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22 January 2015

Mrs Maddie Cowley
Acting Headteacher
Cherry Tree Primary School and Speech and Language Unit
Holt Drive
Colchester
CO2 0BG

Dear Mrs Cowley

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cherry Tree Primary School and Speech and Language Unit

Following my visit to your school on 20–21 January 2015, 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 March 2014. 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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Essex.

Yours sincerely

Robert Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Interim Executive Board
- Local authority
- For the Secretary of State use the following email address: CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk
- The lead and team inspectors.

Annex

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

- Improve teaching so that it is all at least good by:
 - ensuring that teachers expect more from their pupils, including the more able, and encourage them to aim for much higher standards, especially in writing and mathematics
 - providing work that engages pupils' interest and attention, particularly that of boys
 - insisting that pupils concentrate in lessons and pay careful attention to what their teachers are saying
 - giving consistently clear guidance to pupils on what they need to do to improve their work and checking that pupils act on the advice given
 - providing effective training for staff in the teaching of mathematics
 - improving the work of teaching assistants.
- Raise achievement, especially in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - setting clear expectations for the standard of presentation of pupils' work
 - reinforcing pupils' understanding of the sounds that letters make (phonics) as they move up the school so that their reading skills continue to develop
 - ensuring that the rules of spelling, grammar and punctuation are understood and accurately applied by all pupils
 - encouraging pupils to write at length
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to use their knowledge and practise their skills in mathematics
 - using data from assessments to plan work which helps pupils to make more rapid progress by accurately identifying their specific learning needs, especially those eligible for the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, as well as pupils who join at times other than the usual starting dates.
- Improve all levels of leadership and management, including governance, by making sure that:
 - leaders' evaluations of achievement and teaching are accurate and used for improvement
 - the effectiveness of action plans is regularly reviewed so that they result in more rapid and demonstrable improvements
 - the position regarding the leadership of the Speech and Language Unit is swiftly resolved

- leaders are identified for subjects other than English and mathematics so that all the requirements of the new curriculum are planned for and met
- governors hold leaders and managers stringently to account for the quality of teaching, and pupils' progress and attain.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 20–21 January 2015

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, a representative from the local authority, the lead headteacher from the sponsoring academy trust and senior members of the school's staff. HMI scrutinised a range of pupils' books and observed teaching in all classes at least once.

Context

The school is expected to convert to an academy as part of the Connected Learning Academy Trust on 1 April 2015. A substantive headteacher has been appointed to lead the school from this date.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils continue to make more progress than in the past. However, not enough are making the rapid progress required to close the gaps on pupils nationally.

While the proportions of pupils making expected progress has risen substantially in reading, writing and mathematics, too few are making more than expected progress. While there are some differences across classes and subjects, pupils supported through the pupil premium are making broadly similar progress to that of their classmates, which once again means that gaps are not closing quickly enough.

Pupils based in the Speech and Language Centre are now spending more time working in class with pupils of a similar age. They are making similar progress to their classmates.

In lessons observed, pupils made at least the expected progress and in some they made good progress. Pupils make the most progress when teachers and other adults clearly explain to them exactly what they are expected to do and to learn. Teachers then take time to check that all pupils are doing the right thing and working hard. In a successful Year 6 mathematics lesson the teacher moved around between individuals and groups of pupils making sure that everyone knew what they were

doing and had settled quickly. Teaching assistants provided effective support for pupils. This helped them remain focused on their work and make better progress.

Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are continuing to improve their understanding of phonics (linking letters and their sounds) and to apply their knowledge to spelling unfamiliar words. While the reinforcement of prior learning is generally effective there is insufficient time given to the teaching of new sounds within phonics teaching sessions.

The quality of teaching

While the quality of teaching across the school continues to improve, and more is now good, the school has not achieved its ambitious autumn term target of 80% of teaching which is good or better. Because not enough teaching is yet good or outstanding, pupils are not making sufficiently rapid progress to close the attainment gaps with others nationally.

