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13 November 2104

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

Dear Mrs Porter

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

Following my visit to your school on 12 and 13 November, 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 appoint two newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection on condition that it uses the expertise and resources of another school whose newly qualified teacher induction provision has been audited by the local authority and judged to be good or outstanding.

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 Walsall.

Yours sincerely
Angela Westington
Her Majesty's Inspector

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 third monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 November 2014

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, a representative of the local authority and members of the interim executive board. She observed lessons, most of them jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher. She spoke to pupils in lessons, examined the work in their books and heard pupils read. She scrutinised a range of data about pupils' performance and documents relating to how leaders and managers are improving and monitoring the work of the school.

On day 1 of this visit, the inspector focused on the teaching of mathematics in Key Stage 2. During this inspection, she made only brief observations in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in July 2014, the building work has been completed, creating three additional classrooms and refurbishing other areas. The programme of redecoration of classrooms is almost complete. A significant capital investment has been made in the early years rooms; the environment has been completely updated and redecorated. The outdoor area has been improved with adventure play equipment and the development of a Forest School area.

Classes have been re-organised into single year groups, two classes per year group with a maximum of 23 pupils per class.

The assistant headteacher took up her post in September. Staffing remains a concern. Since the previous inspection, four teachers have left the school and two are due to leave at the end of this term. There are currently three teaching vacancies covered by teachers on supply contracts.

The governing body has been disbanded and replaced with an interim executive board, with four members.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Standards in reading are improving across the school. They are gradually edging closer to the national average by the end of Key Stages 1 and 2, including at the higher Level 5. Pupils read more books, more often, and are beginning to recognise the writing styles of individual authors such as Roald Dahl and Michael Morpurgo. All classes now use novels and texts as the central core of their English lessons and, as a result, pupils are writing more interesting stories and letters, for example. They read every day in school for half an hour, but this time is still not always used to best effect in every reading session. For instance, in some classes, pupils only read the set book one day in five. Instead, on three of the other days they are free to

read other texts or complete low level writing activities. Some teachers appear reluctant to allow pupils to read for extended periods of time and require them to write in the reading session in order to justify the time spent reading. No justification is needed when pupils are reading interesting, engaging and challenging books. Despite the improvements, more able readers, in both key stages, are still not challenged enough.

Standards in mathematics remain low and are not improving quickly enough. Standards in mathematics in Year 6 are exceptionally low. Pupils in Year 6 have significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding of basic mathematics, the legacy of years of weak teaching. For example, many do not know that a kilogram is equal to 1000 grams. In Years 5 and 6, many pupils confuse multiplication with division and do not understand that division can be seen as repeated subtraction.

The mathematics subject knowledge of teachers in Years 5 and 6 is weak and the teaching does not tackle the gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills. Many pupils are unable to estimate weights and lengths because lessons provide too few opportunities for them to handle and compare items and weights and rulers with imperial and metric measures. Lessons focus too much on how to gain marks rather than developing in pupils a deeper conceptual understanding and correcting their errors and misconceptions.

In contrast, the inspector observed pupils in Year 2 learning how to estimate and measure a variety of items of different lengths using 10 centimetre blocks. Pupils had to use their knowledge of counting in tens in a real-life context; they learnt and used the new skill of measuring accurately and used the correct new technical vocabulary, 'estimate' and 'measure'. They could explain in detail what they were learning and they recorded their work accurately in their books.

Pupils' writing is improving but not quickly enough. Pupils are more willing to write than was previously the case and the inspector read work that was lively and engaging. However, across all year groups, pupils' work still contains basic errors. Teachers do not constantly remind pupils to correct spellings, punctuation, grammar and handwriting. Pupils' presentation of their work has improved, but not enough. Handwriting is weak and many pupils, in all year groups, are unable to develop a fluid cursive style because they form letters incorrectly or do not know how to join one letter to another.

Disadvantaged pupils, those eligible for the pupil premium, continue to attain less well than their classmates. Pupils with special educational needs are making better progress in reading than in mathematics and writing because the school now has better systems in place to identify and support those pupils who need extra help.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is not yet good enough to ensure that pupils make more rapid progress nor to eradicate the significant gaps in what they know, can do and understand.

Teacher subject knowledge in mathematics and pedagogical knowledge in upper Key Stage 2 are weak. Pupils, including older pupils, do not routinely have access to practical equipment to develop their understanding and help move their thinking from the concrete to the abstract. For example, in a Year 5 lesson on division, pupils would have benefited from using base 10 apparatus to help them visualise what is meant by 'how many 6s in 245?', for example, and to see the link with repeated subtraction. Instead, many pupils struggled to understand what they had to do with what they called the 'bus-stop' method.

