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4 December 2013

Mrs D Wakelin
The Headteacher
Meeching Valley Primary School
Valley Road
Newhaven
East Sussex
BN9 9UT

Dear Mrs Wakelin

Special measures monitoring inspection of Meeching Valley Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 and 3 December 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 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:
progress since being subject to special measures – good
progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.
The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection in any year group.

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 to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Browning
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Ensure that teaching promotes pupils' achievement well by:
 - developing teachers' understanding of the teaching of phonics
 - developing an effective whole-school approach to the teaching of spelling, punctuation and handwriting
 - ensuring that there is a clear analysis of gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding, and that this information is used to match tasks and support in lessons to meet pupils' needs
 - providing success criteria so that pupils' progress can be assessed accurately at a range of levels
 - giving pupils more opportunities to write at length in a range of subjects
 - ensuring that introductions to lessons are not overlong and encouraging pupils to develop the skills to work independently
 - ensuring teachers' questioning is challenging and probes pupils' understanding.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at senior, governor and middle, management level by:
 - developing leadership capacity to give teachers the support they need to improve their skills
 - improving the use of data so that pupils' progress is monitored accurately and the information used to ensure that individual needs are met
 - increasing the involvement of the governing body in strategic planning in order to improve its role in raising pupils' attainment.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 December 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and pupils' work in Years 1 to 6. She met with the headteacher, members of the school's leadership team, a group of pupils, a group of parents, the Chair of the Governing Body and representatives from the local authority. The inspector observed nine part lessons all of which were jointly observed with the headteacher and senior and/or middle leaders.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection the school roll has increased from 185 to 204 pupils. In September 2013 the school opened a second Reception class. Three teachers have been appointed and three have left. An additional teacher has been appointed to start in January 2014. The partnership contract with the executive headteacher of a nearby school ceased in July 2013. The school has an increased number of pupils for whom English is an additional language. The school also has an increased number of pupils eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils who are looked after by the local authority, those known to be eligible for free school meals and the children of service families). Two new governors have been appointed.

Achievement of pupils at the school

There have been some improvements in pupils' achievement since the previous monitoring inspection. The proportion of pupils who achieved nationally expected levels in Year 6 increased, especially in mathematics, and writing. There was a slight decline in reading attainment. Girls performed better than their peers nationally in all subjects, unlike the boys, who did not. The gaps closed between the national and school results in mathematics and writing, but increased in reading. Pupils' attainment when compared to levels nationally remains low. A higher number of pupils achieved the higher grade Level 5 than before in reading, writing and mathematics. The average points score trend shows that, since 2011, results have fluctuated, and dipped in 2012 and 2013, but the gaps are getting smaller. Attainment for pupils in Year 2 declined in reading and mathematics, but not in writing. Results continue to fluctuate from year to year, but results in writing are improving.

Pupils who speak English as an additional language make similar progress to their classmates. In Key Stage 1, pupils eligible for pupil premium achieve less well than their classmates, but the picture is reversed in all subjects, except in mathematics, by the time they reach Key Stage 2. The most able pupils make similar progress to their classmates. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs generally make faster progress compared to other pupils. This is because of the good support systems in place to ensure that they achieve well.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make reasonable progress from their low starting points especially in their communication, physical, social and emotional development.

The school is working hard to tackle pupils' weaknesses in reading, punctuation, spelling, handwriting and in pupils' mathematical understanding. There have been some good improvements made, especially in the teaching of phonics (the sounds letters make) across the school. This is due to the continuation of daily phonics sessions to support pupils' confidence in reading and writing and grouping pupils by ability.

The progress pupils make in lessons, while improving, is still too variable. Termly pupil progress meetings identify those who have not made sufficient progress. The information is used to match tasks and put in place interventions to close the gap in achievement. Through the increased use of topics and themes called 'learning journeys', pupils have more opportunities to write at length and to develop their numeracy skills. The use of talk partners, to promote discussion, helps pupils to share learning ideas, resolve problems and works well. Older pupils enjoy working on their own, but younger ones have too few opportunities to do so. In literacy, especially, pupils are increasingly evaluating their own and each other's progress.

The quality of teaching

Lessons observed show that, although teaching is improving, it is not yet consistently good. The proportion of good teaching over time has increased, the weakest teaching has been eradicated. A few lessons still require improvement. Teachers have a better understanding of pupils' achievement and more closely match tasks to their abilities. Teachers' planning has improved, with better use of strategies to motivate and engage pupils' learning effectively in their lessons. Strong features of teaching are when learning is linked through topics. For example, Year 6 pupils used their knowledge of the Tudors to resolve and calculate the probabilities of winning an archery tournament. Year 5 pupils used their editing skills to improve their own account of a horror story and said how much they were looking forward to Count Dracula's visit to class. Marking continues to be more informative in literacy than in mathematics and in some topic-based work learning journeys. Examples of good marking were seen when teachers were very clear about the next steps of learning, and pupils respond well to the comments.

