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Ms Wendy Figes
Headteacher
Arlecdon Primary School
Arlecdon Road
Arlecdon
Frizington
Cumbria
CA26 3XA

Dear Ms Figes

Special measures monitoring inspection of Arlecdon Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the visit and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection on condition that the school can assure high quality support for these colleagues and they are able to learn from good to outstanding practitioners.

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 Corporate Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely,

Charles Lowry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve leadership, management and governance so as to secure rapid improvement in the school's performance and gain the full support of parents and staff by:
 - ensuring that leaders and managers have the necessary training to improve their ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the school, plan for improvement and improve teaching and behaviour
 - making sure that improvements in governance continue to be built upon, especially in the governing body's contribution to reviewing how well the school is doing and to improvement planning
 - ensuring that there is a formal and effective system to evaluate and improve the quality of teaching that includes clear, measurable targets for improvements in teachers' performance
 - making sure that remaining areas of weakness highlighted at the previous inspection are systematically and speedily addressed.

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good and improves pupils' achievement, especially in writing by:
 - making sure that teachers plan work that is appropriate for all pupils
 - making sure that pupils' work is always marked in accordance with the school's marking policy and that pupils know what they need to do to improve their work
 - raising expectations of the quality of pupils' writing and providing more opportunities for pupils to write imaginatively and at length.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 5 to 6 March 2014.

Evidence

During this visit I met with you and you updated me on developments since you took over leadership of the school in January 2014. I also held separate meetings with the class teachers, two members of the governing body, a group of parents, a representative from the local authority and a group of delightful Year 5 pupils, eager to give their evaluation of the progress the school has made since my previous visit. In addition, I had a telephone conversation with a National Leader of Education who is headteacher of a local outstanding school assisting you in driving forward improvements. I scrutinised the revised school development plan, a report of the findings of a review of the school carried out by the local authority adviser and a record of the support that Arlecdon has received from its link school. I also examined senior leaders' records of the monitoring of teaching and learning, records of the school's approach to the performance management of teachers and the school's behaviour log. With you I carried out a scrutiny of work in pupils' books. I observed seven part-lessons taught by four teachers, I was present at one assembly and I also spent time in the playground during morning break observing the pupils at play.

Context

The executive headteacher in post at the time of my previous visit has returned, full time to her own school. The governing body has negotiated a partnership arrangement between your school, Thorn Hill Primary School of which you are headteacher, and Arlecdon. As a result, you are now executive headteacher of both schools. This arrangement is securing the long-term senior leadership of the school. In order to manage this arrangement and ensure its effectiveness the governing bodies of both schools have contributed members to the executive governing body. This group will monitor and evaluate the work of the partnership and will also be responsible for managing your performance. One teacher has left the school and a newly qualified teacher joined the staff in February 2014. This teacher is currently teaching pupils in lower Key Stage 2.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's current data are showing that in mathematics attainment in Year 1 is at least in line with expectations for all pupils as it is for the large majority of their peers in Year 2. However, the proportions of pupils attaining at age-related expectations in reading and writing are greater in Year 1 than they are in Year 2. This is a consequence of a legacy of weaker teaching over time, which the school has effectively dealt with. Although the school's data show that almost all pupils are making at least good progress in Key Stage 1, for pupils in Year 2, this progress is from lower starting points.

The school's data for pupils in Key Stage 2 indicate that pupils in Years 3 and 4 have made less progress since the start of the academic year in mathematics, reading and writing than their peers in other year groups. This is a consequence of weak teaching in the past, which the school is currently addressing. However, it is too early to assess the impact of the school's work in this area. Consistently good teaching in Year 6 is leading to improved attainment in mathematics and reading for pupils of all abilities; with the large majority of pupils achieving the expected levels in reading and most pupils in mathematics. As at the most recent inspection, pupils' attainment in writing is weaker than it is in other subjects and across all year groups. However, senior leaders are aware of the weaker progress pupils are making in writing and are ensuring that teachers receive training in order to improve teaching in this subject. Nevertheless, there are signs in the school's data that pupils' progress in writing is beginning to accelerate in Key Stage 1 and upper Key Stage 2. Those parents who expressed an opinion felt that since September their children have made good progress.

Scrutiny of the work in pupils' books provides convincing evidence that the school's assessment of pupils' current attainment is accurate and reliable.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching continues to improve and evidence from lesson observations and scrutiny of the work in pupils' books shows that there is no inadequate practice in the school, with much that is good. However, there are some aspects of teaching that require further development to achieve your aim of consistently good teaching across the school. This is certainly the case in relation to writing in lower Key Stage 2.

Relationships between teachers, pupils and their peers are positive, based on mutual respect and promote an effective atmosphere for learning. In the lessons where pupils learn well they are eager and willing learners, showing resilience as they tackle challenging activities. For example in one notable Year 6 mathematics lesson pupils were given statements that described three dimensional shapes and from this evidence alone they had to determine what the shape actually was. The teacher, knowing her pupils well, differentiated the activity so that pupils of all abilities were able to engage and experience a sense of accomplishment as they solved the problems. However, this high quality practice is not evident in all lessons. Some activities are not challenging enough for more-able pupils; they are given too much support by the teacher and, as a result, their progress slows. In Year 3 pupils' books there are examples of pupils writing in a range of styles; however, there are not enough instances of pupils demonstrating their creativity in order to produce extended pieces of written work.

Since my previous visit senior leaders have introduced a calculations policy. This has led to much more consistency in the way that addition, subtraction, division and multiplication are taught in all years. However, as at my previous visit the work in pupils' books suggests that there is still an emphasis on pupils learning mathematics techniques. Not enough emphasis is given to deepening pupils' understanding of mathematics by challenging them to apply these techniques in solving problems and carrying out investigations.

