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Stella Porter
Headteacher
Lodge Farm Junior Mixed and Infant School
Willenhall School Sports College Campus
Furzebank Way
Willenhall
WV12 4BU

Dear Ms Porter

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lodge Farm Junior Mixed and Infant School

Following my visit with Gill Bosscaert, additional inspector, to your school on 1 and 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 second 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 Walsall.

Yours sincerely

Angela Westington
Her Majesty's Inspector, Senior

Annex

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

- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching across the school, but especially in Key Stage 2, so that it is typically good and better by:
 - ensuring teachers make effective use of assessment information to plan challenging lessons for all groups of pupils, including boys, the most and least able, those eligible for additional funding, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs
 - ensuring teachers question pupils more effectively to check on their progress during lessons and adapt work if necessary
 - providing regular opportunities for pupils to assess their own and their peers' work
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to work by themselves and develop independent learning skills
 - ensuring pupils know their targets, and that marking is accurate and provides pupils with good guidance as to how they can improve their work.
- Raise the attainment of pupils, in English and mathematics, especially for disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and those eligible for additional funding, in Years 3 to 6 by:
 - ensuring additional adults are deployed more effectively to raise pupils' attainment and progress
 - improving the teaching of mathematics to ensure lessons move at a brisk pace and work is challenging
 - improving the quality of writing, especially for boys and more able pupils
 - developing a reading programme that promotes more reading at school and at home, with
 - better recording of individual pupils' reading and comprehension skills, and ensure adults listen more to pupils reading
 - improving the use of phonics across the school and ensure teachers correct errors in pupils' oral work.
- Improve pupils' attendance and behaviour by:
 - raising levels of attendance through the rigorous and consistent application of the new attendance policy
 - ensuring all staff, especially in Years 3 and 4, apply new policies and procedures for managing behaviour consistently
 - making sure there are consistent expectations for good behaviour in lessons and that any low-level disruption or lack of respect shown is swiftly addressed.

- Improve the quality of leadership, management and governance by:
 - ensuring senior and middle leaders and the governing body undertake robust checks on pupils' progress and teachers' performance to secure a sustained rise in pupils' attainment
 - ensuring all assessments are accurate, regular and effectively moderated
 - ensuring governors robustly check that information and data presented to them is accurate
 - ensuring the curriculum meets the needs of all groups of pupils, so that there are equal opportunities for all to make good progress
 - ensuring that the impact of additional sports funding is evaluated
 - acting on the recommendations in the local authority's recent review of governance.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 July 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, parents and carers, a representative of the local authority, the improvement adviser, members of the senior leadership team, phase leaders and the learning behaviour mentor. They heard pupils read and the lead inspector investigated in-depth the teaching of reading.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, three teachers and one teaching assistant have left the school. Seven new permanent teaching appointments have been made to commence in September 2014, including that of an assistant headteacher. One teacher is currently on long-term sickness leave. There remains one teaching vacancy.

A major building programme will begin during the summer break; its completion is scheduled for the end of August 2014. This will create extra teaching spaces and enclose some open-plan classrooms. From September 2014, all pupils will be taught in single-year-group classes. A new staffing and leadership structure will also come into effect in September.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Standards in Key Stage 1 and 2 remain too low. All groups of pupils are not making consistently good progress across the school and in all subjects. The unvalidated results of the 2014 national tests and assessments reveal a very mixed picture. In the end of Key Stage 2 national tests, higher results than in 2013 are expected for the reading test but lower results in mathematics and writing. In the Key Stage 1 assessments, the figures for mathematics and reading are expected to be similar to those in 2013 but those for writing are expected to be significantly lower. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonic check is also likely to drop – from 71% in 2013 to 63% in 2014.

This mixed picture is evident from the school's own data, and from observations of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work. The school's most recent test of pupils' reading ability revealed that in Year groups 2, 3 and 4 around 40% of pupils have a reading age below or well below their birthday age. In Year 1, the figure rises to nearly half of pupils and in Year 5 the figure is almost three quarters. There have been significant improvements in the four months since the first reading test was completed, with some pupils making gains of two years or more in that period. In each year group, it is very clear from the reading age data that there are high-ability readers for whom the school does not provide enough challenge and direction. The

school has overhauled the teaching of reading, spent more than £15,000 on reading books, catalogued them all, ensured there are reading areas in every classroom, updated the library and sharpened up the additional daily 30- minute guided reading session. Despite all these new initiatives, most pupils still read far too few books, do not read often enough and are not building up reading stamina.

