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11 December 2014

Mr David Saunders
Executive Headteacher
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Baring Road
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South Yorkshire
S61 2BU

Dear Mr Saunders

Special measures monitoring inspection of Blackburn Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 and 10 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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 only after consultation with the lead HMI.

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 Interim Director of Children's Services for Rotherham.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better and so that all pupils make good or better progress in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - eradicating any inadequate teaching that exists
 - making sure all teachers have high expectations about what each pupil is capable of achieving
 - improving teachers' planning so that pupils of all abilities are given appropriately challenging tasks and particularly so that the most able pupils, those who are lower-attaining and those with special educational needs learn at a fast rate
 - making sure that teachers check closely during lessons that the work given is leading to new learning, particularly when pupils are working out of class
 - making sure that pupils are given enough time in lessons to develop their skills and knowledge for themselves
 - making sure that pupils spend enough time in lessons working on interesting and challenging activities that motivate them and result in them developing good attitudes to learning
 - developing the role of teaching assistants so that they can make a more effective contribution to developing pupils' basic skills.

- Improve pupils' basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics, so that they reach above-average levels of attainment by the end of Year 6 and are well prepared for the next stage of their education by:
 - improving pupils' accuracy in their use of grammar, spelling and punctuation
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to use and apply their literacy and numeracy skills in all their lessons across the curriculum
 - providing regular and frequent opportunities for pupils to use their mathematical calculation skills to work things out for themselves, both mentally and in writing, and use them to solve problems
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to practise their reading skills so that they build well on their good start in learning to read.

- Urgently improve the school's leadership and management so that improvement is driven forward at a rapid rate by:
 - making sure that greater account is taken of pupils' progress when undertaking observations of teaching so that the school's view of its effectiveness is more accurate
 - making sure that leaders check more carefully that all teachers' assessments at the end of every year are accurate, and particularly the end of Reception, Year 2 and Year 6
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels rigorously check the impact of their work in the areas for which they are accountable, especially in terms of improving achievement and the quality of teaching
 - ensuring subject leaders contribute effectively to supporting other teachers

- making sure that improvement plans contain clear, specific and measurable priorities, against which progress can be regularly evaluated
 - increasing the impact of the performance management of staff by ensuring that they are held fully accountable for pupils' progress and improving the quality of their classroom practice.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of the governing body in holding the school to account by:
- ensuring that governors challenge leaders more rigorously about pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching
 - providing thorough training for new governors so that they fully understand their roles and responsibilities
 - 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 third monitoring inspection on 9 to 10 December 2014

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the head of school, a group of teachers, a group of learning support assistants and a group of pupils. Further meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor and a representative of the local authority. Ten lesson observations were completed, all of which were undertaken jointly with senior leaders.

Context

The headteacher recently began a maternity leave. The governing body has appointed an experienced executive headteacher to lead the school during her absence. In addition, some other leadership roles have changed. The deputy headteacher has become head of school. There is a new phase leader for upper Key Stage 2, a new assessment coordinator and new leaders with responsibilities for literacy and for the early years. Two newly qualified teachers took up post in September. A new governor has joined the governing body.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Results from 2014 external tests show standards of attainment at Key Stage 2 improved in mathematics to be in line with that seen nationally. However, attainment in reading and writing remained below the national average because too few pupils made expected or good progress across the key stage. However, attainment in grammar, punctuation and spelling improved on the previous year and reached the national average. At Key Stage 1, improvements in achievement were more consistent across reading, writing and mathematics, with levels of attainment being in line with those seen nationally. More pupils attained the higher level in reading and mathematics, although the proportion attaining the higher level in writing was lower. The proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in phonics (the sounds letters and groups of letters make) fell slightly but remains close to the national average. Standards in the early years are above those seen nationally. Pupils typically make good progress in the Nursery, which is consolidated in the Reception Year.

The school has set more ambitious attainment and progress targets for 2015 and expects standards to compare favourably with the national average. However, the school's most recent assessments show pupils currently in Year 6, who were adversely affected by weaker teaching in the past, are not on course to achieve these targets. Consequently, senior leaders are tracking each pupil's progress carefully to ensure they receive tailored support to meet their individual needs.

The school has also taken steps to promote reading more actively and to ensure sufficient curriculum time is dedicated to the teaching of reading. Careful thought has been given to the range of texts included in the curriculum and pupils are responding positively to the reading rewards programme. A new 'Premier League Reading Stars' initiative will begin in

the school in January, designed to appeal to boys in particular. Staff have also focused on improving the quality of writing. Evidence from pupils' books shows the quality of handwriting has significantly improved for many and pupils' use of grammar, punctuation and spelling is more accurate.

The school is implementing a new approach to assessment and tracking of pupil progress. All members of staff have been trained so that they can assess pupils' progress accurately under the new system. There are good arrangements in place for teachers to moderate assessments.

