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4 December 2013

Mrs Rosalind Flanders
Headteacher
Parklands Community Primary School
Little Sutton
Ellesmere Port
Cheshire
CH66 3RL

Dear Mrs Flanders

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Parklands Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 3 December 2013 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. 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 was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in December 2012. 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 the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Strategic Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester.

Yours sincerely,

Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and make sure that all lessons are at least good so that pupils make better progress and reach higher standards in all year groups by:
 - making sure that all pupils learn how to work on their own without relying too much on adults' support
 - improving teachers' skills in finding out what pupils already know and can do before trying to teach them new things
 - improving the quality of teachers' marking so that pupils are told clearly how well they are doing and what they need to do next to improve their work
 - providing more training and guidance for staff on the school's new policies for managing pupils' behaviour and for encouraging positive attitudes to learning so that all staff follow the policy in the same way.

- Raise standards in English, particularly in writing, by:
 - giving pupils more opportunity and real purpose to write longer pieces of work
 - teaching pupils about the features of different types of writing and showing them how to check the quality of their own, and each other's, work
 - making sure staff know how to help pupils develop their writing skills as they go from year to year.

- Work with parents to make sure that all pupils get to school on time so that they do not miss the start of lessons.

- Improve the impact of leadership and management by:
 - giving subject leaders more time and opportunity to check how well their subject is being taught and the progress that pupils are making
 - making better use of the available information about pupils' progress so that school leaders, at all levels, are better able to check how well pupils are doing and whether actions to boost progress have worked
 - making sure that the new systems and routines to check the quality of teaching and to set targets for future improvement are implemented rigorously
 - ensuring that the governing body gets the information it needs in order to check the work of the school.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 3 December 2013

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher, the Early Years Foundation Stage leader, the team leading the action to resolve punctuality issues, the Chair of the Governing Body and five other governors. The headteacher and inspector jointly observed part of three teaching sessions. The inspector and leaders of English and mathematics carried out a joint scrutiny of work by a sample of pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2. The inspector also spoke by telephone to the school improvement officer and looked at a range of documentation including the report from a recent review carried out by the local authority. The focus of this inspection was to evaluate the school's progress in acting on the three areas for development arising from the inspection in December 2012 and in responding to the weaknesses in the school's approach to securing improvement identified in the monitoring inspection in July 2013.

Context

The number of pupils on roll has risen to 170. A class teacher on secondment to the school has taken on the role of assistant headteacher and leader in English. The size of the governing body has been reduced from 19 to 12 members. Talks have continued with an academies' trust concerning the proposed change in school status.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leadership and management continue to strengthen at all levels. A well-founded and tangible feeling of pride in what has been achieved is matched by enthusiasm and determination from governors and staff alike to continue to improve. The school is thriving with a clear focus on learning; every space is being used for group sessions and teaching assistants are playing a significant role in supporting and evaluating pupils' learning. This significant, positive change from July reflects the now strong team approach to delivering the curriculum. Three teaching assistants are working to gain the Higher Level Teaching Assistant qualification – a clear measure of the increased interest and value placed in professional development mirroring the shared drive to give the pupils the best. Previously, only half of staff agreed that they knew what the school was trying to achieve, now it is all. This is a direct result of the strong, determined leadership of the headteacher. In judiciously gauging the pace of introducing new systems, she has been uncompromising in her high expectations of staff and pupils. In September, non-negotiables were agreed concerning teaching and classroom practice, and the behaviour policy was reviewed to reflect the now well-established culture of 'making the right choices'.

The headteacher has been very effective in involving staff and parents in bringing about change and in devolving responsibility for driving improvement to others. With support from within the school and the local authority, this approach has gradually built up the pool of management skills, particularly in tracking pupils' progress and in

allocating resources to boost the achievement of more-able pupils and to enable others to catch up.

Governors' loyal support for the school is now well-matched by their knowledge of what is happening on a daily basis and how well it is doing. Governors know where current weaknesses lie and feel confident in challenging and holding leaders to account. The headteacher's report is now supplemented with pertinent, clear reports from other leaders on their action to bring about improvement. Good examples are the detailed overview of the provision for pupils with special educational needs, the use of pupil premium funding and summaries of data relating to pupils' achievement.

Overall, the school has made steady progress in putting in place systems to raise the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. While justifiably pleased with the positive signs of improvement in many aspects, governors and the headteacher are aware of inconsistencies still to be ironed out and the need to show cumulative gains in pupils' achievement throughout the school.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Action plans are being implemented and regularly reviewed and updated. The governors' action plan, for example, is a true working document with annotations reflecting what has been done and points raised.
- The headteacher is a strong role model. The school is calm, pupils are polite and considerate to others. Most pupils now say that they learn a lot in lessons (data from school's questionnaires).
- Teaching assistants have risen to the challenge of leading groups, delivering intervention programmes, planning sessions and making resources. Their feedback on pupils' learning is often insightful.
- The attainment gap is closing because of focused teaching. For the first time in recent years, Year 6 pupils' progress in mathematics over the four years at Key Stage 2 was far better than the national average. The steps to ensure challenge for more-able pupils are starting to pay off in higher achievement.
- Similarly, improved provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage resulted in 80% of children meeting the prime learning goals, a proportion higher than in other schools in the local authority.
- An analysis of data has highlighted relevant areas for increased emphasis, including the development of number and writing in the Early Years Foundation Stage, especially, but not exclusively, for boys.
- Staff are supporting and coaching each other to ensure effective practice and greater consistency in how policies are followed. Individual accountability is accepted as is the higher expectation of pupils' progress this academic year.
- Support staff have been very successful in helping parents to appreciate the need for their children to be on time for the start of school. Punctuality is no longer a concern.
- Well-reasoned decisions, such as the need to provide sessions in the basic skills of grammar, punctuation and spelling, underlie changes in organisation.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- As yet, reports to senior leaders and the governing body often focus more on describing what has been done than indicating and assessing what it has meant for pupils.
- Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching are constraining learning. Data show differences in rates of progress within and between year groups, and between reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' books show that not all teaching staff are equally adept at following the marking policy. For instance, in mathematics it is often difficult to see, in getting all the calculations correct, whether pupils have been working within their capability or have made really good progress in grasping and using new strategies.
- Writing rightly remains a key priority for improvement. From the Nursery onwards, pupils are not progressing fast enough. The impact of the use of a commercial programme has yet to show in the data tracking pupils' progress. Leaders are aware of the need to provide more opportunities for pupils of all ages to write at length and to develop their story-writing skills. The intention to develop 'talk for writing' is a valid step forward.

External support

The school has drawn on guidance and input from local authority consultants in developing classroom practice, such as planning lessons and moderating judgements about attainment in the Early Years Foundation Stage, but is becoming increasingly self-sufficient as skills grow. The governing body has similarly worked with a consultant to strengthen its effectiveness and has been proactive in setting up suggested ways of working. One governor, for example, has worked alongside the English leader to gain an overview of provision in reading and writing. The local authority's recent review was comprehensive in its coverage of teaching and learning. The report identified strengths and areas for development, some of which were confirmed by this inspection.