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10 July 2014

Mrs Alison Cairns
Headteacher
North Fawdon Primary School
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Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE3 2SL

Dear Mrs Cairns

Special measures monitoring inspection of North Fawdon Primary School

Following my visit with Lee Owston HMI to your school on 8 and 9 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 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 am of the opinion that the school may appoint no more than one newly qualified teacher following consultation with the lead Her Majesty's Inspector.

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 Newcastle Upon Tyne.

Yours sincerely

Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching to be at least good throughout the school in order to accelerate progress and raise attainment, especially in mathematics, for all groups of pupils, particularly in Years 3, 4 and 5, by:
 - ensuring that teachers set work that helps pupils to achieve as well as they can and motivates them to learn and behave well in lessons
 - improving pupils' poor use of spelling, basic punctuation and grammar, particularly in writing
 - making sure that the teaching of mathematics is effective in Key Stages 1 and 2
 - adopting consistent approaches towards marking so that pupils are clear how to improve their work and are given enough time to respond to the advice given
 - making sure that all pupils in every year group make at least good progress so that they reach at least national average attainment levels at Key Stages 1 and 2
 - increasing the proportion of pupils achieving the higher National Curriculum levels in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2 and Year 6.
- Urgently improve L&M by developing the skills and knowledge of leaders at all levels to ensure that:
 - they rigorously and effectively evaluate the impact of teaching upon the progress of all groups of pupils
 - good practice is shared more widely so that there is consistently good teaching across the school
 - plans to improve teaching and learning are based upon an accurate evaluation of the school's current performance
 - every pupil fully understands how to keep safe and that adults apply school policy in responding to potential risks
 - the number of exclusions for unacceptable behaviour is reduced considerably and the overall standard of behaviour improves to be at least good
 - teaching and resources fully meet the needs of children as they move from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Year 1.
- Ensure that governors have the skills and knowledge to:
 - hold school leaders to account rigorously for pupils' attainment and progress
 - check that risk assessments are reviewed regularly and that they are understood by all staff working in the school
 - fulfil reporting requirements relating to the progress of pupils who are supported through the pupil premium funding, the use of the new primary school sport funding and pupil outcomes at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2
 - ensure the local authority is aware of the need to undertake regular checks on provision in the ARC unit.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 8 to 9 July 2014.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documentation and met with senior leaders including the headteacher and the school's lead professional. They also met with the leaders of literacy and numeracy, and with managers of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the school's ARC provision, as well as with class teachers. Inspectors also spoke with pupils in meetings with them and in lessons, as well as at break and lunch times. The lead inspector also met with the Chair of the Governing Body and with two other governors, and with a representative from the local authority. Nine extended lesson observations were completed, three of which were done jointly with members of the school's leadership team. All classes in the school were seen, as well as a session taking place in the ARC provision. During their visits to lessons, inspectors looked closely at a broad range of pupils' work and talked with them about their work and their learning.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection, one teacher has resigned and another teacher's fixed term contract terminates at the end of this academic year. Two teachers and two teaching assistants have been appointed to join the school in September 2014.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Inspection evidence confirms leaders' views that pupils' progress is accelerating and attainment is beginning to rise across the school. For example, indicative statutory assessment results for 2014 suggest there have been gains at the end of each key stage, including the Early Years Foundation Stage. While overall levels of attainment remain below average overall, a greater proportion of pupils across the school are now making better progress than that expected for their age. This is true for all groups of pupils, including the most able, those with special educational needs or disabilities and those supported through the pupil premium funding. In particular, a focus on pupils' basic skills in writing and mathematics has ensured good improvement in these aspects. Although progress in reading is also improving, pupils do not yet have a similar level of competence and confidence in their understanding of what they read. Less time is devoted to these skills in the curriculum and, as a result, fewer pupils are making more than expected progress across Key Stage 2 in reading than in writing and mathematics.

As a result of stronger transition arrangements between the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, more pupils are able to get off to a good start at the beginning of Year 1. For example, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception in 2014 is nearly twice that in the previous year, reflecting recent improvements to teaching and the quality of the learning environment, particularly outdoor provision. Nevertheless, not all assessments in the Early Years Foundation Stage are fully secure. For example, inspectors found that some assessments of attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage were lower than that justified by the evidence available.

