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12 June 2014

Mrs Morven Stroud
Headteacher
Gorsefield Primary School
Robertson Street
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Dear Mrs Stroud

Special measures monitoring inspection of Gorsefield Primary School

Following my visit with Keith Bardon, Additional Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 June 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 in November 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 Executive Director of Children, Young People and Culture for Bury.

Yours sincerely

Aelwyn Pugh

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching, so that it is consistently good or better and so that all pupils make good or better progress in reading, writing and mathematics, by:
 - eradicating any remaining inadequate teaching raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should achieve
 - making sure that all teachers use information about pupils' progress to plan lessons which meet pupils' varying needs and abilities and provide good levels of challenge, particularly for the middle-ability and most able pupils
 - ensuring marking consistently provides clear guidance for pupils about what they need to do next to improve their work and giving pupils time to act on it
 - making sure that teaching motivates and engages pupils enough in their work so that their attitudes to learning are always good
 - ensuring that support staff play an active role in all parts of lessons.

- Raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics, so that they are at least in line with national standards by the end of Year 6, by:
 - improving pupils' accuracy in their use of grammar, spelling and punctuation
 - improving the teaching of phonics (the links between sounds and letters)
 - making sure that all pupils read high-quality and varied texts that are appropriate for their differing ages and abilities
 - ensuring that all teachers insist on high expectations of good standards and presentation of pupils' work, including neat, correctly formed handwriting and numbers that are always modelled accurately by staff
 - placing less emphasis on the completion of worksheets and giving more opportunities for pupils to set out their own work
 - providing pupils with more open-ended challenges which encourage them to further develop their mathematical thinking, especially in a real-life context, particularly the middle-ability and most able pupils.

- Urgently improve leadership and management, including governance, so that the school's improvement is rapid and its capacity to improve strengthens by:
 - providing training for leaders at all levels so they can accurately evaluate the quality of provision in their areas of responsibility, including through reviewing teachers' planning, observing lessons and scrutinising pupils' work
 - making sure that senior and middle leaders check more carefully that all teachers are providing work that is well matched to pupils' varying abilities
 - ensuring improvement plans are clear, identify specific outcomes in terms of pupils' achievement and include interim measures against which progress can be regularly evaluated
 - improving the systems to manage the performance of staff so that they are held fully to account for the progress of pupils
 - improving the skills and knowledge of the governing body so it is able to effectively hold leaders fully to account for rapidly improving teaching and pupils' progress
 - undertaking an external review of governance, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 10 to 11 June 2014.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and held meetings with the headteacher, senior staff, three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority and 14 pupils chosen at random from across the school.

Context

Since the Section 5 inspection, the number of pupils at the school has increased to 447. The deputy headteacher has assumed responsibility for monitoring teaching and learning. Additional part-time teachers have been brought in to provide extra support for particular groups and classes. The governors and the Department for Education have identified a potential academy sponsor, which will be a successful school from a neighbouring authority.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Since the first monitoring inspection, the school has set more ambitious attainment targets for pupils at the end of Key Stage 2. The most recent assessments by teachers show that the proportion of 11-year-olds likely to reach the expected standards at the end of this academic year is higher than in previous years, although it is still below the most recent national averages. Higher targets have also been set for progress. However, if the pupils are to reach or surpass the national standards, a higher proportion of them will need to make greater progress than is currently expected of them. The senior leaders have recognised this and will be revising the targets for the end of Key Stages 1 and 2.

The school now conducts six-weekly reviews of pupils' performance. These show clear improvements, particularly in reading and mathematics. This was borne out by what inspectors saw in class and in pupils' books. The best standards in writing were seen in Year 6. In one lesson, for example, the class reviewed a very vivid description of a battle scene that one boy had written. Through very lively but focused discussion, the pupils identified the features which contributed to the effectiveness of the writing, showing confident knowledge of parts of speech and sentence types. They used this understanding to suggest ways in which the work could be improved further. However, this was not typical and, elsewhere in the school, it was evident that there is still further work to be done to improve pupils' command of spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Progress in reading is beginning to accelerate and more pupils are reading at the level expected for their age. The progress made by pupils supported by the resource provision continues to be good.

Pupils are being provided with more opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in a variety of contexts. In the lessons seen, however, progress in mathematics varied according to the quality of teaching.

