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7 February 2014

Mrs Kate Stuart
Headteacher
Langland Community School
Langland Road
Milton Keynes
MK6 4HA

Dear Mrs Stuart

Special measures monitoring inspection of Langland Community School

Following my visit with David Westall, Additional inspector, to your school on 5 and 6 February 2014, 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 November 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 up to two newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection: one in Key Stage 1 and one in Key Stage 2.

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 Milton Keynes and as below.

Yours sincerely

Alison Storey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching so that it is at least good and leads to much better achievement for all pupils by ensuring that:
 - teachers focus specifically on what pupils are going to learn when planning lessons
 - work is matched to the ability of pupils so all are challenged in lessons and they do not find work too easy or too hard
 - introductions by teachers take less time and pupils spend more time on activities so that time in lessons is used well
 - teachers give clear feedback to pupils about how to improve their work
 - best practice in teaching is shared more widely in the school.

- Raise expectations of behaviour around the school site by:
 - ensuring the behaviour policy is followed consistently
 - establishing clear routines for the end of break and lunchtime
 - analysing incidents of poor behaviour and checking that actions carried out are effective so they do not recur
 - reducing exclusions so they are in line with national levels.

- Ensure that leaders and managers are more focused on raising standards and ensuring pupils, including those in the nurture group, make rapid progress by:
 - checking that development plans are sharply focused and have clear actions for improvement
 - making sure that observations of lessons are judged accurately, that next steps are identified for teachers and that these are monitored to ensure improvement occurs.

- Increase governors' knowledge and understanding about their role so they are able to hold senior staff to account more robustly to ensure improvement is rapid and sustained.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 February 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with: the headteacher, assistant headteacher and other key staff; the Chair of the Governing Body and vice chair; and representatives from the local authority. They talked with teachers and informally with pupils during lessons, around school and at break times.

Context

Staffing has been more stable since the last monitoring inspection. One member of the senior leadership team left the school at Christmas. A new teacher joined the school in January to take on her responsibilities for teaching and leading mathematics. The consultant headteacher's support finished at the end of the autumn term and the deputy headteacher is due to return from maternity leave after February half term.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Most year groups, with the exception of pupils moving into Year 3, started the school year at levels below those expected for their age. Senior leaders' analysis of the most recent assessments of the levels pupils reached in reading, writing and mathematics show that overall standards are still low. This is particularly the case for older pupils, and in writing across the school. There are, however, signs of improvement. The gap tends to be narrower for the younger pupils who have not experienced the weak teaching and high staff turnover of the past to the same extent.

Taken on their own, the school's most recent assessments suggest that too many pupils made little or no progress in their learning between September and December. This does not match with pupils' work or the quality of teaching and learning seen in lessons recently. Senior leaders realise that the use of reading and mathematics tests designed for the end of the school year did not give an accurate picture of pupils' learning after one term. Teachers had also been cautious in their assessments of pupils' writing levels. Pupils' work in their books shows improvement over time although there are still gaps in their reading, writing and mathematical skills, particularly in Years 4, 5 and 6. In almost all the lessons observed pupils were moving forward. They were either practising what they had recently learnt to make sure they understood it or were learning new things. However, rates of progress are not consistently fast enough to make up for underachievement in the past.

Published data indicate that the gap between pupils who are disabled or have special education needs and those who do not is starting to narrow by the end of Year 2.

The same is true of the gap between those eligible for free school meals and those who are not. However, this is not the case across the school. Data show that the gap for pupils eligible for free school meals widened at the end of Year 6 last school year and that progress for the most vulnerable pupils this school year is too variable. The school still has no data to show how well the school is meeting the needs of the more able pupils.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are improving. In the lessons observed, they usually paid attention while the teacher was talking to the whole class and applied themselves to activities whether they were working independently or with others. They are far more willing than previously to have a go at tasks which challenge them.

The quality of teaching

There are signs of improvement in the quality of teaching observed recently by the headteacher and senior leaders and during the monitoring inspection. Inadequate teaching is unusual, and sometimes teaching is good. In the main, teaching assistants are making a more effective contribution to lessons. However, good or better teaching is not widespread or consistent enough to bring about the rate of progress needed to improve pupils' achievement.

