

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22

West Lancs Investment Centre T 0300 123 1231

Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566850

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: dmccarrick@cfbt.com



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Mrs Victoria Milne
Headteacher
Nelson Castercliff Community Primary School
Marsden Hall Road North
Nelson
Lancashire
BB9 8JJ

Dear Mrs Milne

Special measures monitoring inspection of Nelson Castercliff Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20 and 21 January 2015, with Tim Vaughan Her Majesty's Inspector on 20 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely,

David Selby

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Ensure that all safeguarding requirements are met, including that school records contain all the required information including that staff identity checks have been completed.
- Urgently improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better, thus enabling pupils to make at least good progress in their learning, by ensuring that:
 - any inadequate teaching that exists is eradicated
 - teachers have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - all teachers insist that pupils present their work to a high standard, are fully attentive in all lessons and that their attitudes to learning are always good
 - teachers use the targets they set for the pupils regularly and rigorously in order to check how well pupils learn
 - teaching challenges all groups of pupils, including the most able pupils, so they learn at a faster rate and reach the higher levels of which they are capable
 - teachers check pupils' work and their progress accurately and regularly, mark their books carefully and use the information from this to plan work that meet pupils' varying ages and abilities
 - pupils with special educational needs are provided with work which is matched to their abilities and challenges them to achieve their best.
- Rapidly improve standards of attainment and pupils' progress in English and mathematics by ensuring that all groups of pupils:
 - use and apply key literacy and numeracy skills, including phonic skills, regularly in other subjects
 - make secure and brisk progress in developing the skills of spelling, grammar and punctuation and use these skills consistently to improve their reading and writing
 - make at least good progress in mathematics, particularly pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, by addressing the gaps in their understanding of mathematical language
 - apply their mathematical skills to real-life problems
 - extend their speaking, listening, writing and mathematical skills in Reception.
- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, in order to rapidly drive forward improvements in teaching, achievement and in keeping pupils safe by:
 - ensuring leaders and governors are clear about their responsibility for checking on and managing the performance of teachers, including setting clear targets for pupils' achievement so teachers are held to account for the progress pupils make and weak teaching is eradicated
 - ensuring that methods for checking on and evaluating pupils' progress are firmly in place and that the resulting information is accurate and used carefully to set clear and relevant steps needed to improve teaching and pupils' achievement
 - making sure the ways in which the development of knowledge and skills is planned for in each subject builds securely on what pupils already know and can do

- building leadership at all levels and providing the opportunity for senior and middle leaders to contribute fully to the leadership of subjects and aspects of the school's work
- developing the skills of governors so that they can effectively hold leaders to account and challenge them robustly enough about the school's performance, including the impact of the pupil premium funding.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 20 to 21 January 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents including the school improvement plan, minutes of governors' meetings and school records relating to attendance, behaviour and teaching. They held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, groups of three middle leaders and other staff, including four teachers and two teaching assistants. Inspectors met with the school council and had informal conversations with other pupils during the school day. Inspectors talked with parents before and after school. Meetings were held with the Chair of Governors and two representatives of the local authority. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in six lessons taught by seven teachers and made short visits to other lessons. Inspectors examined the single central record of employment checks on staff.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the new Chair of the Governing Body has been confirmed in her role. The roles and responsibilities of senior and middle leaders have been clarified and responsibility for the leadership of English has been divided between two teachers. A member of the non-teaching staff team has returned from a long-term absence.

Achievement of pupils at the school

There are early signs that achievement has started to rise, although this is not yet fast enough to close the deficits which have developed over time nor to ensure that the continuing low achievement seen for many pupils in 2014 is not repeated in 2015.

The nationally published information for 2014 indicates that Year 6 made less progress than Year 6 in 2013. Despite increases from 2013 to 2014, Year 2 still reached standards in English which were well below the national average. Their attainment in mathematics matched the national average after rapid increases in 2012 and 2013. In 2014, when compared to the previous year and to the national average, Year 1 scored less well in the national tests to find out how well they know their letters and sounds. The school's own data for children in Reception in 2013 and 2014 identify that too few reach a good level of development. This indicates that too many are not ready for Key Stage 1 learning, which makes it harder for their teachers to help them catch up.

During this inspection, inspectors saw pupils making steady progress in their lessons. Teachers express determination to help pupils achieve as well as possible. Staff have been helped to do this through improved teaching as a result of the training they

have received from local authority consultants. In addition, class teachers' knowledge of individual pupils' learning is better because of more effective team work. There has not been sufficient time for these changes to lead to consistently rapid progress for all groups of pupils.