Teachers plan differentiated mathematics work for pupils of differing ability, but it is not really differentiated to challenge more able pupils. For example, in one upper Key Stage 2 lesson on multiplication and division, each of three different ability groups had to complete a sheet of word problems. All the sheets contained exactly the same two-step problems, but with slightly bigger numbers according to the ability of the group. There was no increase in complexity of the problems posed or in the number of steps that pupils had to undertake in order to complete the problems. Despite purchasing a new mathematics scheme recently, textbooks are not used, even to allow the most able pupils to read problems and work independently. Most of their mathematics work is presented to them on low level teacher produced worksheets.

Elsewhere, the teaching observed can be characterised as 'missed opportunities'. Staff have worked very hard to embed systems and processes, for example in reading, lesson planning and behaviour management, so that there are clear and consistent approaches to how things are done across the school. However, the relentless focus on intellectual challenge, thereby raising academic standards, is lacking; put simply, teachers miss too many opportunities to ratchet up teaching and learning. For example, the teaching of reading is much improved, but more needs to be done to make the most of every reading session. The teaching of writing is also much improved, but there are no displays of pupils' writing or the books that classes are reading and teachers do not model good handwriting script on boards. Accurate standardised assessments are now in place and the data have been collated and analysed, but not all teachers use the mathematics data to group pupils, and some teachers do not understand standardised data.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

At the previous monitoring inspection, inspectors noted that adults had to manage pupils' behaviour and that pupils did not routinely exert self-control. This is no longer the case for the overwhelming majority of pupils.

The inspector observed pupils settling to work, reading quietly, working patiently on their own or with a partner. Pupils are developing stamina, resilience, perseverance and independence. There remain some examples of low level off-task behaviour, but this was observed mostly when teaching was less effective.

Attendance is better at this point in the school year compared to last year: 94.7% against 93.2%. Persistent absence figures continue to decline. Exclusions have risen this term as the school tackles the extreme behaviour of four boys.

The school has purchased additional support from the local authority Behaviour and Attendance Services. This support is having a positive impact, which is reflected in the improvements in behaviour and attendance. The Service Head, who is a member of the interim executive board, reports that school staff work well with service officers and have taken on board all recommendations. The school is a calm and welcoming environment.

There remain further missed opportunities though; for example, end of day routines could be more reflective and contribute better to pupils' spiritual, social and moral development. Although there are class story sessions at the end of each day, the inspector observed a session which fizzled out as pupils went to get their coats and line up to meet parents. There was no opportunity for them to reflect on the day, or to say good afternoon to each other and their teacher and to bring the day to a good end.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leadership and management are improving.

The headteacher continues to work exceptionally hard and carries a heavy workload. Increasingly, the senior leaders are playing a more prominent role in the school. With the headteacher, they are becoming a strong team, with a clear vision for the school. They have led, and carried out, much development and change since the previous monitoring inspection, including overseeing the building work; developments in reading and literacy and the introduction of a new curriculum which is engaging pupils; improvements to the management and assessment of special educational needs; and a raft of monitoring activities. A lot has been done in a short time.

The school is receiving a lot of support from a partner school, Moorcroft Wood, whose headteacher is a member of the interim executive board. Staff from Lodge Farm have spent time at Moorcroft Wood and found the visits useful. Some Moorcroft staff have undertaken joint monitoring activities at Lodge Farm, including lessons and pupils' books. Some of the feedback given is low level and inappropriate and does not focus on standards and expectations. The school has also bought in consultancy support from other sources. This variety of advice and support is confusing for staff and is in danger of undermining key messages. The school's self-

evaluation is still over generous, for example on the quality of teaching over time, and is not focused enough on pupil outcomes.

HMI recommends that all additional advice and support, consultancy or otherwise, be stripped away and that the headteacher and members of the school's senior leadership team be allowed to lead the school in order to build the capacity needed to take the school forward.

The governing body has been replaced by an interim executive board. The four members bring a range of relevant skills to their work. The level of challenge exerted by the board is very high.

A review of the use and impact of the pupil premium funding is in hand.

External support

Links have been made with a local school, Moorcroft Wood Primary, the headteacher of which is a member of the interim executive board. This is a positive development and allows staff from Lodge Farm to see good practice. However, caution needs to be exercised about the amount, and quality, of advice provided, the monitoring activities undertaken and the potential for confusion amongst Lodge Farm staff.

A senior local authority officer attends the interim executive board. She has a very accurate picture of the school's progress.