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Deborah Bailey
Executive Headteacher
John Bunyan Junior School
Lancaster Way
Braintree
CM7 5UL

Dear Mrs Bailey

Special measures monitoring inspection of John Bunyan Junior School

Following my visit with Kate Robertson, Additional Inspector, to your school on 19–20 March 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 17–18 September 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement 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 not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Essex.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Winter
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Strengthen teaching so that pupils make good progress by ensuring that:
 - every teacher has high expectations of each pupil and uses methods that hold their attention
 - assessment data are used more effectively to plan lessons that meet the needs of all pupils, including the more able and those who have special educational needs
 - teaching assistants are deployed so they contribute to learning throughout each lesson
 - individual targets are set for pupils in English and mathematics, and that these are frequently reviewed and used to plan the next steps in learning
 - teachers give pupils clear points on how to improve when they mark their work and check that these have been adopted.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - introducing more rigorous procedures for evaluating the impact of teaching on pupils' performance and developing a coordinated approach to improving teaching
 - managing the performance of all staff more rigorously by setting individual targets for teachers which are tightly linked to pupils' progress
 - sharpening self-evaluation so that it provides a frequent and accurate analysis of performance
 - ensuring that improvement plans include challenging targets that are about raising pupils' achievement
 - undertaking an external review of the role of the governing body, to ensure that governors do more to challenge senior leaders over the school's performance.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 19–20 March 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed 12 lessons or parts of lessons. Four of the observations were conducted jointly with the executive headteacher or the associate headteacher. The inspectors met with senior leaders including governors, members of the strategic board, and leaders of mathematics, English and special educational needs. Inspectors spoke to pupils in lessons and in two meetings. Meetings were held with teachers and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors scrutinised documents, monitoring records and school improvement plans.

Context

Following the section 5 inspection in September 2013, the headteacher left the school in December 2013. An executive headteacher from the linked infant school took over the leadership of the school in January 2014. She is supported by an associate headteacher from an Essex infant school, on a part-time basis. Both of these leaders are local leaders of education. One teacher left the school in January 2014. A strategic improvement board was formed in January 2014 to monitor and challenge the school. It comprises members of the governing body and governors from the linked infant school as well as representatives from local authority.

Achievement of pupils at the school

School leaders have set higher expectations of pupils' progress. Along with training and support to improve teaching, these have resulted in improved progress, particularly for the most able pupils in mathematics. Teachers are more consistently challenging the most able pupils and their mathematics skills are improving. In Year 3, for example, teachers give pupils greater opportunities to apply their number skills to solve problems; this ensures that pupils have to think hard. These opportunities also help to embed learning when pupils explain their thinking and their answers. Teachers have begun to use practical resources in mathematics to reinforce learning.

Teachers provide pupils with more opportunities to write at length across a range of genres and the most able pupils are making better progress because teaching meets their needs more successfully, particularly in their use of language for different purposes. However, some pupils are not improving their spelling, grammar and punctuation skills quickly enough. Teachers are not always addressing these weaknesses well enough, or focusing enough on pupils' most important priorities for improvement, for instance to write sentences successfully. Some of the older pupils, particularly in Year 6, receive the additional help they need to improve spelling and grammar and this is having a positive impact.

Leaders are in the process of introducing a new scheme to encourage reading, particularly among the boys. The full impact of the work to improve reading is yet to be seen. Pupils say they enjoy reading, however, and would like more interesting books to read at school. Leaders are addressing this by restocking the school library.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving. Leaders have addressed inadequate teaching successfully. Classroom environments have improved. They are more orderly and stimulating places to learn.

Each year group is linked to a senior leader of education from the local teaching school alliance, who works alongside teachers to plan and deliver better teaching. This is having a positive impact and lessons are more purposeful now. Pupils themselves say that their work is more challenging now. Pupils enjoy the higher-level mathematics lessons taught by a secondary teacher. Sometimes teachers do not help pupils make better progress because activities are not adapted well enough for their differing abilities, or build on their existing skills and understanding systematically. In some lessons, the whole-class objectives are not set at an appropriate level of difficulty for some groups.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are better supported in lessons, often by teaching assistants who are receiving regular training. Leaders have not yet evaluated the impact of the additional individual and small group work for these pupils. Sometimes pupils miss learning in subjects other than mathematics and English because they have additional support during the afternoon when many of the science, art and humanities lessons take place. Senior leaders are aware of this and plan to make changes to ensure that all pupils have opportunities to develop their skills across a range of subjects.

Teachers' marking has improved and they are now consistently following the school's reviewed marking policy. Sometimes, however, the comments are not helpful. Pupils are not clear about what they have done well, and although they know their targets and levels of attainment, they are not always sure what they mean or what they need to do to reach the next level.

Interactive whiteboards are not helpful in promoting learning when the text displayed is too small for pupils to read.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Although disruption to lessons is rare and most pupils work hard in lessons, a small minority of pupils do not have consistently positive attitudes to learning. They find it difficult to concentrate in some lessons and lose focus. Teaching assistants often

help them by reminding them to listen and asking helpful questions to ensure they re-engage with learning.

Behaviour is generally good, but pupils report that a small proportion of pupils who behave badly do not respond to the school's system of rewards and sanctions. Pupils also say that they would worry about reporting bad behaviour because they might be 'picked on'. Pupils know what bullying is and say that it does not happen very often. They also say that a very few pupils sometimes swear and occasionally fight.

The school's strategies, including close working with some families, have helped to improve attendance.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The pace of improvement has quickened with the new leadership team. The executive headteacher and associate headteacher are passionate about making a difference and as a result of their work, teaching is improving. Parents and pupils who expressed their views to the inspection team are positive about the changes that are taking place in the school. Senior leaders have secured the confidence of the staff team.

Leaders and local authority representatives observe lessons regularly and teachers receive feedback about how to improve. They are encouraged to reflect on their own practice by completing a professional log, which records what went well and what could improve in their lessons. The executive headteacher plans to merge this document with a development plan for each teacher to record the support they receive, their targets and timescales for improvement.

Senior leaders work in partnership with the teaching school and the local authority to ensure that teachers have the training and support they need. Leaders have rightly focused their efforts on improving the quality of teaching, but they are not yet tracking the progress of pupils carefully enough. Leaders are not yet confident that teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment are fully accurate.

The school's improvement plans now detail how it is going to bring about improvements. They do not, however, have enough measurable targets to help governors, the strategic board and others check that the school is on track to make the improvements it has planned.

Some of the middle leaders, such as those in charge of subjects or specific pupils groups, are being supported by colleagues from the linked infant school. This work aims to help all leaders in the school make a valuable contribution to improving teaching and achievement in their areas of responsibility. It is too early to see the impact of this work.

The curriculum is not broad and balanced for some pupils. Leaders are appropriately looking for ways to address this, for instance by linking more subjects and ensuring that additional small group work in mathematics and English does not affect learning in other subjects.

The strategic board set up in January 2014 is monitoring the work of the school along with the local authority. It is also working with the local authority to consider and plan for the future of the school. The members of the board have the skills and experience to support leaders and hold them to account rigorously.

External support

The local authority has secured interim leadership and has a credible vision for the school's future. It monitors improvements through the strategic board and regular visits to the school. A local authority representative supports senior leaders, including by monitoring the quality of teaching and providing mainly helpful feedback.