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3 July 2014

Pam Purdon
Headteacher
Howitt Primary Community School
Holmes Street
Heanor
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Dear Mrs Purdon

Special measures monitoring inspection of Howitt Primary Community School

Following my visit with Malcolm Johnstone, Additional Inspector, to your school on 1–2 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 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 Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely

David Carter
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of the teaching so that pupils make at least good progress by ensuring that teachers routinely:
 - make the pace of teaching brisk enough to motivate and challenge all groups of pupils
 - give pupils sufficient time in lessons to work at tasks matched to their levels of ability
 - ensure that boys take as full a part in lessons as girls and get on quickly with their work
 - check that pupils eligible for the pupil premium are fully supported in their learning
 - provide work that is challenging but achievable for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs
 - make detailed assessments and use information and communication technology effectively to support the younger children.

- Improve the impact of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all senior leaders and governors regularly check the quality of teaching and learning
 - giving clear information to teachers on how they can improve their skills
 - allowing teachers opportunities to learn from the best teaching in this and other schools
 - holding teachers to account for the progress of different groups of pupils such as boys, pupils eligible for the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs
 - ensuring that all teachers follow and apply the guidance in the behaviour policy
 - improving attendance, particularly of pupils eligible for the pupil premium
 - setting targets in the school improvement plan that focus on underachieving groups.

Ofsted will make recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the school. An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 1–2 July 2014

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with: the headteacher; leaders of English, mathematics, the Early Years Foundation Stage and special educational needs; a representative of the local authority; and members of the governing body. Inspectors visited lessons, talked to pupils about their learning and evaluated the quality of their work in a range of subjects. Inspectors listened to pupils read. Inspectors considered the school's most recent data on the attainment and progress of groups of pupils. The quality of the school's improvement plan was evaluated. Documentation relating to the pupils' attendance and the behaviour and safety of pupils was considered.

Context

Since the second monitoring visit, four new members of the governing body have been appointed to replace three members who have resigned from their positions. A teacher of children in a Reception class has been appointed to replace a long-standing teacher who retired in April 2014. The governing body has appointed an assistant headteacher, who is due to commence her role in September 2014.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils are making better progress. Teachers' assessments indicate that pupils in Year 6 have made faster progress than in their previous years. As a result, their attainment in reading is average. While their attainment in writing and mathematics is slightly below average, pupils appear to have made at least expected progress from the end of Year 2.

Assessments of pupils' progress for Year 3 to Year 5 indicate improved progress, particularly in reading and writing. Pupils' attainment in reading is now similar to the standards expected of their age, especially in Year 4 and Year 5. Pupils' progress in mathematics lags slightly behind that in literacy. Pupils are not developing their skills in reasoning quickly enough to help them to apply their skills in solving mathematical problems. Consequently, pupils' attainment in Year 3 and Year 4 remains below average.

In Key Stage 1, a more consistent picture of pupils' achievement is emerging. Pupils in both Year 2 classes have made quick gains in their knowledge and developing their skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Moderation of teachers' assessments by local authority consultants confirms that pupils' attainment in Year 2 is average. Pupils in Year 1 have made faster progress during the summer term. Hence, they are attaining standards which are closer to those expected than was the case at the end of the spring term. More pupils are attaining the expected standard in their

understanding of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) by the end of Year 1 than in previous years.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making better progress. Although children start Nursery with skills and knowledge which tend to be well below those which are typical, they are now making faster rates of progress in all areas of learning. In particular, adults are providing more opportunities for children to develop their skills in speaking and listening. Children in Reception are benefiting from being engaged in a wider range of more practical and interesting activities. This is helping them to develop their skills more quickly, especially in their ability to communicate. As a result, a greater proportion of children are leaving the Early Years Foundation Stage demonstrating a good level of development.

Pupils for whom the pupil premium provides support are now making better rates of progress than others in reading, and similar rates of progress in writing and mathematics. This is helping to narrow the gap in attainment, particularly for pupils in Years 1 to 4. However, gaps in attainment remain wide in Years 5 and 6. On average, pupils eligible for support are about four terms behind their classmates in these two year groups.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are benefiting from more focused support. Despite their progress continuing to improve, leaders acknowledge that this needs to be sustained to ensure that a greater proportion of pupils make at least expected progress from their starting points.

The school's analysis shows that boys are now making progress which is similar to that of girls, particularly in reading. This is helping boys, especially from Year 1 to Year 4 to narrow the gap between their attainment and that of girls. The gap in attainment remains wider in Years 5 and 6, where a legacy of boys' prior underachievement exists. Nonetheless, boys' attainment in Years 5 and 6 continues to rise.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching continues to improve. Teachers are using their daily assessments of pupils' learning to plan increasingly better-structured and more interesting lessons. Pupils have a better understanding of the purpose of their learning because teachers are sharing with them more clearly defined learning objectives. Teachers' expectations of the amount of work which pupils undertake during lessons have risen. Teachers and teaching assistants are keeping a closer eye on pupils' progress during lessons and are becoming better at providing more bespoke support to help pupils who are finding the work difficult or not working at a fast enough rate. Teachers' marking of pupils' work more clearly identifies what pupils have done well and the next steps in their learning. However, pupils do not always have enough opportunities to respond to teachers' comments to show how they have improved their work, or to undertake corrections. This reduces the rate of learning, particularly in mathematics.

Teachers are taking a pride in ensuring that their classroom displays are providing more effective guidance for pupils. While displays celebrate the standard of pupils' work, this is not always reflected in pupils' workbooks. Although there are examples of improved standards of presentation, this is not yet consistent.