Similarly, leaders in the Early Years Foundation Stage do not use national benchmarking materials at the end of Reception to help judge children's achievement; as a result some assessments made are too cautious and do not provide a fully reliable picture of children's learning.

The quality of teaching

As a result of a concerted focus from school leaders, and the commitment and determination of staff, the quality of teaching is improving across the school. Underpinned by an emphasis on much higher expectations, pupils' work is neat, tidy and well-presented, and standards are regularly reinforced through teachers' marking. In a similar way, much greater consistency has been achieved in approaches to teachers' planning, particularly through a focus on the learning to be developed within a lesson or across a series of lessons. However, sometimes the approach used confuses pupils, is too ambitious or does not help them to grasp the most important aspects of lessons clearly enough. The best teaching helps pupils to understand what they are learning and makes sure they are able to apply this in other lessons or contexts. Sometimes, in less effective teaching, pupils are not always clear about what they have learnt; Year 2 pupils who were developing their descriptive writing told the inspector they had 'learnt about dragons'. Similarly, in a Year 6 science lesson, the class were fascinated by observing the reaction of yeast, sugar and warm water. However, they struggled to write about the purpose of the experiment because the teaching did not focus clearly enough on the science they were learning. Nevertheless, in the follow-up lesson the next day, the same pupils made good progress in interpreting the graphs they had drawn from their experiment because they understood clearly the purpose of the activity they were completing.

Inspectors also noted many examples of pupils' work in which learning was better because of the impact of teachers' marking and feedback. Teachers and teaching assistants show a great deal of commitment, through their marking, to ensuring pupils put right any errors, address misconceptions or extend their thinking further. For example, several pupils had made a mistake with their column addition of decimal numbers. The teacher's written feedback made clear the mistake they had made and posed a few more similar questions to check the pupils had understood. When one pupil then went on to make a further mistake in his corrections, the teacher spotted his subsequent error and helped him to understand where he had gone wrong. However, in a few cases, marking lacks focus or does not get to the heart of pupils' misconceptions. Later, in the same set of books, some pupils had not understood how to use zero as a place holder in long multiplication. The teacher's comment of 'you need to remember' was much less effective in helping these pupils to catch up with their peers who knew what to do. Sometimes, the lack of a sharp focus on what is to be learnt in lessons means that it is then much harder for teachers to offer precise feedback about how pupils can improve their work.

Teachers work hard to provide imaginative and engaging contexts in which to develop pupils' writing. As a result most pupils work with great determination and pride; they frequently produce pieces of good quality writing as part of their topic projects. Leaders have ensured an emphasis on developing pupils' skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar and this is also making a good contribution to improving the quality of pupils' work. However, opportunities to develop pupils' reading skills in similar ways are less well planned.

Nevertheless, inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work showed that, over time, pupils are now making better progress in most aspects of their learning. Despite this, opportunities to further speed up learning are sometimes missed. For example, not all mathematics teaching moves pupils on quickly enough to more challenging problems or provides them with opportunities to apply what they have learnt. This approach means that sometimes pupils spend too long doing a series of questions that are all too similar in nature and this prevents the most able pupils in particular from making even faster progress. Likewise, in literacy, inspectors noted that pupils in Key Stage 1 had completed separate pieces of descriptive writing throughout the year. Although the context changed in each case (Burglar Bill, aliens and dragons), the development of pupils' skills in descriptive writing across the three pieces was much less clear. This was because the teacher had not identified more precisely the improvements in the skills she expected the pupils to show across each of the three examples.

Teaching in the ARC provision is effective in helping pupils to reintegrate successfully into mainstream classes. A good focus on developing pupils' personal and social skills to enable them to work productively alongside their peers is central to the success of the provision. An imaginative range of engaging activities, together with a clear understanding of each child's needs, underpins the good impact of teaching within the provision.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Most of the time, pupils show good attitudes to their learning and behave well. This is because leaders have made sure that adults use a consistent approach to rewarding good behaviour and reducing the number of times where behaviour gets in the way of learning. Despite this, pupils told inspectors that some pupils still 'go silly' and disturb learning in a few lessons. Nevertheless, the ways in which teachers present learning in interesting contexts means that most pupils try hard and want to do well. As a result the number of 'yellow and red cards' and internal exclusions has declined significantly this term. In addition, over the same period, there have been no fixed-term exclusions from school.

