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Mrs S Deacon
Headteacher
Westwood Farm Junior School
Fullbrook Crescent
Tilehurst
Reading
Berkshire
RG31 6RY

Dear Mrs Deacon

Special measures monitoring inspection of Westwood Farm Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 2 and 3 July 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 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 West Berkshire.

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching by:
 - making sure teachers check pupils' progress carefully in every lesson
 - ensuring leaders check pupils' workbooks to see how well they are marked and that pupils have time to respond to teachers' comments
 - making sure lessons move on at an appropriate pace and that teachers provide the right resources and activities to extend and challenge all pupils
 - making sure teachers use information and communication technology in all classes more effectively to support pupils' learning.

- Improve pupils' achievement, particularly in reading and mathematics, by:
 - ensuring phonics is taught well so pupils are able to use their knowledge of sounds and letters to sound out words
 - making sure teachers who have responsibility for subjects and aspects of the school regularly analyse the achievement of all groups of pupils to identify key priorities for rapid improvement
 - ensuring pupils know what to do to meet their personal targets
 - identifying why girls do not do as well as boys and putting appropriate strategies in place to accelerate their learning
 - giving pupils opportunities to extend their reading, writing and mathematical skills through work in other subjects.

- Improve leadership, management and governance, by:
 - ensuring teachers who hold management responsibilities have the appropriate time and resources to fulfil their roles and responsibilities
 - extending the positive links with parents, so they have a stronger involvement in supporting their children's learning at home and school
 - ensuring governors use information about pupils' achievement to challenge the school's leaders to bring about improvement
 - ensuring procedures for performance management support teachers well and hold them to account for the achievement of the pupils in their classes.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 2 and 3 July 2014

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher, and subject coordinators for English and mathematics. In addition, there were meetings with the inclusion manager, representatives of the new governing body, a representative of the local authority, a Local Leader in Education supporting the school, and a group of pupils from Years 3, 4 and 5. Teaching and learning in all six classes in Years 3 to 5 were observed and a brief visit was undertaken to see the few Year 6 who were in school. Aspects of safeguarding were checked.

Context

The governing bodies of the neighbouring infant school and this school have now combined to become one federated governing body. Two teachers have joined the school since the last inspection visit: one is currently teaching in Year 3 to cover the absence of another teacher, and the other teaches groups during their class teacher's planning, preparation and assessment time. The majority of Year 6 pupils were not in school at the time of the inspection as they were visiting the secondary school they are joining in September.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement continues to improve. The gains made in the first half of this year have been sustained in all classes, and many pupils' attainment is now at or near national averages in most subjects.

Pupils in Years 3 and 4 currently make much better progress in all aspects of their work than has been the case in lower Key Stage 2 over the last few years. Pupils in Year 4 continue to catch up quickly on what was much slower progress made over their Year 3. Pupils in Year 5 have accelerated the progress they make in all three core subjects over 2013/14; as a result, they are now at the levels of attainment expected of them in reading and mathematics, and are nearly so in writing. The previous, and longer-standing, poor achievement of pupils in Year 6 is reflected in their lower than expected Key Stage 2 assessment outcomes. Despite the adequate rates of progress they made in reading while in lower Key Stage 2, and this year, they have not made up the ground from a period of much slower progress last year. The most serious impact on outcomes for Year 6 is likely to be in writing, where few are likely to achieve the expected Level 4. Too many had profound problems with planning and structuring writing tasks to the standard required, and many suffered from very low levels of confidence in their writing work. Their achievement in mathematics was also affected by previously poor teaching; the much better progress they made over 2013/14 brought their overall achievement to nearer

national averages, but not to the standard that could have been expected of them given their Key Stage 1 results.

The progress of groups of pupils vulnerable to underachievement is monitored very closely, and appropriate support is provided for individuals who need it. This work is led well by the inclusion manager. Pupils eligible for pupil premium funding are continuing to make better progress and are now at least in line with their peers, and faster in some cases, for example in reading and mathematics in Year 4. Pupils who are at an early stage of learning English are supported well, and many make good gains in their spoken and written skills, and also across a wide range of other subjects. The various needs of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs are met well by the inclusion team; as a result, they make much better progress. Some receive close and good-quality support in lessons, and all now have appropriate work set for them by their teacher each lesson.

The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) now supports better reading in Years 3 and 4 and, where appropriate, in upper Key Stage 2. Teachers and teaching assistants have been well trained, and many are confident in the use of the technique, and apply it consistently.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving and is supporting the better achievement of pupils in all year groups. None is inadequate and, although aspects still require improvement, more is securely good. Teachers usually provide very clear explanations of key ideas, and give pupils a structure in which to work and be able to gauge their own successes. Teachers are also much better now at checking that pupils have understood ideas and are able to apply learning confidently. All lessons now involve pupils being given work appropriate to their needs; more pupils are able to begin the work more independently and sooner, and different groups are often working on the same task but using different resources and tackling it in different ways. Sometimes, however, teachers overload pupils with too many ideas at the outset rather than allowing them to discover problems for themselves and learning how to find their own ways around them.

