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Martin Clinton
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Clinton

Special measures monitoring inspection of Istead Rise Primary School

Following my visit with John Viner, Additional inspector, to your school on 14 and 15 May 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 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 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 Kent.

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

Improve the quality of teaching in Years 1 to 6 by:

- ensuring that teachers set work for pupils that matches the whole range of abilities in each class and maintains their interest, especially for more-able pupils
- ensuring that teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics are accurate
- making sure teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to practise their skills in reading, writing and mathematics in different subjects
- ensuring that teachers check that pupils in Key Stage 2 know their targets in English and mathematics and how these targets can be achieved.

Increase rates of progress in Years 1 to 6 by:

- planning more effective support for those pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding
- raising teachers' expectations for what more-able pupils can achieve making sure that teachers' marking clearly identifies how work can be improved and providing opportunities for pupils to act on the teachers' comments.

Improve leadership and management by:

- increasing the capacity of senior and subject leaders to make accurate checks on teaching and provide clear feedback to teachers to help them improve the quality of their teaching
- ensuring that information from checks on pupils' progress is used to identify any dips in progress and is quickly followed up with effective action
- ensuring that school leaders at all levels take urgent and effective steps to improve communication with parents and carers, especially with regard to behaviour
- providing training for governors to improve their skills in checking on the school's performance and to ensure that the governing body consistently implements agreed procedures.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 14 and 15 May 2014

Evidence

We observed the school's work including attending an assembly, looking at pupils' books and observing the teaching and learning in all classes. As well as carrying out 11 lesson observations we made shorter visits to most classes. We scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, head of school, the assistant headteachers and the special educational needs coordinator. We also met with six members of the governing body and two representatives from the local authority.

Context

The deputy headteacher, who has been absent for some time, left the school in the spring. A class teacher also left at that time and has been replaced by two part-time teachers. Another teacher has been appointed to cover teachers' planning and preparation time.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The most recent checks on how well pupils achieve in reading and mathematics and work completed in pupils' books show that the majority of pupils are making reasonable progress this year. Standards are rising and in several year groups standards are edging closer to the national average. The rise in progress and standards is not even across the school or subjects. For example, pupils in Year 2 make slower progress in mathematics. Overall in Years 3 and 4 pupils are making good progress this year, but their standards are still below average because these pupils have the most ground to make up. Pupils eligible for support provided by the pupil premium (extra funding given to eligible groups of pupils) in Year 3 have made good progress over this year, however there is still a wide gap between their achievement and that of their classmates. In Year 4, this group of pupils have made really fast progress and, in reading, they achieve better than their classmates.

The improvements in pupils' skills and knowledge vary from class to class and in some cases the pace of improvement is not fast enough to make up for very slow progress in the past. This is evident in books and in lessons when it is clear that pupils do not always have the time needed to complete enough work. This results in a lot of short, often unfinished pieces of work. Pupils in some classes are not always clear about what they are learning and what successful learning will look like. This is sometimes because the objectives for the lessons are not sharp enough. Occasionally, although all teachers plan activities at different levels to match pupils' abilities, the work is too hard or too easy for a few pupils. Finished pieces of work around the school show that the content and the presentation of work, particularly in writing, is improving. There are also good examples of pupils completing interesting writing in subjects such as history and science. This shows that when

pupils have the time, they are able to produce extended pieces of work. The quality of presentation is improving in many of the pupils' books but there are still too many instances of scruffy, undated and unfinished pieces of work. Where teachers give pupils clear guidance and the opportunity to improve their work, pupils respond well. This is not routine and although teachers mark the work assiduously, in many cases the guidance is too broad to be helpful. Although pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills are improving steadily, the pace of improvement would speed up if teachers ensured pupils had enough time to complete work and expected more of them.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching and the impact that it has on pupils' learning were similar in this visit to the last. Unlike the last visit however, this time there was a little teaching which was inadequate. The small amount of good teaching that we saw during this visit was reflected in the quality of work in pupils' books and it is clear that this is normal practice in these classes. There is no doubt that most teachers plan more interesting activities, with opportunities for pupils to discuss their learning and work collaboratively. They plan activities to try and cater for different abilities and all teachers follow the agreed policies for planning lessons and for marking work.

Nonetheless, most of the teaching requires improvement. This does not mean that teachers are not working hard enough, indeed in some ways they are doing too much during lessons and not giving pupils sufficient opportunity to complete enough work at a high enough level. This means that, although pupils make some progress, the quality of teaching in most classes is not good enough to really speed up the pace of learning. In some lessons during the visit, pupils were champing at the bit to get going but were held up by lengthy explanations of what, in some cases, they already knew. In other lessons, despite teachers spending a lot of time explaining, when the pupils had the opportunity to start the activities it became clear that many were still confused. Teachers sometimes do not find out what the pupils already know and are not clear about how to build on that understanding. In some classes pupils know their targets and are clear about how these are being checked; however, this is not always the case. There is challenge for pupils in terms of the level of work; however, the expectations about how much they can do in a lesson are sometimes too low.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Almost all of the parents and carers who completed the online questionnaire, Parent View, are rightly confident that their children are happy and safe in school. Pupils behave well in class, at playtimes and lunchtimes. They are polite, friendly and confident. They are able to talk about the school values and exemplify the current focus on friendliness. They cooperate well in class, listen to each other and are willing to work hard when they have the opportunity. There is a little inattentive and

off-task behaviour but this is very closely linked with less effective teaching and inconsistent behaviour management. Generally though, pupils respond well to the positive approach of most adults and the good routines in most classrooms and at playtimes. During this visit, the older pupils were taking their national tests and they responded sensibly to the changes in their routines. Attendance has been lower than average in the past mainly because of the low attendance of a few pupils. Although this was not looked at in great detail, during the visit four out of the 11 classes achieved 100% attendance and all but two of the remaining classes achieved over 95%.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

It has been important to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning in classes but this, and the long-term absence of the deputy headteacher, has meant that the two assistant headteachers have had a limited time out of class to fully develop their leadership roles. This is particularly true because both have the weighty responsibilities of leading mathematics and literacy. As a result, they have not had sufficient time to guide and support their colleagues on a regular basis. This is a pity because there has been very little recorded observation, follow up and mentoring for teachers and they have not benefited from regular guidance and support. Senior leaders have checked teachers' planning and looked at pupils' books. This has tended to focus on what teachers are doing rather than examining the impact of teaching on pupils' learning.

The responses to the parents' and carers' online survey are much more positive now. Several parents and carers took the time to write to me explaining how pleased they were with the school and the improvements they believe have happened during the last year. There remain some concerns about aspects of leadership and management, which possibly reflect the changes that have happened since the school was judged to require special measures.

I reported on the weaknesses in the school's improvement plan in the last report and the plan has not changed significantly so the same weaknesses remain. The plan tends to be task driven so that there are checks as to whether actions have been taken. There is not enough emphasis on finding out whether this has made a difference to pupils' learning. As has been reported previously, the lack of targets and milestones in the school improvement plan make it difficult for governors to accurately evaluate the school's progress. Governors continue to visit the school when they can and understand the current strengths and remaining weaknesses. They ask challenging and appropriate questions when presented with information about pupils' achievement and quality of teaching. They are not meeting often enough however, to regularly or systematically focus sharply enough on remedying the school's remaining key weaknesses.

External support

The school receives a great deal of support from the local authority advisor and colleagues from Meopham Community Academy. No doubt this support is valuable but, given the amount of it, the pace of improvement for individual teachers and the school in general is not as rapid as might be expected. Actions and advice they provide need to be followed up more rigorously by senior leaders in the school to ensure that they are fully effective.