

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22

West Lancs Investment Centre T 0300 123 1231

Maple View

Skelmersdale

WN8 9TG

Text Phone: 0161 618 8524

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566932

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: hcarnall@cftb.com



5 December 2014

Mrs Sharon Bates
Headteacher
Mill Hill Primary School
Sunnyside Avenue
Tunstall
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST6 6ED

Dear Mrs Bates

Special measures monitoring inspection of Mill Hill Primary School

Following my visit with Simon Bramwell, Additional Inspector, to your school on 3 and 4 December 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.

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 People Services for Stoke-on-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 so that it is always good or better and thus raise attainment, close gaps in the attainment and progress of different groups and accelerate the progress all pupils make, especially in writing by:
 - ensuring teachers use information from assessments including their marking to help them plan and set targets for individuals in order to meet the needs of pupils of different ability, particularly of the most able
 - making sure that pupils are always given good guidance about how to improve their work, that marking helps them to improve their handwriting and spelling and that pupils are given the time to respond
 - increasing the opportunities pupils have to practise their literacy and mathematical skills in subjects other than English and mathematics
 - making sure teachers increase the opportunities pupils have to think things out for themselves or to take the initiative.
- Improve attendance and reduce persistent absence further by working more closely with parents.
- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, so that there is the capacity to improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - improving the skills of senior, middle and subject leaders, especially in English and mathematics, so that leaders at all levels can drive improvement in teaching and learning
 - improving the effectiveness of the monitoring of teaching and learning and ensuring the assessment of pupils' progress is accurate so that leaders have a clear understanding of what needs to be improved and can hold teachers to account for such improvements
 - ensuring governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses to be able to challenge the school effectively and hold leaders to account
 - undertaking an external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 3 and 4 December 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, associate headteacher, executive headteacher and a director of the City Learning Trust. Inspectors also met with the Chair and two members of the Interim Executive Board, senior leaders and phase leaders, groups of pupils, some parents and a representative of the local authority.

Context

The interim deputy headteacher was appointed headteacher from November 2014. The previous interim headteacher is supporting the school as a consultant. Two temporary acting deputy headteachers have been made to the senior leadership team. A new special educational needs coordinator has been appointed. Three teachers have left the school. An Interim Executive Board has been in place since September 2014. It replaces the previous governing body that was disbanded. The school is due to become part of the Haywood Academy's multi-academy trust, the City Learning Trust, in January 2015. All Years 5 and 6 English and mathematics lessons are co-taught with staff from Haywood Academy.

Achievement of pupils at the school

At the end of Key Stage 2, pupils' attainment in reading, writing, mathematics, spelling, grammar and punctuation has continued to decline and was well below the national average for these subjects in 2014. The school's data for this term indicate that pupils' progress in lessons has improved for the first time since the school became subject to special measures.

Children in the early years continue to make good progress. They are developing good skills in early reading, writing and number work. They talk purposefully about their learning and this helps them to answer questions confidently. Children read and count with increasing accuracy. They are well prepared for Key Stage 1, but their rate of progress slows during Years 1 and 2.

Pupils' reading is improving. Pupils are beginning to read more frequently, particularly in upper Key Stage 2. However, pupils in Key Stage 1 are not consistently able to apply their knowledge of letters and sounds to read unfamiliar words and this is hindering improvements in reading.

The quality of writing is getting better. Pupils are beginning to spell with greater accuracy. Older pupils are beginning to use dictionaries with confidence. Pupils' understanding of grammar is improving. In upper Key Stage 2, pupils' handwriting and presentation of work are much neater.

Pupils' understanding of number is improving. They are beginning to apply the basic processes of addition, subtraction and multiplication in their mathematics work, but not in other subjects.

The most able pupils in Year 6 are beginning to make faster progress. This is because the additional literacy and mathematics lessons supported by teachers from Haywood Academy enable pupils to tackle more demanding work that challenges them well and extends their thinking.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is beginning to improve, but it remains too variable across the school. It is weakest in Key Stage 1. Teachers' understanding of what pupils can do is getting better, but the majority of teachers do not yet use this information to plan work that is sufficiently challenging. In many classes, the work planned for middle-attaining pupils is at too low a level; as a result, they are not able to tackle sufficiently challenging work to make good progress. Teachers have not planned opportunities for literacy skills to be practised in subjects other than English. Consequently, pupils, and especially the most able, are not able to advance their literacy skills by applying them in a range of contexts. Opportunities for pupils to use their understanding of mathematics are similarly limited.