Teachers are better at matching work to the ability of pupils. Published schemes help them to pitch lessons at broadly the right level and to build on pupils' learning over time. At times, however, teachers still stick too rigidly to the plans provided. Where they take account of what pupils found difficult in previous lessons or gaps they have identified in their learning and adapt the lesson accordingly, teaching is better matched to pupils' needs. Lessons are generally planned with the different levels pupils are working at in mind. However, sometimes teachers assume where pupils are in a set they will all be working at the same level or they work with a whole class on the same activity for a prolonged period of time. On these occasions the work is too easy for some pupils and too hard for others. A common weakness is insufficient challenge for more-able pupils, particularly where they have to complete the activities other pupils are doing before they move on to more challenging work.

Teachers are usually clear what they want pupils to learn in lessons and share this with them. In the better lessons they use questioning effectively to check what pupils are learning. Too often though questioning is superficial and opportunities to check pupils' understanding and correct errors are missed at the expense of keeping to time in a lesson. Teachers accept the first response without asking further questions to really check pupils' understanding, or they do not challenge those who do not offer an answer. Sometimes they simply do not wait before answering the question themselves. Marking and feedback tend to be better in 'exciting writing' than across other subjects. Where they are used well teachers show pupils what they have done well and what needs to be better and follow up with opportunities for them to improve their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Most pupils know how they are expected to behave in class, around school and on the playground. Clear routines, a more consistent approach to managing low levels of unacceptable behaviour in classrooms, and individual and class rewards encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own actions. High levels of adult supervision around school at key times of day and on the playground reinforce expectations.

Systems are now in place to monitor incidents of poor behaviour and to analyse the causes to try and prevent them happening again. By closely tracking the pupils with the most challenging behaviour, identifying trigger points and what gets them back on track the school has halved the number of pupils who need constant monitoring to 10. Similarly, the number of detentions and incidents where pupils have to spend time out of class are down. The drop in the number of pupils excluded for a fixed number of days seen at the last monitoring inspection has been maintained.

The initial success in improving attendance and punctuality this school year has been sustained. Most pupils attend school regularly and the numbers who are late are much lower than last school year. However, there is still work to be done to ensure all children arrive on time ready for a prompt start to learning.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The school is less reliant on external support than previously, with the headteacher and assistant headteacher taking greater responsibility for improvement. Supported by key governors, and following consultation with staff, they have completely rewritten the improvement plan since the last monitoring inspection. The long-term vision for the school is much clearer as are the priorities for the short term, such as improving reading and writing, although targets are not always clear. In future it is important that accurate self-evaluation happens first to identify priorities and that the plan drives the budget, not the other way around.

Senior leaders are establishing their roles with the year groups they have responsibility for, regularly observing lessons and checking teachers' planning. They identify strengths and points for improvement in teaching but are not looking closely enough at the match of work to pupils' needs or the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. Senior leaders provide clear feedback to staff, identifying next steps and how they will support them to improve. Often they will demonstrate or teach alongside staff to show exactly what they mean. Staff value the feedback and support they get and there is evidence that it is improving the quality of teaching.

Better links are made between the lessons senior leaders observe and other information, such as data on pupils' progress and the work in pupils' books, to get a

broader picture of teaching. However, the school's view of the overall quality of teaching over time is too generous because they still give too much weight to the most recent lesson seen and not enough to its impact on learning.

Expectations are higher with a closer focus on the progress different groups of pupils make and the standards they reach. Regular progress meetings mean that teachers have a better understanding of how well different groups, with the exception of the more able, are doing. They know they are responsible for making sure all pupils achieve as well as they can. A programme of support is picking up pupils who are underachieving across the school, not just those in Years 2 and 6, but there is more to be done to check what is effective and what is not.

Governors have started to look in more detail at how well pupils do across the school rather than just at the end of Years 2 and 6. They are beginning to consider what the information tells them about teaching and the progress that different groups of pupils make. They have not yet evaluated the use of additional money to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals even though around half of pupils attract this funding. In part, this is because training has been delayed and also because senior leaders have not formally analysed the impact of different interventions and additional support. It is important that this happens as soon as possible so that they can hold the school to account and plan for the next budget.

External support

The local authority is committed to plans for the school to convert to an academy to secure its long-term success but acknowledges it is taking longer than anticipated to confirm arrangements. It has ensured clearer plans are in place to support and challenge the school during the transition than at the last monitoring inspection. Since the consultant headteacher left, the local authority improvement partner has brokered additional support through the local teaching schools. In the main this works well, although the school has not had all the support it identified it needs and some has been slow to get off the ground. It is important that momentum is not lost. Senior officers recognise the challenges that lie ahead over the coming months and the need for close monitoring to ensure improvement seen to date continues.