The quality of teaching

The school has placed considerable emphasis on improving the quality of teaching through a well-constructed programme that involves support from external agencies, as well as the

mutual support provided by groups of teachers working together to improve specific aspects of their practice. This work relates closely to the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report. It is having a positive effect in improving several aspects of teaching although there is still considerable variation in the quality of teaching across the school. The new marking policy is being applied consistently and pupils are given clear advice on how to improve their work. Teachers now insist on high quality of presentation and well-formed, legible handwriting and this has led to clear improvements in these aspects of pupils' work. More opportunities are being provided for pupils to develop their mental arithmetic skills and to apply their mathematical knowledge in a variety of contexts.

However, in the lessons seen, teachers did not always make sufficient use of questions to check on pupils' understanding, to help them correct errors or to develop their ideas further. The work provided by teachers is still not consistently adapted to the varying needs of pupils and inspectors saw examples of able children doing work that they had already covered. The teaching assistants play a very active role in lessons, providing well-focused advice and support to individual pupils and to groups of children. Volunteers from the local community also make an important contribution to helping pupils improve their reading.

Not all teachers are adapting their lessons in the light of how well pupils are learning over the session. However, the inspectors did see instances where this was done very well. This good practice now needs to be shared across the school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The pupils relate well to their teachers and to each other. They are polite and very welcoming towards visitors to the school. Within and outside the classroom, they show respect for their environment, which is kept in a very good state of repair and cleanliness by the site manager and his colleagues. The pupils arrive at lessons ready to work and most of them concentrate well in class. The teachers take great care to compliment and reward good behaviour but are also ready to draw attention to behaviour that falls short of what they expect. On a few occasions, particularly in Key Stage 1, pupils lost concentration. This tended to be because they could not see what the teacher was showing them or because they were not given enough work to do.

The pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they felt safe at school and in the local community. They knew how to keep themselves safe on the roads and near rail and tram lines. They said that they had experienced some instances of bullying but these had reduced and had been dealt with effectively. They attributed this, in part, to the revision of the school's behaviour policy and the work of the recently appointed learning mentor.

The school conducts all the necessary checks on the suitability of full- and part-time staff. Inspectors discussed ways of improving the recording of information, so that it can be retrieved more easily.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have a clear determination to bring about improvement. This is shared by the senior leadership team, which has been extended to allow for closer monitoring of specific aspects of the improvement plan. Following the first monitoring inspection, this plan has been revised and is now fit for purpose. The senior leaders recognise that this plan would benefit further from the inclusion of specific targets

for phonics (letters and the sounds they make) and for attainment at the end of Key Stage 1.

The school has worked hard to extend the training and support to raise the quality of teaching and learning. It is working closely with Local and National Leaders of Education and with staff from neighbouring schools. It is also making increasing use of the good practice that exists within the school to provide additional support for specific members of staff.

The quality of teaching and learning is being closely monitored through a wide range of activities. While these are appropriate and helpful they have not been brought together into a coherent programme in which the individual strands are clearly related to each other. The teachers who spoke to inspectors valued the additional support and challenge they had received since the inspection, particularly the opportunities to observe and share good practice within and outside the school.

The school now monitors the progress of each pupil every six weeks. However, this monitoring does not take sufficient account of the fact that many of the pupils have underperformed in the past. Therefore their progress will have to be far greater than average if they are to reach the standards expected for their ages. Individual pupils and groups of pupils are being provided with a wide range of additional help to enable them to improve and inspectors saw examples of how these were leading to improvements.

The review of the governing body has been completed and a specific development plan for governors has been produced but not yet formally ratified. The governors accept that this plan would benefit from the inclusion of more milestones to track progress. The Raising Achievement Committee (a group of governors who meet to check the improvements of the school) is closely involved in monitoring pupils' progress every six weeks. The training that all governors have received in data analysis means that they are now better placed to hold the school to account and to challenge, as well as support, the headteacher and senior leaders. The agreed protocols mean that all visits that governors make to the school are recorded. This will ensure that all the information gathered is shared with all members so that appropriate action can be taken where necessary. As well as talking to staff, the governors have now established a system of regular meetings with the school council to gain the pupils' views on how well the school is developing.

The governors and senior leaders have spent a considerable amount of time on preparing for the transition to academy status. They have worked with the Department for Education to identify a potential sponsor and a provisional timescale has been established for the next stages in the process.

External support

The local authority has provided support and advice on revising the school improvement plan which is now fit for purpose. Through regular meetings with the senior leaders, attendance at the Raising Achievement Committee and conducting whole school reviews, officers are closely involved in monitoring, supporting and challenging the school. The headteacher and her staff are making good use of the advice and support which the local authority provides directly or organises through other agencies.