There are also marked improvements in pupils' attendance, continuing a trend evident at the first monitoring inspection. The contribution of the school's lead professional, particularly in working with families who may have previously been reluctant to engage with the school, has been a significant factor in this improvement.

Leaders have also maintained a strong focus on ensuring that the school is a safe place to learn. At the time of the monitoring inspection, the school's arrangements for safeguarding, recruitment and risk-assessment gave no cause for concern. Pupils say that bullying is rare and that there would be no reason why they would not report it to adults whom, they believe, would deal with it well. They also say their school is a friendly place to be and that they like their teachers and enjoy going to lessons. However, some younger pupils did not understand the difference between bullying and falling-out with friends. Similarly, some older pupils knew that the use of some forms of discriminatory language, such as homophobic language, was wrong, but they were not sure about the reasons why.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Following the first monitoring inspection, the headteacher and other leaders moved rapidly to strengthen the quality of improvement planning. Underpinned by an honest and accurate evaluation of the school's effectiveness, the new plan sets out very clearly the actions to be taken over appropriate timescales, each with clear aims and milestones. The plan makes clear the contributions of staff and school leaders, as well as governors and other partners. It provides a very strong basis for further improvement. In addition, the headteacher and other leaders have succeeded in establishing a strong team spirit across the school, and staff morale is good. In particular, leaders have worked hard to secure staff 'ownership' of the process of improvement and, despite much higher levels of challenge and accountability, there is a good deal of commitment from all those involved with the school to rapidly improve.

The leadership of teaching is increasingly effective, including through the impact of training and support. Leaders' checks ensure a good range of evidence is used in identifying where teaching can be improved. For example, leaders check carefully on the impact of marking by regularly reviewing the quality of pupils' work; the criteria that leaders have developed to evaluate teaching are shared with staff and this is also helping to drive up standards. As a result the quality of teaching is improving across the school. However, although this good range of evidence is gathered, it is not yet captured clearly enough, or linked sharply enough to pupils' attainment information, to provide a more joined-up record of the performance of individual teachers. Complications caused by the introduction of a new system for recording assessment information have further contributed to this issue, although leaders recognise this weakness and have plans in place to address this before September.

The capacity of the school to maintain this improvement is increasingly secure, including through the contribution of middle leaders who coordinate subject areas. Through audits of provision, lesson observation, work scrutiny and curriculum development, middle leaders are making a valuable contribution to the work of senior staff. In a similar way, the leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage ensures a strong team approach between teaching and support staff, with an emphasis on shared planning and joint training.

The governing body responded energetically to the findings of the external review of governance. They acted quickly to strengthen and broaden governors' expertise, which includes members who are educational professionals and business leaders. Governors have adopted a more challenging approach, and ensure a detailed oversight of school performance, including the impact of pupil premium funding on pupils' attainment. They have a good understanding of the effectiveness of actions taken to improve teaching and have rightly identified the need to strengthen the rigour and impact of performance management at all levels throughout the school. They have undertaken an appropriate range of training to strengthen their skills. In conjunction with school leaders, governors have established clear protocols for engagement with the school and, as a result, have increased their first-hand involvement, including through learning 'walks' and lesson observations. Links established through the governing body with Northumbria University have facilitated the involvement of trainee teachers to support work with small groups of targeted pupils who need extra support.

External support

North Fawdon Primary School continues to benefit significantly from support provided through the local authority and through its partner schools in the Newcastle North West Learning Trust. The local authority has provided support for the school in reviewing the ARC provision, evaluating safeguarding arrangements and validating leaders' judgements about teaching. In addition, local authority staff have supported with the moderation of assessment information and provided challenge through the 'monitoring support group'.

The Trust has also provided strong support for the school. For example, teachers from North Fawdon have observed good practice within the Trust and have worked collaboratively with staff from other schools to plan lessons, including developing a mathematics 'trail' for use in schools across the Trust. Other schools in the Trust have also valued the opportunity to share the strengths seen in the improvement plans developed by leaders at North Fawdon. In addition, the Chair of the Governing Body has benefitted from observing the work of the Chair in two outstanding schools in Newcastle.