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7 July 2014

Mrs Yvonne Buckley
Headteacher
Willow Primary School
Alston Road
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN4 7EZ

Dear Mrs Buckley

Special measures monitoring inspection of Willow Primary School

Following my visit with Keith Bardon, Additional Inspector, 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 April 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.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

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 Academies Advisers Unit, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Interim Director Children and Young People's Service for Doncaster.

Yours sincerely

Amraz Ali
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school so it is good or better in order that pupils make at least good progress and reach the standards of which they are capable of particularly in English and mathematics by:
 - ensuring that teachers take account of what pupils already know when planning lessons in order to match work closely to the full range of pupils' learning needs
 - taking steps to help all groups of pupils make the progress of which they are capable and achieve equally well, particularly pupils with special educational needs
 - making sure that teachers always have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, including standards of presentation, spelling and handwriting
 - modifying the curriculum so that it enables all pupils to achieve well
 - making sure that pupils' books are always marked thoroughly and that marking provides pupils with clear feedback about how well they are doing and what they need to do next.

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by:
 - taking swift action to eradicate inadequate teaching
 - developing an effective system of self-evaluation so that it is realistic, robust, and accurate in focusing on what the school is good at and what areas need developing
 - establishing rigorous systems for checking pupils' progress
 - ensuring leaders and managers know how to review and analyse information about pupils' progress and use it to check whether their actions are helping to improve pupils' achievement
 - making certain that when leaders observe lessons they focus on the progress pupils are making as well as what the teacher is doing
 - improving the effectiveness of the methods used to communicate with parents
 - undertaking an external review of the governing body in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management could be improved.

- Improve the behaviour of a small number of pupils who behave boisterously at break times by teaching them how to play purposefully and understand the consequences of their actions.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 2 to 3 July 2014.

Evidence

Inspectors visited 16 lessons and observed daily routines, including start-of-day activities, break times and lunchtimes. Work in pupils' books from across the academy was scrutinised and an inspector talked with parents as they collected their children at the end of the school day. Inspectors scrutinised documents, including the academy's records of pupils' attainment. Meetings were held with the headteacher, staff, groups of pupils and three members of the governing body. A telephone interview was conducted with a representative of the local authority. A meeting was held with two representatives from the Wakefield City Academy Trust (WCAT), which is in the final stages of becoming the academy's sponsor and has begun to provide support for the academy.

Context

Since the last inspection there have been a number of changes to the academy's context. One teacher continues to be absent due to illness and the class is being taught by a temporary teacher. One teacher continues to be absent on maternity leave and the class is being taught by a temporary teacher. On the days of the inspection, one teacher was absent due to sickness and the class was being covered by supply teacher. Three teachers have resigned their posts and will leave the school at the end of term and the contract of a temporary teacher will not be renewed.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' learning and progress in lessons are improving but remain inconsistent in some classes. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, assessments indicated more children at a good level of development this year compared to last year. The recent end of Year 2 assessments suggests improvements in attainment, particularly in terms of the proportions reaching the higher Level 3 in reading, writing and mathematics. In Year 6, the school's own assessments indicate some improvements in attainment, including at the higher Level 5 in writing and mathematics. The academy's tracking of attainment demonstrates that progress is improving but is still variable, with the greatest progress reflecting the best teaching and the weakest where teaching is less secure, or has been affected by changes to the class teacher during the year.

Although the rates of progress of pupils supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding) are improving at a similar rate to other pupils there remains a gap in the attainment. For example, in Year 2, those supported by the pupil premium are more than two terms behind those not supported by the pupil premium and at Year 6 the gap is around one term behind their peers. The attainment of pupils identified as having disabilities and/or special educational needs is improving, but this remains particularly variable – especially where teaching has been disrupted.

Although there has been work to improve the accuracy of assessments and this was previously reported as improving this remains an area of concern in some parts of the academy where, for example, assessments have been a little too generous. Across the academy, pupils' written work continues to improve in terms of quantity and quality but there remains a core of pupils whose work continues to be untidy, poorly presented and typified by poor handwriting. A particular concern is the lack of a consistent policy for teaching pupils to form letters across the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Consequently, pupils are taught different ways to form letters and this leads to poor and incorrectly formed handwriting elsewhere in school.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving but much still requires improvement and some continues to be particularly poor. Staff absence and changes to the teaching force during the year have slowed the impact of planned developments. Improvements were stronger in the classrooms where the substantive teachers were observed. This is reflected in better attainment and progress across the academy and in the quality of work recorded in books.

