untidily dressed. This is not helpful, given that the school quite properly expects pupils to be in smart uniform and to speak correctly.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour continues to be very positive. They are keen learners and show much potential to learn better. They work well together, have good ideas and show enthusiasm. They consider that behaviour is good and they feel safe. The new, much enjoyed, 'Funky Fridays' assemblies provide strong encouragement and reward for good work and behaviour. Pupils' play is generally purposeful, happy and friendly. In discussion, some pupils pointed out that there can be occasional unkind behaviour. School records show this too. Boys are considerably over-represented in logs of poor behaviour. Pupils' attendance is above average.

When the teaching or provision is weak, pupils' behaviour deteriorates. This was shown in the two Key Stage 2 assemblies observed. The first of these lacked focus and depth. Pupils enjoyed the informality and humour of the teacher's approach at times but, at other times, lost interest and concentration. There was no opportunity for shared reflection or music. Conversely, the executive headteacher, in a harvest assembly, expertly illuminated moral and spiritual values about giving and being thankful to others and to God. He asked well-constructed questions, providing pupils the time to think and thoughtful guidance so that they responded profoundly. Their concentration was palpable. However, the choice of music, 'I've got a brand new combine harvester', did not suit the reflective mood created and the pupils did not sing well.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The executive headteacher has, in a short time, made his mark. He has a very encouraging and supportive style, which contains steel and high expectations. He thinks deeply about the school, listening to others, and drawing on his considerable experience. As a result, he has introduced some useful, quick changes which have already brought some improvement. They also pave the way for the long term. For example, he has sensibly revised the responsibilities of senior and middle leaders. Teachers, in accordance with their pay grade, must now take on appropriate whole-school responsibilities. There are some anomalies emerging, however. The subject leader for music does not teach any music lessons, including to his own class. The executive headteacher has also made rapid and useful changes to the curriculum by introducing the carefully structured 'learning journeys'.

The two deputy headteachers, who became very influential in the latter part of the last school year, are contributing still more in their revised roles. All senior leaders contribute well to a programme of lesson observations and coaching of staff, which bring improvement in teaching. Performance management procedures for staff are rightly being further refined so that they are more closely aligned with the precise job description of each individual.

The school improvement plan continues to provide a firm basis for improvement, but it needs further revision to incorporate the changes initiated by the headteacher. The school evaluates itself accurately. Data on pupils' progress and attainment are well maintained and used increasingly well by staff to guide their planning of English and mathematics lessons. Senior staff make accurate and well-informed judgements about the quality of teaching across the school.

Middle leaders, including subject leaders, have taken on board the new expectations set by the executive headteacher. They have each prepared functional action plans for their areas of responsibility. Nevertheless, they have much still to learn about the scope and accountability of their roles. The action plans too often address relatively minor issues, rather than the crucial matter, which is to raise standards and remove the low expectations in many subjects. The new leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage has made a positive start, following the leadership of the executive headteacher. She has ensured that planning and assessment processes are appropriate and consistent across all three classes. She is correctly aiming to improve the outdoor provision, learning from other schools.

Well led by the co-chairs, the work of the governing body continues to improve. The independent review of governance sharpened governors' thinking and helped them to understand why the school was judged to require special measures. Governors have been a calming, sustaining influence through the current leadership changes. They ask increasingly astute and well-informed questions of senior leaders. They have adapted suitably to the different style of the executive headteacher while rightly keeping their focus on pupils' attainment and the quality of the school's work.

External support

The local authority very usefully helped broker the services for the school of the new executive headteacher. It is now rightly treating the school with a lighter touch and its staff are less frequently involved. A local authority adviser continues to monitor the progress of the school. She does this alone, so her judgements, although reasonable, are uncorroborated. It is important that the local authority should involve more of its senior officers in evaluating the school while it remains in special measures.

The headteacher is beginning to involve usefully other local partners, including other schools, in helping the school to improve.

Priorities for further improvement:

- As a matter of urgency, provide training and support for middle leaders, so that the expectations of pupils in each subject rise and that the leaders know how they will be held accountable for the impact of their work.
- Ensure that the curriculum developments, and work on improving teaching, take full account of the needs of boys and higher-attaining pupils.