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12 December 2013

Mrs Yvonne Buckley
Headteacher
Willow Primary School
Alston Road
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN4 7EZ

Dear Mrs Buckley

Special measures monitoring inspection of Willow Primary School

Following my visit with Lee Owston, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in April 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 not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

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 Academies Advisers Unit, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Doncaster.

Yours sincerely

Amraz Ali

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school so it is good or better in order that pupils make at least good progress and reach the standards of which they are capable, particularly in English and mathematics by:
 - ensuring that teachers take account of what pupils already know when planning lessons in order to match work closely to the full range of pupils' learning needs
 - taking steps to help all groups of pupils make the progress of which they are capable and achieve equally well, particularly pupils with special educational needs
 - making sure that teachers always have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, including standards of presentation, spelling and handwriting
 - modifying the curriculum so that it enables all pupils to achieve well
 - making sure that pupils' books are always marked thoroughly and that marking provides pupils with clear feedback about how well they are doing and what they need to do next.

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by:
 - taking swift action to eradicate inadequate teaching
 - developing an effective system of self-evaluation so that it is realistic, robust, and accurate in focusing on what the school is good at and what areas need developing
 - establishing rigorous systems for checking pupils' progress
 - ensuring leaders and managers know how to review and analyse information about pupils' progress and use it to check whether their actions are helping to improve pupils' achievement
 - making certain that when leaders observe lessons they focus on the progress pupils are making, as well as what the teacher is doing
 - improving the effectiveness of the methods used to communicate with parents
 - undertaking an external review of the governing body in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management could be improved.

- Improve the behaviour of a small number of pupils who behave boisterously at break times by teaching them how to play purposefully and understand the consequences of their actions.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 10 to 11 December 2013.

Evidence

Inspectors visited 15 lessons and observed daily routines, including start-of-day activities, breaktimes and lunchtimes. Inspectors scrutinised documents, including the academy's plans for improvement and the academy's records of pupils' attainment. Meetings were held with the headteacher, staff, groups of pupils, a representative from the local authority and two members of the governing body. Work in pupils' books from across the academy was scrutinised and both inspectors talked with parents as they collected their children at the end of the school day.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been a number of changes to the academy's context. One teacher is on maternity leave. A teacher and higher level teaching assistant are absent due to sickness. One teacher returned from an extended period of absence but was not present during this inspection. These roles are covered by temporary staff. A new Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body have been elected. Two new parent governors and a local authority governor have been recruited. One member of the governing body is currently suspended.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' learning and progress in lessons remains very inconsistent, across subjects and across all phases of the academy. This is confirmed by the academy's tracking of attainment, which indicates that progress over time is still too variable, with a particular issue in writing where progress is particularly weak. Children who left the Reception classes at the end of the last academic year generally reached above average levels, indicating that most were ready for learning in Key Stage 1. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 declined in 2013 to be broadly average. The attainment of pupils in receipt of the pupil premium lagged behind others by a term. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2013 was above average overall, but the progress made by pupils in this group was inconsistent and for some was poor. A particular concern is the progress made by pupils in receipt of the pupil premium and those with special educational needs.

Procedures are in place to track closely the attainment and progress of pupils, involving the regular assessment of pupils. However, the accuracy of assessments is not totally secure and teachers do not have confidence in assessments carried out by previous teachers, even where assessments have been moderated by the local authority. Regular pupil progress review meetings are holding teachers to account for the progress pupils are making.

The quality of teaching

Although there is some evidence of improvements, given how long the academy has been subject to special measures, teaching has not improved rapidly enough. The headteacher understands the urgency with which the quality of teaching needs to improve. Key developments include, staff training on marking and feedback, the introduction of an

academy-wide lesson planning format and a change to the way that pupils are taught letters and sounds (phonics). However, these have had only limited impact on the quality of teaching and the progress of pupils, in part related to the high incidence of staff absence. While there is less inadequate teaching than at the time of the April inspection, too much remains weak and the variability of quality between teachers has not been sufficiently addressed. A small number of staff have not accepted the outcome of the April inspection and have been reluctant to accept the guidance and support from senior leaders and other schools.

Pupils are now streamed by ability across Key Stage 1 for the teaching of letters and the sounds that they make so that they are taught in ability groups. This is helping teachers to tailor the tasks more accurately to the needs of each group. However, these groups are at times too large and consequently, do not allow each pupil's needs to be met fully. In some lessons, pupils sat through the teaching of skills they had already mastered, while others struggled to keep up with the pace of the lesson. Teaching assistants are not always utilised effectively during this time.