Some guided reading sessions are not effective. Sessions of whole-class reading of a text on the white board do not develop well each pupil's ability to decode and read with fluency, because some pupils could not keep up with the rest of the class. A few teachers accept one-word answers, instead of encouraging complete sentence responses in pupils' spoken and written work; as a result, pupils are not encouraged to think more deeply about their answers. The teaching of letters and sounds has improved and there is a better selection of books to support practice in Key Stage 1. However, upper Key Stage 2 does not have a sufficient range of age-appropriate books. This limits pupils' choice of reading materials, especially for those who are new to Britain. Pupils are reading more frequently to an adult and this is improving their fluency.

Handwriting is beginning to improve. However, this improvement is limited because teachers do not consistently demonstrate the quality and style of handwriting that is expected. In Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2, pupils do not hold their pencils correctly, their forming of letter shapes is weak and they often miss finger spaces between words. In some classes, pupils who demonstrate consistently neat handwriting are not permitted to use pens.

Teachers are providing more resources to support learning. Pupils are beginning to use a variety of strategies to help themselves to solve problems. In some classes, the use of learning walls is helping pupils to be more independent.

Teachers' marking is improving. There is greater consistency in using the new marking policy and pupils are much clearer about what they need to do to improve. However, teachers do not always ensure that pupils follow the advice they have been given or complete the follow-up activity. Mistakes in spellings, punctuation and grammar are frequently identified and corrected in literacy work, but not in other subjects.

Teaching assistants are not always deployed well. They are underused when pupils have 'carpet time'. Too often, they sit at the side of the class waiting for pupils to move into group work. Teaching assistants contribute well to pupils' learning in small groups. They work well with pupils who have disabilities and those who have special educational needs and help to keep them focused on what they have to do.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour is improving. Pupils walk sensibly around school and show interest in and care for each other. They hold doors open for visitors and wait for others to walk through. Children in the early years are able to focus well on tasks and stick at work to find out answers. Key Stage 1 provision does not build on these skills. In some classes, pupils shout out when the teacher asks a question, reducing opportunities for other pupils to contribute their ideas. During lessons, inspectors observed low-level poor behaviour, including pupils rocking on chairs, staring into space and fidgeting. Younger pupils become restless when they are required to sit on the carpet for long periods. Pupils stated that there is still some bullying and silly behaviour in some lessons, but that in the majority of cases it does not interrupt their learning.

Pupils are very proud of their new school uniform. Older pupils are pleased that they are allowed to wear blazers to mark them out and are very proud of their new responsibilities to help younger pupils. All pupils have the opportunity to be monitors and to take responsibility for different jobs.

Pupils' understanding of being safe is improving. They can explain the dangers of using the Internet and are confident they can tell an adult if they have worries. Children in the early years use equipment safely and are developing confidence to be more adventurous in physical activities.

Pupils' attendance is slowly improving. The family support workers and educational welfare officer contact all families and follow up when a pupil is absent. Pupils are keen to earn a certificate for full attendance and enjoy the cake provided in celebration. Punctuality is improving. Exclusions have declined because teachers and teaching assistants are managing pupils' challenging behaviour better. The school is calmer.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The leadership and management of the school are improving. The new headteacher is working determinedly to improve teaching and learning and raise the expectations of staff. She has restructured senior and middle leaders' responsibilities to make them more accountable for improving teaching. The headteacher has identified the need for staff who can lead subjects other than English and mathematics. Phase leaders are developing their leadership and management roles. They observe learning in the classroom, check on pupils' progress information and compare this with pupils' work within their phase. They do not look at work from the preceding phase and this limits their understanding of any gaps in pupils' learning.

The headteacher has introduced performance management systems. All staff have performance management meetings and their targets are appropriately linked to the teaching standards and focus on improving pupils' progress. All staff receive appropriate training to help them to carry out their roles more effectively. Staff from within the school and from the City Learning Trust have worked to improve teachers' expertise through coaching and moderating their assessments. Teaching groups have been reorganised into sets for English and mathematics, which enables staff to plan work that better matches pupils' starting points and this is beginning to provide the appropriate level of challenge.

A new tracking system is helping leaders to monitor pupils' progress better. This enables leaders to hold teachers to account for improving pupils' progress. All staff have received training in assessing pupils' work and they are beginning to do this more accurately.

The curriculum is in the early stages of development and is not yet broad and balanced. It has been reorganised to focus on English, spelling, handwriting and mathematics. The headteacher is aware that opportunities for pupils to participate in physical education are too limited and is looking at ways to increase the time spent in physical activities. She has introduced curriculum-learning journals to provide opportunities for wider learning in other subjects, such as science.

All staff have had up-to-date safeguarding training. They also understand the new requirements for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs.

The Interim Executive Board is well informed and confidently challenges the headteacher and other school leaders. It is overseeing the transition to the City Learning Trust. Members of the board who are also governors for the trust are helping to promote this process.

External support

The local authority provides additional support and challenge through regular school improvement partner visits and commissioning the work of external consultants. The

support brokered by the local authority complements the work of the City Learning Trust. The consultants provide the school with an external evaluation of the progress being made.