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20 November 2014

Mrs A Allnut
Headteacher
Greenvale Infant School
Symons Avenue
Chatham
ME4 5UP

Dear Mrs Allnut

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Greenvale Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 19 November 2014 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. 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 was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in January 2014. 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 the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Medway.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes
Seconded inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014

- Improve teaching and raise achievement for pupils with behaviour, emotional and social difficulties so that they are at least good by:
 - providing pupils with consistently interesting learning opportunities which fully engage them in their learning
 - ensuring staff plan and teach reading, writing and mathematics at the right level of difficulty
 - ensuring leaders review the quality of provision for these pupils effectively.
- Ensure teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is consistently at least good by:
 - ensuring learning tasks in the Early Years Foundation Stage are always stimulating and give children in Reception more reading and writing opportunities
 - ensuring teachers question pupils more skilfully to help them learn
 - ensuring teachers fully implement the new mathematical calculation policy, address gaps in pupils' mathematical understanding and give more-able pupils harder work
 - ensuring support staff intervene more effectively to extend pupils' learning, including in Nursery and Reception.
- Raise achievement and accelerate progress, including for pupils eligible for pupil premium, by:
 - improving pupils' speaking and listening skills
 - improving pupils' spelling, punctuation and ability to write in sentences, ensuring teachers consistently help pupils to apply phonics skills when writing
 - improving lower-attaining pupils' progress in reading by ensuring pupils practise phonics skills before reading and that teachers' reading records show phonics skills.
- Improve the leadership and management, including governance, of the school by:
 - developing the role of middle leaders so they have a greater impact on improving pupils' progress and the quality of teaching
 - ensuring the school improvement plan shows more precisely how governors will monitor and evaluate the impact of initiatives on improving achievement
 - ensuring new governors quickly receive training.

The school should undertake an external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium funding, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 19 November 2014

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher, two assistant headteachers, three middle leaders, a group of governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority. He scrutinised a range of documentation, including minutes from governors' meetings, evaluations carried out by the school, the school's monitoring information, reports completed by external advisers, information about staff training, and information the school had on the progress of pupils. Three formal lesson observations were completed, as well as short visits to the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection the school has appointed four new teachers, one of whom is a newly qualified teacher. New leaders have been given responsibility for English and mathematics.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Under the energetic leadership of the headteacher, school leaders have continued the momentum of school improvement seen at the previous monitoring visit. The headteacher's high expectations have, as an example, led to high-quality, consistent learning environments in every classroom. Other senior leaders have continued to develop their roles and are becoming more effective. They support and challenge each other's work well and this has increased the accuracy of self-evaluations carried out by the school, particularly when monitoring the impact of initiatives introduced to improve learning.

Middle leadership is less well developed. For example, the new leaders for English and mathematics are very new to their roles. Opportunities to train them have been well considered. There is still some way to go, however, before middle leaders' actions improve learning in their areas of responsibility.

Leaders have continued to work on the behaviour policy and this is now more effectively applied by staff. Pupils behave well in and around the school. They are beginning to show more enthusiasm in lessons and work hard to tackle what they have been asked to do. Pupils get on well together and add to the strong sense of community at the school. For example, a group of children from Reception worked together with one of the school caretakers to clear away leaves from their learning area.

Governance has also continued to improve, although it is still in a period of transition. Governors rightly trust the work of school leaders and demonstrate they are making sure they look for evidence to substantiate what they are told at

meetings. They visit the school regularly, for example, to look at the areas that are being developed in the amended school plan. Governors are providing much greater challenge to the work of senior leaders. They are aware of the need to extend this to include providing challenge and support for middle leaders.

All those involved at the school, including pupils, are enthusiastic about the creative curriculum that leaders have introduced. There are now much stronger links made between the topics pupils are studying and their learning in English and mathematics. Classroom environments have been developed to support this work well. Consistent displays that pupils can access to support their work in phonics, for example, ensure that wherever pupils are learning, they have access to help them apply their skills. Role-play areas in classrooms also bring the topics being studied to life and give opportunities for pupils to develop their language skills.

Despite the many positives seen, however, the introduction of the curriculum is recent and, as yet, teachers are not making the most of the opportunities that it affords to add greater purpose to what pupils are learning. For example, an English lesson seen in Year 2 began with pupils learning more about the diary of Samuel Pepys, focusing on his entries about the Great Fire of London. Pupils were attentively engaged in a short film that shared the information in an exciting and imaginative way. The teacher used the pupils' enthusiasm well to help them learn how to retrieve information and develop their sentence-writing skills in answer to a range of questions. However, the task itself only gave a narrow opportunity to develop writing and so pupils made limited progress.

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has continued to improve. Children are now able to consistently 'free flow' to develop their skills in both the outdoor and indoor environments. Adults interact with children and make the most of opportunities to help them learn through their play. There is still work to be done, however, because some activities on offer, especially in the outside environment, do not always link well enough to what children have been learning in their classrooms.

The work of leaders to improve the teaching of phonics has been effective. Noticeably pupils across the school are encouraged to apply their phonics skills across the curriculum, particularly when formulating words in their writing. A good example of how well established this has become was seen in a Year 1 lesson, in which a pupil made reference to the phonics display when evaluating what he had done well at the end of the writing lesson.

The quality of questioning seen during lessons is still varied. Recent training involving support staff and teachers has yet to have the impact needed to make this a strong feature of teaching. The new marking policy is now consistently applied. Feedback, however, often focuses on presentation, spelling and use of their phonics skills, rather than the learning the children have been asked to do. Pupils are not yet making the best use of this feedback either, as they do not respond quickly enough.

The introduction of new practical mathematical resources to support teaching and learning has been well developed and pupils have responded well to this.

Although there are signs of improvement, the many changes made to teaching and the curriculum have yet to result in better standards. This is particularly the case in writing and phonics. The work seen in books, for example, shows that pupils are making rapid improvements in their technical writing skills, but this has yet to lead to extended pieces of writing of a high enough quality.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The headteacher has set high standards for teaching and learning.
- All leaders and staff at the school have a strong common purpose to bring about improvement.
- The performance of staff is well managed and has been effective in promoting improvement.
- Improvements made to the curriculum have enthused learners and added vibrancy to the work of the school.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teachers are not making effective use of the improved curriculum to raise standards.
- Pupils are not producing high-quality extended writing because teachers do not expect enough of them.

External support

The school continues to make effective use of external support. This has been particularly useful in the work done to improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Where the local authority has responded to the needs of leadership at the school, they have given accurate and challenging feedback to the school about what to prioritise next.