Teachers mark pupils' work regularly, with many teachers' comments being supportive and affirming the work pupils have done. However, this style of marking is not incisive enough. As noted at my previous visit, too many comments do not identify exactly what it is that pupils have done well and what they need to do make their work even better. Even when marking is of this quality, too many pupils do not act on their teachers' advice, correct their work and so learn from their mistakes.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

As at my previous visit, pupils' behaviour continues to be a strength. They relate well to each other and their teachers, are courteous, friendly and polite. The pupils I spoke with said that they enjoyed coming to school. This is reflected in their above-average rates of attendance. The behaviour policy that you introduced soon after joining the staff is already having positive impact. When asked, pupils could clearly state what is expected of them, in terms of their conduct, and the consequences of not meeting the school's high expectations. Pupils also said that the behaviour of those few individuals who sometimes find it difficult to conform has improved as a result of the new strategy. Parents who met with me during the visit said that their children were happy at school, felt safe and secure. They also agreed that pupils' behaviour was good and bullying was not an issue that concerned them or their children. This was supported by the school's central record of behaviour. Only two incidents of bullying have been recorded in the past year and both were effectively managed by the staff to a positive conclusion. The recent introduction of 'Friendship Benches' in the playground has been received enthusiastically by the pupils. These benches, where children can go and sit if they are feeling upset or vulnerable are monitored closely by the group of pupil play leaders. If they see anyone sitting on the bench they approach them to offer help and support. As one pupil put it, 'these benches show everybody that we care. People are happier now and we all play together.' Pupils continue to conduct themselves well in lessons. When teaching challenges them they engage well with the learning and want to do well. As a result their progress accelerates.

Pupils demonstrate respect for their school and its environment. They wear their uniform tidily and the school grounds are litter- and graffiti-free. Teachers have established routines for managing pupils' behaviour in class. These ensure that little learning time is lost as pupils move from one activity to the next.

Safeguarding procedures are compliant with statutory regulations and the single central record of the checks made on the suitability of staff to work with the children are up to date.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

You have taken the baton from the outgoing executive headteacher and built upon the foundations already laid to improve the school rapidly. You have very quickly united the school community behind your vision, and your drive and determination are continuing to accelerate positive change.

The governing body under the leadership of the Chair of Governors has secured a partnership arrangement between your own school, Thornhill Primary School and Arlecdon. As a result, you have taken over the headship of both schools under the banner of executive headteacher. This new arrangement is enabling the good practice that exists in your own school to be shared among all the staff and, as a result, improve the quality of teaching. In addition, it is increasing the effective support for newly qualified teachers who are being enabled to learn best practice and share ideas with their more experienced colleagues. However, this arrangement is in its infancy and it is too early to determine the long-term impact of this arrangement on the leadership and management of both schools.

With the support of the local authority and governing body you have eradicated inadequate teaching. You have introduced a robust system for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. You observe teachers' classroom practice regularly and provide them with detailed feedback about their strengths and areas for development. You agree with your colleagues how they will address these and then check that improvements have been when you next observe them. Consequently, teachers are being held robustly to account for the quality of their work and the standards achieved by the pupils they teach. However, it is apparent from your records of lesson observations that too much emphasis is placed on what the teacher does during the lesson, rather than the effect their teaching is having on pupils' learning, particularly the learning of the different groups in the class. Therefore, an opportunity is missed to collect information on pupils' progress.

Soon after joining the staff you evaluated the school development plan and then revised it to reflect your accurate evaluation of how well the school is doing. The revised plan is detailed and describes the actions to be taken to improve the school. However, it is not sharp enough. It is not clear who will monitor and evaluate the plan to make sure that the actions being taken are having the desired impact. The targets are not in an order of priority so it is not easy to see which of them are the most important to do first. The lack of milestones makes it difficult for governors and senior leaders to measure the progress the school is making towards achieving each of the targets. Nevertheless, the plan provides a blueprint for the continued development of the school, informing the work of you and your colleagues.

Data on pupils' progress are collected and analysed every half term. This is enabling teachers to identify, quickly, those pupils who are underperforming and put in place extra help to get them back on track.

The system in place for monitoring progress in mathematics, with its regular assessments of pupils' knowledge and skills and extra classes to deal with their misunderstandings, is contributing to the improved progress of pupils, particularly in Key Stage 1 and upper Key Stage 2.

The parents who met with me said that the school encouraged them to be involved with their child's education. For example, they were kept up to date with the life and work of the school through the weekly newsletter. They also receive regular updates on their child's progress through the recently introduced termly report.

Since my previous visit the school's website has been improved and is now fully compliant with statutory requirements. Consequently, it provides an effective source of information for parents and pupils. However, care needs to be exercised when pupils' photographs or their names are used on the site. For example, if pupils' photographs are used to illustrate an aspect of the school's work then avoid using the pupils' names. This reduces the risk of inappropriate and unsolicited attention from people outside the school.

External support

The school continues to work effectively with the local authority. The general adviser has been supporting the school since my previous visit. He recently reviewed the school to determine the progress being made against each of the improvement priorities, confirming the positive impact of the actions you are taking to improve the school. He was instrumental in working with governors to secure the partnership between Thornhill Primary school and Arlecdon and your position as executive headteacher. With the assistance of the general adviser you have forged a valuable link with a local outstanding school. The headteacher, a national leader of education, is working with you to address school improvement priorities, including improving the quality of teaching. The newly qualified teachers on the staff at Arlecdon are benefitting from the guidance and support provided by the deputy headteacher of the link school.