Pupils are developing their skills in phonics more systematically. This is because teachers are using more effective strategies to engage pupils in sounding and blending letters. Pupils are finding reading more enjoyable, especially when they are able to access the recently refurbished library.

Teachers in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making better use of their assessments of children's learning to provide more stimulating and challenging activities. This includes more effective use of information and communication technology in order to promote children's learning. Senior leaders recognise that, while the outdoor provision has improved, further work needs to be undertaken in this area. Pupils do not have enough resources and attractive areas which are motivating them to write when learning without the direct supervision of an adult.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are increasingly demonstrating more positive attitudes to learning. Pupils are more motivated to undertake their work and achieve their learning objectives. Boys, in particular, are becoming more engaged in their learning, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. This is because teachers are ensuring that both boys and girls are given an equal chance to answer questions and offer their ideas. Occasionally, pupils in Key Stage 2, usually boys, can lose concentration. This is particularly where teachers: repeat instructions; fail to capture pupils' interest at the commencement of lessons; or provide explanations to the whole class where, in fact, only a few pupils require additional support.

Pupils' behaviour around the school continues to improve. Pupils have a greater confidence in adults consistently applying the school behaviour code. Pupils know that they will be rewarded for demonstrating positive behaviour while being aware of the consequences if they choose to misbehave. As a result of systems for managing behaviour being more established, there is a greater sense of calmness and order around the school.

Senior leaders have worked more closely with other agencies to ensure that pupils who demonstrate challenging behaviour are supported more effectively. This is reflected in the reduction in the number of pupils who have been either temporarily or permanently excluded.

Pupils' attendance continues to rise. In particular, the attendance of pupils for whom the pupil premium provides support, as well as for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, is at the same level as that of others.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders of English and mathematics are correct in their view that the headteacher is managing change at an appropriate pace. Senior leaders keep a close eye to check that staff are implementing agreed actions, which are set out in the school's development plan, and provide additional support where required.

Senior leaders have introduced more rigorous systems for checking on pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. Class teachers are taking more responsibility for providing evidence and accounting for pupils' achievement, during the more frequent meetings to discuss pupils' progress. This is helping to identify pupils who are falling behind and inform decisions on how to support them more effectively. Moreover, such meetings are also identifying strengths and weaknesses in the skills of individual teachers. As a result, bespoke professional development activities have been provided to support staff to develop their skills.

Leaders of English and mathematics have developed their knowledge and skills in how to check more closely on the quality of teaching and learning. They are checking teachers' plans against the work in pupils' books to see how this is helping pupils to make gains in their learning. They have a better understanding of how to analyse data relating to pupils' achievements. This is helping them to identify strengths and areas for improvement in teaching. Senior leaders recognise that leaders of subjects have not had enough opportunities to visit lessons. As a result, they are not able to check on teachers' skills in engaging pupils in their learning and the extent to which teachers are helping pupils during the course of lessons to maximise their progress.

The special educational needs coordinators have updated their system for recording the support which is provided for vulnerable pupils. They are maintaining a close check on pupils' progress, and this is enabling them to assess more precisely the extent to which support programmes are having a positive impact on pupils' achievements. They recognise the need to continually evaluate the quality of support to ensure that all disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, make at least expected rates of progress from their starting points.

Senior leaders have improved the curriculum to ensure that pupils are able to develop their skills in reading more systematically. Pupils have access to a wide range of books and are encouraged to read both at school and home. This is reflected in pupils making better progress in reading. However, leaders at all levels recognise that their current curriculum does not enable pupils to develop their skills in mathematical reasoning well enough. This is because they do not have enough opportunities to solve problems and undertake investigations. Similarly, pupils do not undertake enough work where they apply their skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology in a wider range of subjects. Leaders of subjects have made a positive start in redesigning their curriculum for September 2014, in line with changes to statutory requirements, and to provide units of work whereby pupils can apply their key skills in a wider range of subjects.

Governors have introduced more robust systems for gathering the views of parents and carers. This is enabling them to gauge more closely levels of engagement while obtaining evidence to inform their strategic plans. While the most recent parental survey was mostly positive, governors have already begun to address issues which have arisen relating to parking around the school and the school's policy on homework.

Governors are more involved in reviewing the school's policies, following changes to the structure of the governing body by reducing the number of committees. This has helped them to review key policies relating to the behaviour, safety and safeguarding of pupils. As a result, systems for keeping children safe have become more robust.

Following training, governors have a better understanding of how to interpret the school's historical performance, and they receive regular updates relating to the achievement of current pupils in the school. Governors are awaiting their final tranche of training following the external review of governance, which is focusing upon monitoring and evaluating the school's work. Although governors have begun to check on the school's work, through undertaking learning walks and being involved in scrutiny of pupils' work, this is at an early stage of development. Consequently, they are limited in the extent to which they can hold senior leaders to account for the rate of improvement.

External support

The local authority continues to provide effective support to the school. The local authority's senior adviser maintains close links with the school and is a sounding board for senior leaders. She supports leaders in making checks on teaching and analysing the school's data relating to pupils' achievements. As a result, senior leaders have an accurate and realistic view of the school's performance and rate of improvement.

Teaching and learning consultants have worked closely with the leaders of English and mathematics. This is helping to develop their skills in checking on the quality of teaching through scrutinising teachers' plans, pupils' work and analysing data relating to pupils' progress. The local authority has undertaken moderation of teachers' assessments at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. This has shown that the school's assessment of children's development and pupils' attainment are accurate.

Adults in the Nursery have benefited from working with a headteacher from South Normanton Nursery. This has helped to develop their skills in capturing relevant evidence to inform their assessments of children's development.