The continued use of a common planning format prompts teachers to identify pupils' current knowledge or understanding before introducing them to new work. However, not all teachers are checking prior knowledge thoroughly enough to ensure that tasks are always at just the right level. The level of challenge presented to pupils varies and is not always high enough for the most able pupils. In some lessons, all pupils have to work through similar work before they are presented with 'extension' work when in fact they could tackle the harder work without completing work that is too easy for them. Problem solving and practical activities are a regular feature of lessons. Pupils enjoy this approach and enthusiastically engage in tasks. However, on some occasions opportunities to extend learning with appropriate resources are missed. For example, when writing independently some pupils did not have access to word prompts or dictionaries.

The deployment of additional adults within lessons has improved and teaching assistants were seen to be more actively supporting learning in most lessons. However, on a small number of occasions it was not always clear what the teacher's role was when pupils were working to complete a writing task. Pupils are trusted to use technology, such as digital cameras, which contributes to good learning and high levels of engagement. Pupils show improved levels of concentration and a strong desire to learn even when lessons are less stimulating or tasks are not challenging. This has a positive impact on pupils' achievement and goes a long way towards explaining why attainment is so high despite variations in the quality of teaching. The quality and impact of teacher's questioning are variable; in the best examples it required pupils to think hard, apply what they know and reason through to answer but on other occasions it only required pupils to state the obvious. Teachers' marking continues to be regular and typically confirms what pupils have done well and identify where future work needs to be better. The impact of marking remains

inconsistent and in too few books, pupils are not expected to make corrections to their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The academy has correctly focused on improving behaviour at lunchtime which was the main area of concern for parents, staff and pupils. Lunchtime supervisors have received training which has improved their knowledge and understanding of how to address any incidents of inappropriate behaviour and the strategies to use to bring about positive outcomes for pupils. Incidents are recorded in the 'behaviour book' so that any patterns can be spotted along with any issues which might need a more concerted approach, including the involvement of parents. Pupils' involvement has improved. For example, some Year 5 pupils have quite recently been trained as play leaders and organise games for younger pupils at lunchtimes. Year 6 pupils share a dining room with Key Stage 1 pupils and provide good role models for them. Members of the school council have been instrumental in formulating a set of playground rules which are written in simple language and displayed in the playground. Improvements have brought about a reduction in the number of incidents at lunchtimes and in the number of accidents pupils have experienced.

Behaviour around school was observed to be generally good, although Key Stage 1 pupils quickly become restless in assembly, where there are only a small number of adults to supervise pupils. A small number of pupils have difficulty behaving well in lessons but they are clearly identified and generally managed well by staff. It is rare for lessons to be seriously disrupted. Attendance is continuing to improve and so far this year has been above average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are fragile and ongoing staffing issues threaten their security. Although some improvements are evident, leaders and managers have had variable impact on securing and sustaining improvements to the quality of teaching. Consequently, some teaching and learning remains weak and much still requires improvement. Given that this is the fourth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures the academy still has much to do if it is to exit special measures successfully in the available time. Although there are systems in place for tracking the attainment and progress of pupils, the accuracy and reliability of assessments continue to be a cause for concern within the academy. Consequently, staff from the WCAT, the academy chain wanting to sponsor the academy, had to moderate assessments.

Although there have been some improvements to aspects of teaching, middle leaders have not demonstrated their skills and ability to identify precisely where improvements are needed nor have they successfully secured improvement in the teaching skills of all staff. Consequently, the development of leaders' and managers' skills at all levels remains a significant priority across the academy.

Governors are acutely aware of the need to deal with staffing issues. However, support and advice from the local authority human resources partner have not helped to resolve a long term staffing difficulty successfully. Governors are aware of the need to recruit, train and retain teachers with the skills needed to improve the quality of teaching across the academy further. Governors are correct in their analysis that the academy's leaders and managers require further direction and guidance if the academy is to secure lasting improvement. Governors have been involved in the process to secure a sponsor and, consequently, the arrangements for WCAT to become the sponsor are well developed.

External support

Since the last inspection support from the local authority and the Doncaster Teaching Schools Partnership and have ceased. Instead a package of support from WCAT has been negotiated. The local authority correctly plans to continue to provide external challenge through the termly review group meetings. Through their involvement with the academy to date, WCAT has a clear understanding of the most important issues that must be addressed if the academy is to continue to improve. Although WCAT is not yet sponsoring the academy, their package of support, which began in early June, has received positive feedback from staff. It is too early to gauge the impact of this work at this stage.