The new format for planning English and mathematics lessons is helping some teachers to plan better lessons. Some teachers are using this approach to plan activities that more precisely match the needs, interests and abilities of the pupils. However, this is not evident in all lessons. Additionally, inaccuracies in assessment have not been tackled decisively and teachers do not always agree with their colleagues' judgements at the end of each year. Consequently, vital time is wasted conducting reassessments rather than moving learning forward. While these inaccuracies are allowed to exist, teaching cannot effectively tailor tasks to individual needs, limiting significantly the impact on pupils' progress. Teachers' expectations of the quality and quantity of pupils' work remains too low. Recent training on marking and feedback has led to more regular comments being given to pupils about the quality of their work. Although improving, the comments do not allow pupils to respond easily to teachers' suggestions because they are too general. As such, pupils say they read their teachers' comments but are rarely expected to make improvements nor corrections to their current piece of work.

Within the Early Years Foundation Stage, improvements to the outdoor environment mean that children are learning more when taking part in the planned outdoor activities. Inside the classrooms where children work closely with an adult, activities generally meet the range of children's needs. However, activities children choose for themselves do not present enough challenge, especially for higher ability children and this slows their progress. Similarly, in Key Stage 1 where pupils work with teachers and teaching assistants learning is more successful than when they work independently. Activities provided for pupils to choose and complete independently have not always been given enough thought and do not offer sufficient challenge to capitalise on the above-average range of skills and abilities of pupils.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

At the most recent section 5 inspection, behaviour and safety were judged to require improvement, particularly at break and lunchtimes. Observations of breaktimes and lunchtimes, along with discussions with pupils, indicate that behaviour at these important times is improving. Pupils say that the incidence of poor behaviour on the playgrounds has declined. Pupils say that their recent anti-bullying work has helped them to understand what constitutes bullying and they say that staff usually sort out any difficulties. However, they report that there are inconsistencies of approach when incidents are reported to lunchtime

supervisors. Senior leaders correctly identify that the limited hard play space available for Key Stage 1 pupils contributes to regular difficulties pupils have when playing out, such as falls and bumped heads. In classrooms, behaviour is generally good. Typically, pupils are well behaved and enthusiastic in lessons and it is only when they are kept stationary for too long that their engagement wains. Attendance in the last academic year declined to below average, but current rates of attendance indicate that this is now a little above average for the current term.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Staffing difficulties, a slow start to address key issues and some resistance to change on the part of a small number of staff means the academy has not secured enough improvement to the quality of teaching in the period since it became subject to special measures.

Although senior leaders were initially slow to accept the findings of the most recent section 5 inspection, they have subsequently responded with determination. They are aware of where most improvement is needed and underperformance is being challenged. Teachers who need extra training have individual support plans in place. However, some of these teachers have not accepted these plans. A comprehensive package of support from three better performing schools has been commissioned through the Doncaster Teaching Schools Partnership. Some teachers talk very positively about the benefit of this work and identify that this has helped improve aspects of their work. This has contributed to some important improvements and there is less inadequate teaching now than at the time of the last inspection. However, too much teaching remains weak and a small but significant minority of teachers are not fully engaging with the external partners who have been commissioned to aid the improvement in their work.

After lesson observations conducted by inspectors, all teachers accepted feedback in a very positive and professional manner and indicated that they would in turn act on the points identified for development. During the inspection, relationships between staff appeared sound and many talked about the positive impact of the guidance and support that leaders provide. However, what is clear to inspectors is that the staff do not present as a unified body that is determined to work together in order to improve the quality of education provided for pupils. Discussions with staff gave a mixed picture of the staff's willingness to accept the need for improvement. Weekly consultative meetings involving the headteacher and trade union representatives are helping to sort out staff grievances but are taking a large amount of senior leaders' time and energy. This is detracting from the important work of improving teaching and learning.

Parents who spoke with inspectors were generally very supportive of the academy and confirmed that improvements are being made, particularly with pupils' behaviour. They welcome the opportunity to discuss their children with Key Stage 2 teachers on the playground at the end of each day. Similarly, parents of Key Stage 1 pupils welcomed the opportunity to read with their children at the start of the day each Friday, but questioned why this was restricted to one day each week.

The work of the governing body has improved and represents a cause for optimism. The recently elected Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body are clear about their roles and the need for rapid improvement. The academy's improvement group of governors have been clear in their requests for information from members of the senior leadership team

Consequently, the headteacher's termly report to governors is comprehensive and provides a firm basis with which governors are able to gauge the rate of improvement. Governors correctly identify the need to address issues with staff motivation and morale, but are equally clear that at the same time the quality of teaching needs to improve.

External support

Following the last monitoring visit by Her Majesty's Inspector, senior leaders engaged well with the local authority, and the local authority officer regularly attends the improvement group. The support from the local authority has helped to secure improvements to the role of governors. A high level of support has been commissioned from the Doncaster Teaching Schools Partnership. However, although the planned support is sound the impact of the work has been inconsistent and too much teaching remains weak.