The quality of teaching

The proportion of teaching that is good or better continues to increase. This is because teachers receive good professional development and detailed feedback which is helping to develop their practice. As a result policies to improve teaching are becoming embedded. For example, teachers now routinely share learning objectives and success criteria which make clear what will be learned and what is expected by the end of the lesson. Teachers also routinely encourage pupils to achieve the more challenging success criteria and this approach is helping to create a culture of aspiration which motivates the majority of pupils. Teachers are now more adept at planning lessons that meet the needs of different abilities, and, consequently, the resources provided for pupils are thoughtfully designed to ensure the level of challenge is appropriate. During lessons, most teachers check the work provided is challenging, although there are still occasions when the work provided for the most able pupils does not stretch them sufficiently. For example, there are not enough opportunities for the most able pupils to solve complex open-ended problems in mathematics.

Teachers are now more skilled at demonstrating or modelling what they are looking for and, as a result, pupils are clear about what is required and are able to make good progress. Teachers also hold higher expectations of the pupils. For example, teachers now challenge pupils to extend their answers to questions and expect them to use subject-specific vocabulary. As a result pupils are becoming more articulate and are increasingly able to contribute clearly and confidently. Marking increasingly identifies areas for improvement, which pupils act upon during 'fix-it' time each day and improve their work.

An increased emphasis on good grammar, punctuation and spelling and more focus on good handwriting have paid dividends. In Key Stage 1, teachers are taking care to ensure pupils are forming letters correctly and this is helping pupils to write with greater fluency. There are good displays in each classroom that help pupils to develop their vocabulary for writing and teachers are providing more high-level writing examples for pupils to learn from.

The quality of support from teaching assistants has become more consistent. They make a positive contribution to learning when supporting in class because their work is targeted thoughtfully and they are clear about how best to support learning. Some teaching assistants have recently received training on new programmes to support pupils making slower progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' attitudes to learning have improved. They behave well in lessons and are increasingly keen to participate and support one another. The use of collaborative learning approaches is now well established across the school and, as a result, pupils have good social skills and work together very effectively. Where teachers are enthusiastic, pupils respond positively, are keen to answer questions and settle to work with real purpose. They respond quickly to the techniques teachers use to quieten the class. They are also proud of the improvements they have made in the quality of their handwriting. Behaviour at social times is calm and there is a welcoming atmosphere around the school. A learning mentor is providing good support for the small minority of pupils that exhibit more challenging behaviour.

Attendance across 2013/14 was above the national average and has continued to improve so far this term.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

In the headteacher's absence new leadership arrangements have been put in place to ensure the school continues to move forwards. An experienced headteacher from another local school is leading the school on an interim basis and the deputy headteacher is providing good support as head of school. The school's plans for improvement have been updated and set out appropriate actions to ensure the school remains on course towards the removal of special measures.

Central to these plans is a recognition that not enough pupils have made good progress in the basic skills of reading and writing. As a result leaders are focused on promoting the benefits of reading, broadening the range of texts pupils encounter and developing the skills to read analytically. Work to improve the quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar has already had a positive impact.

Senior leaders have continued to ensure the quality of teaching is checked regularly and that teachers receive constructive feedback that helps them to reflect upon and refine their practice. In addition, senior leaders have ensured the quality of teaching has been externally reviewed by local authority colleagues. Therefore, senior leaders and governors have a detailed knowledge of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and are clear about the priorities for improvement. Recent training for teachers has therefore addressed these priorities effectively. There has been good support for the newly qualified teachers who joined the school in September.

The introduction of a better-structured and more-creative curriculum is being well received by pupils because the topics and planned activities are more engaging and interesting. The curriculum also places a stronger focus on applying literacy skills across other subjects.

Senior leaders have taken steps to ensure the performance of teaching assistants is managed with the same scrutiny as that of teachers. This process has helped to refine the

deployment of teaching assistants and to identify any specific training needs required to develop their practice.

Leaders are ensuring the school's preferred approach to assessment is being introduced carefully and that assessment information is used to support lesson planning. A new data management system has been installed and leaders are ensuring the progress of pupils is tracked rigorously. Arrangements are in place for staff to moderate assessments within school and more widely within the learning community of schools. During the transition to the new assessment system, efforts are being made to help parents understand the different information contained in progress reports.

Governance is now a strength of the school. The governors have a detailed and thorough knowledge of the school because they have sustained a programme of visits to learn about particular aspects of the school's work. In addition, they receive detailed information about achievement and the quality of teaching. Governors prepare probing questions in advance of meetings and are rigorous in fulfilling their statutory responsibilities. They have good systems in place to check on the use of the pupil premium (additional government money) and primary sports funding.

Since the last monitoring inspection the Department for Education has withdrawn its proposal for the school to convert to a sponsored academy. This decision has given members of staff greater certainty about the school's future direction and has allowed the governors and senior leaders to develop longer-term plans for the school's development.

External support

The local authority, in conjunction with the governing body, has acted quickly to secure the leadership of the school during the headteacher's absence and good arrangements are in place to ensure the school continues to move forwards. In addition, a representative of the local authority, working with other local headteachers, continues to review the school's progress and provide helpful reports.