Homework is set regularly and plays an increasingly important role in reinforcing learning. Pupils feel that it could be more interesting sometimes, but they are realistic about the need to learn their times tables and spellings. Some find the extended project type of homework difficult to manage and would prefer shorter tasks that they can organise more easily. Marking is more effective because work is checked often, and teachers' guidance provides useful help about how work could be improved, or why a piece of work has been so successful. Pupils appreciate this high level of support and many respond positively. There is also some very good feedback built into lessons through the 'polishing-pen' system whereby pupils edit

and redraft their work. Pupils also spoke of understanding their targets better in each subject and being able to make good use of them to understand not just what, but how, to improve.

Teaching assistants support the learning of pupils better. They use more initiative when promoting better learning and behaviour in lessons, and also challenge the quality of thinking by asking better questions of pupils, rather than solving problems for them.

The work of the hearing resource base continues to be a successful feature of the school. It is well led and managed, and makes a significant impact on the quality of the learning of the pupils supported, many of whom achieve well and enjoy school as a result.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Better behaviour was evident during this inspection visit. Classes worked calmly and cooperatively. However, some pupils are slow to start work when teachers do not monitor this closely; in such cases, valuable learning time is wasted. Pupils speak of occasional silliness in lessons slowing their learning, but the majority say that behaviour is improving and they regard the school as a safe and happy place. Out of class and on the field, pupils usually play well together. The school analyses incidents of misbehaviour and appends details of responses to the records. Issues are usually relatively minor, but the school makes appropriately serious responses to the small number of number of racially-based incidents, pupils hitting each other, and misuse of the word 'gay'. Safeguarding is given a very high priority: systems to check the appropriateness of adults working with children in various ways in the school are well managed, and pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe on the internet.

Nearly all parents and carers who responded to the recent survey or who use Parent View indicated that they feel that their child is safe at the school, and a large majority said that their children are happy here. Pupils' attendance continues to be good, and the vast majority arrive punctually to school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The interim executive headteacher continues to lead the school with a quiet authority and obvious determination to ensure that all teaching is at least good, to enable good progress for all pupils. She is well supported by other senior staff and middle leaders.

The interim governing body has been dissolved and, in its place, a federated governing body now oversees the work of the infant and junior schools. While continuity with the two previous governing bodies has been carefully maintained, new systems and structures enable fresh thinking and new approaches. Governors are keen to hold senior leaders to account and they undertake a wide range of useful training, mainly provided by the local authority, to ensure that they have the appropriate knowledge and skills to do so. They value the detailed achievement information provided by the school and are keen to make good use of it, and information about the quality of teaching, to oversee arrangements for the performance management of teachers and support staff.

The recent formation of the Westwood Farm Federation of Schools has already enabled much closer cooperation between the two schools which has the potential to benefit all pupils from Early Years Foundation Stage to Year 6. For example, the junior school's assistant headteacher has been appointed to oversee assessment in both schools from September. The work of the inclusion managers in both schools is also already much better coordinated between them and the governor with oversight for this aspect of the schools' work.

Pupils' achievements are monitored very closely. This enables senior staff and middle leaders to know the precise strengths and weaknesses of every class, and each group of pupils in each class, in reading, writing and mathematics. This helps them identify and provide quick and effective support. It also enables them to monitor the quality of specific strategies they have used to improve pupils' progress; as a consequence, they make good decisions about which ones will be developed in other year groups and which should be refined or adapted. For example, the West Berkshire mathematics and English network strategies, aimed at addressing the underachievement of identified pupils, led to significantly better progress being made by this group in Year 6. Also, the support provided by Denefield School, a local secondary school, proved to be very effective in accelerating the progress of 17 pupils in mathematics. The school is introducing many of the approaches used in these strategies into other classes from September.

Senior leaders and subject coordinators regularly check the quality of marking and provide useful feedback to teachers on where it is most effective, and why. The coordination of English and mathematics will be undertaken by members of the senior team next year, due to staffing changes. They have already demonstrated the capacity to work closely and effectively to drive up achievement.

Governors and senior staff remain keen to involve parents and carers in the life of the school. The regular newsletter is well received, and both governors' comments, and the surveys undertaken, point to higher levels of satisfaction on the part of parents and carers with all aspects of the school's work.

External support

The strong and practical support for the school's leadership and management provided by the school improvement adviser continues. The interim executive headteacher also values the links with a Local Leader in Education brokered by the local authority. Good support from the local authority for teaching and learning in literacy and mathematics continues. It has recently included assistance with checking that the assessment of pupils' work is accurate, and in supporting the development of the marking strategy. The local authority is currently working with the school to undertake a check on the quality of its provision for pupils eligible for the pupil premium, and its impact.