Where teaching is most effective, teachers carefully select resources which support pupils' learning and ensure they are readily available. In a Year 2 mathematics lesson pupils made use of a wide range of resources such as number squares and whiteboards to help pupils solve addition and subtraction calculations. All pupils worked with sustained concentration. They discussed their work sensibly and supported one another through careful explanations of what they were doing. The teacher moved around the groups well, making sure that all pupils made good progress. Teaching assistants were well deployed and helped ensure all pupils worked hard. Where teaching is less successful teachers do not set sufficiently high or explicit expectations. Pupils take too long to start working, produce too little work and take insufficient care. Teachers do not always use questions well enough to challenge pupils, assess their learning or encourage everyone to answer. If pupils' answers are not clear enough, some adults are too quick to rephrase the answers themselves rather than expecting pupils to do better. Sometimes they even answer their own questions before pupils have had time to reflect.

Some marking is of good quality. It tells pupils how to improve their work and teachers check that their suggestions are acted on. In some books, it is more difficult to see the impact that marking is having. Work remains uncorrected and the same mistakes are repeated later on. Improvements in the presentation of pupils' work have largely been maintained. This is particularly true during handwriting practice sessions and for pieces of work intended for display. The school has been very successful in eliminating the clutter and poor use of display space reported in October. As a result, classrooms and corridors are now much brighter, colourful and less cluttered. High quality displays of pupils' work across a range of subjects exemplify rising expectations and show what pupils are capable of.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Improvements in pupils' behaviour reported in October have been sustained. In the dining hall pupils conduct themselves in a safe, calm and sensible manner. When moving around the school they are polite and responsible. They welcome visitors and are almost unfailingly friendly and polite. They generally have good relationships with each other and with adults. Pupils play and learn together well.

In lessons there is very little disruptive behaviour but too often pupils only work at full capacity when they are directly supervised. When left to work independently too often they prefer to do little or engage in conversations about their life at home or the latest football results. The school has been very successful in addressing poor behaviour and creating a more stable environment. The next challenge is to use the school's behaviour policy to encourage positive attitudes to learning and motivate pupils to learn.

Attendance fluctuates but is broadly average over time. The number of exclusions is falling but remains too high.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting headteacher continues to provide effective leadership with a sharp focus on improving the quality of teaching. As pupils' behaviour improves and the school becomes more stable, she is able to devote more time to strategic management and less to dealing with urgent problems. Senior leaders know where teaching is strongest and weakest. Where teaching most requires improvement additional support and challenge is in place, including more effective performance management. Teachers are being held more directly accountable for how well pupils are doing. Following the appointment of new leadership in the Speech and Language Centre and improvements in pupils' behaviour, the inclusion manager is taking a greater role in leading school improvement and ensuring that day-to-day issues such as the deployment of teaching assistants and updating the school's website are completed. The move to new accommodation for the Speech and Language Centre has gone smoothly. Pupils are now more fully integrated into the life of the school and have the benefit of a much brighter and more attractive base.

The school is making good use of the local authority statement of action and its own improvement plans to keep track of how well it is doing and evaluate its progress. The school is mainly up to date with planned improvements and in some respects, such as progress with improving provision in the speech and language centre, it is ahead of schedule. In the past, systems for managing and tracking the impact of additional pupil premium funding have been weak. This is now being resolved so

that the school has a clearer understanding of who this group of pupils is and how well they are doing.

The interim executive board (IEB) knows the school well. It asks searching questions about how the school is doing and the impact of transition arrangements as the school converts to academy status. The Chair has a good understanding of the school's developing strengths and where it still needs to do better. There are plans in place to ensure continuity between the IEB and the new academy governing body through the appointment of some existing members of the IEB. As the school moves towards academy conversion, support from the academy trust is increasing. The lead headteacher from the academy trust attends meetings of the IEB and the headteacher designate is spending more time getting to know the school.

External support

The local authority is providing regular and effective challenge and support. Since the last monitoring inspection the focus has been on improving the quality of teaching, the strategic leadership of the school and ensuring a smooth transition to academy status. The autumn term local authority review of the school's work is timely and accurate. It provides a useful benchmark for progress. The review is right to point out the need for pupils' progress to continue to improve if the gap with national attainment is to close.