The picture in mathematics is slightly better but still of concern. The school recently tested the mathematical abilities of all pupils, using a commercial test. The results reveal that about half of the pupils in Years 1, 2 and 3, and almost two thirds in Year 5, have standardised scores well below that expected; in Years 4 and 6, the comparable figure is about a third. However, the evidence from lesson observations showed that the changes made to the school mathematics curriculum are paying dividends. Pupils are making better progress in lessons due to the focus on solving real-life problems; an approach which is engaging and enthusing pupils. The work in pupils' books shows that they are covering a wider range of mathematics topics and producing more work in lessons.

Standards in writing remain poor across the school. This is partly due to the imbalance of focus in lessons. Teachers focus almost exclusively on ensuring that pupils know the features of different styles of writing and pay too little attention to handwriting or to correct letter formation, grammar, spelling and punctuation in English lessons and in other subjects. In some classes, the overuse of worksheets denies pupils the chance to practise the laying out of their work, ruling off when finished and labelling correctly – all important and necessary skills. The school does not have an agreed policy for how and when skills such as these will be taught.

In contrast, pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage continue to make good progress. The validated results of the end of Early Years Foundation Stage assessments show that in 2014, 55% of children reached a good level of development compared to 50% in 2013; 80% met or exceeded the standard for reading compared to 71 % last year; and 67% did so in writing, compared to 50%.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching remains too variable. There is some teaching that is resulting in pupils catching up on lost time, especially as seen in upper Key Stage 2 mathematics books and lessons, and in some instances in reading. However, pupils' continued inadequate progress overall is clear evidence of too much teaching that is inadequate or requires improvement.

Some teachers are not clear what 'good' teaching might look like over time. They maintain models of teaching that are not having the desired impact. One example is the approach to daily guided reading which requires most pupils to write and complete low-level activities, when the purpose of the sessions, over time, is to increase the range and volume of reading that pupils undertake and build up their reading stamina. In addition, leaders and teachers are too slow to use the data they

have available and insist on changes being made to groupings of pupils where necessary. In one reading session observed, despite having up-to-date reading ages for the pupils present, the reading groups had not been changed to ensure that those whose reading had improved were working in more suitable groups with more appropriate texts.

Nevertheless, there are some improvements in the use of assessment data. One good development has been the setting up of a reading-age board in the staff room on which every pupil's name is listed under a reading-age band. Repositioning pupils' names according to the latest reading-age data is a stark reminder to teachers of the progress still needed. In addition, leaders have abandoned some intervention work that was previously carried out by teaching assistants due to the limited impact on the progress made by pupils. Teaching assistants are now working more closely with teachers in lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

This aspect of the school's work is improving. Attendance, at just over 93%, is slightly better than at this point last year. The closer involvement of the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) is having a positive impact. The EWO and the school's learning mentor now go out to the homes of pupils who are absent without notification or who have a record of persistent absence. This action is ensuring that pupils attend but is leading, temporarily, to a rise in recorded lateness. Persistent absence figures are declining. There is also a declining picture of recorded repeated incidents. Pupils say bullying exists but that teachers deal with it.

Inspectors observed several instances of low-level disruption in lessons: some off-task behaviour and calling out. Adults have to manage pupils' behaviour; pupils do routinely exert self-control. Too often, pupils do not settle and get on without fussing or seeking adult help. They lack stamina and resilience, and the teaching observed and tasks set, which were sometimes too fragmented, or low level, did not help pupils to develop habits of perseverance, patience and independence.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leadership and management are improving. The headteacher remains highly committed and has a clear view of where she wants the school to be. She is very ably supported by her capable deputy.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the headteacher has focused, amongst other things, on staffing, restructuring and changes to the building. She has also been leading on significant changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage environment. The deputy is leading the developments on the provision for reading and changes to the curriculum. Other developments include changes to the assessment procedures and tighter moderation, in conjunction with local good and outstanding schools. The school has a number of initiatives under way, not all of

which are critical at this point and which have the potential to deflect attention from overriding priorities such as reading.

The senior leadership team is not strategic enough: members of the senior team do not yet take joint responsibility for standards across the school. They recognise the need to be more proactive in their roles, to drive forward improvements and champion high expectations. Phase leaders are also not strategic enough in their work. The notes of their meetings do not routinely focus on standards. The headteacher and deputy recognise the need to develop middle leadership.

Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage continue to be good. The leader has ensured that the newly qualified teachers working in this department have attended training in other high performing schools and that all Early Years Foundation Stage staff are trained paediatric first aiders.

External support

The local authority now has a very accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The previous school improvement adviser has been replaced. The Interim Head of Service for School Improvement, Children's Services – Education from the local authority has been supporting the school. The governing body is about to be removed and an Interim Executive Board is ready to be installed. An external consultant, commissioned by the local authority, has been supporting the headteacher to develop more robust methods to triangulate evidence of pupils' progress. He has an overgenerous view of current capacity in the school.