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10 July 2014

Ms Claire Westcott
Headteacher
Meridian Community Primary School
Roderick Avenue North
Peacehaven
East Sussex
BN10 8BZ

Dear Ms Westcott

Special measures monitoring inspection of Meridian Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 and 10 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 appoint newly qualified teachers in early years 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 Interim Executive board and the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex.

Yours sincerely
Catherine Anwar
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is consistently at least good by:
 - ensuring teachers consistently have high expectations and good subject knowledge for teaching reading, writing and mathematics
 - ensuring teachers always make effective use of the time available in English and mathematics lessons, including during guided reading
 - ensuring that teachers always match learning tasks to all pupils' needs, especially for the higher- and lower-attaining pupils, and that tasks are stimulating and encourage pupils to contribute fully to lessons
 - ensuring lower-attaining pupils are heard to read more regularly, and also that reading records show parents and carers their children's phonics targets.

- Accelerate pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - improving pupils' spelling and punctuation and the ability of lower-attaining pupils to write in sentences
 - ensuring pupils, particularly boys, consistently apply phonics when reading and writing and that teachers' marking shows pupils how to improve their spelling by applying phonics
 - improving pupils' mental skills in mathematics, addressing the gaps in understanding and increasing opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills to real-life problems
 - accelerating the progress of pupils with special educational needs in reading, writing and mathematics
 - raising the attainment of those pupils in receipt of the pupil premium and accelerating their progress.

- Improve the leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring teachers are provided with the training they need to teach English and mathematics consistently effectively
 - senior and middle leaders rigorously evaluating the impact of initiatives for improving teaching in reading, writing and mathematics across the whole school and providing support where needed
 - ensuring the school development plan includes more subject-specific actions for improving English and mathematics
 - providing training for governors so that they can carry out their role effectively
 - working directly with those parents and carers who keep their children off school without good reason to ensure pupils' attendance and punctuality improve.

- Ensure that the governing body holds leaders robustly to account for the school's performance, monitors the impact of spending on pupils'

performance, including the pupil premium, and addresses the weaknesses identified in the recent, separate, external review of governance.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 9 and 10 July 2014

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) observed the school's work and scrutinised documents such as evidence of pupils' progress and achievement. Meetings were held with the headteacher and senior leaders, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative from the local authority. HMI also met with the school's consultant headteacher. Nine lessons or parts of lessons were observed, all of these with senior leaders. A wide range of pupils' books was scrutinised with the deputy headteacher.

Context

On the second day of the inspection, the school was closed to pupils due to national industrial action taking place.

The imminent departure of several key staff means that the leadership of English and mathematics will be taken over by members of the leadership team in September. The school, well supported by the interim executive board (IEB), has appointed several teachers who will join the school in the autumn term.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Since the last inspection pupils in most year groups have made rapid progress because of well-targeted support for those who needed it. In the summer tests, Year 6 pupils achieved results dramatically better than last year's. All groups of pupils have made rapid gains in all subjects. Improvements in mathematics are particularly pleasing with a 24% rise in the number of pupils achieving Level 4. More-able pupils also achieved very well with a 22% increase in those gaining a Level 5 overall. In addition, eight pupils achieved the highest possible level: one in spelling, punctuation and grammar and seven in mathematics.

Attainment for pupils in Year 2 is also significantly better than it was last year. Nearly all pupils in this cohort have made expected progress, and more than half have made better-than-expected progress in reading and mathematics.

Those pupils eligible for additional funding have made even more rapid progress than their peers. Although their attainment is still often lower than other pupils', they are catching up quickly. The rate at which pupils with special educational needs make progress, particularly in reading, is improving. However, these pupils are not yet catching up with their peers quickly enough.

Achievement in Year 3 has not been as positive as in other year groups. This is because classes have, unavoidably, been taught by several different and some weaker teachers this year which has hindered their progress. The school has robust plans in place to address this issue in Year 4.

In Year 1, the proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in the phonics (the sounds that letters make) check has risen dramatically by 19% and is now above the national average. This is because effective training means that teachers are now more confident in teaching phonics. Pupils happily use sounds to spell out words; reading is now a strength in the school.

Work in pupils' books reflects rising standards. A keen focus on improving presentation and handwriting is beginning to bear fruit. Pupils were keen to demonstrate the improved standards of their work to HMI during visits to lessons.

The quality of teaching

The introduction of English and mathematics teams has been useful in helping teachers develop their subject knowledge better, particularly in mathematics and phonics. Further support has been provided by local authority consultants; more work still needs to be done in this area. For example, although phonics is now better taught to support pupils' reading, it is not yet having enough impact on their spelling which remains a weakness. There is now very little inadequate teaching in the school. Pupils commented that they enjoy the topics that they study in class and that they appreciate the focus on writing which has helped them to improve their work. They also reported an improving picture in learning overall, with pupils listening better in lessons.

More teachers now demonstrate higher expectations and better challenge for more-able pupils. Teachers match work more accurately to pupils' ability, and now often provide appropriate activities for pupils. Teachers assess pupils' work more accurately than previously. Nevertheless, marking and feedback remain inconsistent in quality and impact and more work needs to be done on this aspect. Weaker planning in some lessons means that activities do not always stretch and challenge pupils and they do not learn as quickly as they should. Teachers do not yet use probing questions well enough to develop pupils' thinking and to help them learn. Teachers' limited subject knowledge is sometimes still a barrier to pupils' progress. Astutely, pupils in Key Stage 1 commented that they would like 'harder maths' and access to 'all the letter sounds more quickly' so that they could make quicker progress in their reading and writing.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are polite, engaging and keen to learn. In lessons which are interesting and when they are questioned well, pupils join in eagerly with activities. Where work is too easy or too hard, pupils understandably become restless. In discussions with pupils they expressed some concerns about the disruptive and sometimes unkind behaviour of a very few children. They feel, however, that teachers manage this well and that, generally, pupils' behaviour has improved a lot this year. Pupils all feel very safe in school, and say that teachers are always there to help.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders have worked tirelessly to raise standards in the school. The headteacher's relentless focus on raising expectations and the highly effective way in which pupils' progress is tracked have resulted in a sharp rise in pupils' achievement. Leaders have brokered appropriate training for teachers in English, including phonics, and mathematics, and the impact of this is starting to be seen in better teaching and the rapid rates of progress made by all groups of pupils across the school. The impact of any actions taken has been evaluated thoroughly, with changes made as appropriate.

Leaders recognise that continuing work on the quality of teaching in the school remains a key priority. However, there is not yet a systematic enough approach in place to ensure that more teaching quickly becomes good. The school plans to address this with urgency.

Diligent work with parents and carers on improving attendance is starting to show results; attendance is rising for all pupils and is now in line with the national average.

The IEB, formed in March, is now becoming more effective in holding school leaders to account and offering support for improvement. The board must ensure that all statutory obligations are met.

External support

The local authority provides effective support to the school in a range of ways. Regular monitoring visits are combined with subject-specific training for teachers, joint lesson observations and learning walks to monitor standards. The work of the consultant headteacher is extremely helpful in further developing the work of senior leaders. Information on pupils' progress and the monitoring of this information are now sharper because of her support.