Typically, in the weakest teaching, expectations are too low, pupils' pace of learning is slow and caused by weak planning and marking. In most lessons, work is better targeted to meet the needs of the majority of pupils. Teachers use good questioning and more practical learning methods and resources to motivate pupils. Teaching assistants are making an increasingly positive contribution to lessons. They have developed their questioning skills, are trained in how to use personalised learning to read programmes and mathematics support programmes, and pupils are benefiting from their increased knowledge and expertise.

Adults in the Early Years Foundation Stage support children's learning well. Improvements in teaching and the environment are helping to tackle children's low communication, physical and social and emotional development.

To tackle the weaknesses and gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding, the school has put in place measures such as regular short bursts of grammar sessions, spelling games, and accelerated reader programmes. Interventions such as writing and mathematics booster classes, language development, small group work and one-to-one support in English and mathematics are in place. These have yet to be evaluated in terms of their impact on accelerating pupils' achievement. Pupil premium funding is used wisely to purchase additional staff who provide smaller group work and individual support, as well as purchasing home reading kits, resources, learning games, tablet computers and subsidising educational visits. To reverse weaknesses in mathematics, commercial resources and programmes are used to help develop pupils' mathematical understanding and to help raise pupils' achievement levels. The revised range of subjects in Years 3 to 6 is much more exciting, with good links made through learning journeys which provide pupils with interesting cultural experiences as well as opportunities to improve their creative writing and presentation skills.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

There is a positive atmosphere in the school. Pupils say that behaviour in lessons continues to be good. Pupils know about the different forms of bullying and who to turn to if they have concerns. Most are keen learners and enjoy the effort teachers are making to help them do well. They like the Golden Rules and rewards. They are proud of the changes taking place and feel that adults respond to their ideas. They say they feel safe and happy in school. Several said they enjoyed breakfast club and how it 'set them up' for learning. One pupil said, 'This is an eco-friendly learning environment.' Leaders scrupulously monitor and analyse attendance by groups and collate this information alongside achievement. They work closely with families to support them, especially when facing significant challenges.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The quality of leadership and management by the headteacher has improved significantly since the last monitoring visit. She has formed a cohesive team who recognise that there is more to do to ensure systems to improve teaching are sustainable long term and are not quick fixes. The headteacher ensures that teachers are accountable for their pupils' progress and has had some challenging discussions with teachers whose practice falls below that expected. As a result, a number of teachers left the school last term. Action plans have been devised and implemented to support training. Leaders have a secure grasp of the performance information and ensure that it is used to drive up the quality of teaching. The tracking of pupils' progress continues to be used well. An outcome of this and pupil progress meetings is to pinpoint interventions required. Many have been taken on board, but not all have been evaluated in terms of their impact and value for money,

some because they are too recent. Systems for monitoring teaching, scrutinising pupils work, giving feedback to teachers and staff training are firmly in place. Leaders revised the school's improvement plan, it is accurate in terms of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

The capacity of leadership is somewhat hampered because the skills of the wider leadership team are developing. Those in senior and middle leadership roles are genuinely eager to develop professionally. They welcome the opportunities to attend training and to monitor and evaluate the school's work. Nonetheless, they do not always have a sufficiently clear whole school picture to enable them to develop robust analytical and evaluative skills to move the school on at a faster rate.

The special educational needs coordinator continues to effectively ensure pupils who have particular needs receive the right support. She has clear evidence of the impact of actions taken and teachers' better use of targets so that next steps for pupils' learning are made clear. Her role has extended to include the overview of the Early Years Foundation Stage, which is also undergoing substantial change.

The range of subjects on offer is more interesting and relevant and is based on practical, first hand learning experiences. Visits made to Preston Manor, the Natural History and Booth Museums provide greater opportunities for pupils to write enthusiastically. These experiences also enrich their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The governing body is strategically involved, and keen to move the school forward at a swift pace. In discussion, it is clear that governors are more confident in holding the school to account. Now with staffing stability, the school is well placed to accelerate the drive for improvement and demonstrate the impact of the wide ranging initiatives adopted, while continuing to promote equal opportunities.

The parent group was overwhelmingly positive about the many improvements in the school and of the headteacher's efforts to engage with all parents. The group said that communications had improved significantly, that it is listened to and consulted. Several members gave personal accounts of the way in which the school had supported them. For the first time, several parents have stood as parent governors.

External support

Leaders are working well with the local authority to make sure that the areas for improvement are tackled effectively. The intense support from the local authority and previously from the partner school has supported the school in its accurate self-evaluation and improvement. The local authority is checking the work of the school, but has stepped back from its substantial support which demonstrates its confidence in the school's leadership and capacity.