The school's data on achievement in the first term of this school year show that, unless learning becomes faster, pupils will continue to fall further behind. However, teachers have planned additional teaching in English and mathematics for older pupils and put in place carefully targeted teaching of letters and sounds for younger pupils to help pupils of all ages to reach much higher standards. It is essential that leaders ensure that nothing less than these higher standards are accepted.

School leaders have introduced a new system to track pupils' achievement. While this has allowed teachers to be made more accountable for pupils' success, the school's analysis has not given enough emphasis to the key skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar. In addition, it is not used to provide concise summaries which include the progress pupils make as well as their attainment.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has started to improve. During this inspection, no teaching seen by inspectors resulted in inadequate learning.

Teachers' expectations have increased as a result of discussion within teams and much sharper meetings to discuss pupils' progress and learning needs. Leaders and staff are developing the confidence and openness to share practice in the school to improve teaching further, for example, in the review by all teachers of pupils' literacy work across the school. Teachers' better knowledge of pupils has led to teaching which is more closely matched to pupils' previous achievement and potential. The simpler organisation of classes means that teaching groups within years can be adjusted to support pupils' learning, for example, during mathematics teaching in Years 5 and 6.

The better tracking of pupils' achievement means that teachers are more aware of when pupils are at risk of falling behind. The additional teaching offered to such pupils is better planned, because it is taking place during the school day. This confirms its importance to pupils and their parents, but also means that all pupils who can benefit do so. In the past, additional teaching was offered after school which meant that a number of children were not available to take part. Leaders have taken steps to ensure that pupils included do not miss out on other subjects.

Teaching in Reception is improving. Teachers and other adults working with these classes have adopted new approaches identified through training and other work with consultants, for example, in reorganising the learning areas and in better supporting and extending children's learning arising from their play and other

activities. It is still too early to judge the impact this will have on children's final outcomes; however, staff have noted that the new approaches are helping children to remember what they have learned better.

The marking of pupils' work varies in its quality and impact. It is too frequently superficial and fails to identify spelling errors in key words relating to the work being covered. Even where the school's system is followed, opportunities are not taken to challenge pupils to improve their work or develop their learning through comments or discussion. Effective approaches are not always shared, for example, in supporting pupils for whom English is an additional language. An inspector saw a helpful diagram of key words about rocks in English and Polish in one classroom, but similar support was not available elsewhere.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure has improved, because the checks that the school is required to make on its staff are completed and recorded as required.

Pupils' behaviour contributes well to their achievement. Inspectors saw pupils behaving well in lessons and around the school despite the extra challenges of wet play arrangements on both days of the inspection. The relationships between pupils and adults are good. Pupils are polite and friendly. They are keen to talk about their work and learning.

Few instances of poor behaviour are recorded by the school and where these occur, records indicate that they have been followed up appropriately.

Pupils participate in lessons and work well together to support each other's learning. An inspector observed a few pupils in Key Stage 1 being less settled and fidgeting when their teacher was talking.

Pupils' attendance fell when the first term of this school year is compared to the same period in the last school year. School leaders have investigated the reasons for this and have seen that absence due to short-term illness has increased. Absence rates for the children in Reception are generally higher than elsewhere in the school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leadership in the school has been strengthened because the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders have been made clear, governors are providing more robust challenge and new systems have been introduced, for example, in tracking pupils' achievement. The parents spoken to by inspectors expressed confidence in the school. Staff identify that leaders are providing clear direction and that leadership is forward-looking.

The impact of the new teams of teachers who work with classes of pupils of similar ages is already evident. Assessments are being checked and effective approaches shared. Teachers have accepted their roles within these teams as leaders or other team members. In order to keep the rate of improvement as fast as possible, senior leaders now need to ensure that all leaders can further develop their skills and experience and so become even more effective with their teams. The splitting of the leadership of English between a Key Stage 2 and a Key Stage 1 teacher has provided extra time and experience in developing this key subject. The school is using the previous experience of staff who are new to the school to share and develop effective practice. Where teaching and learning are not good enough, senior leaders have taken robust action to ensure that it improves.

The school improvement plan continues to provide an overall framework for improvement. However, the actions planned since September 2014 have now been completed and details of what is to be done and how this is to be checked have not been formalised for the next stage of the school's development. This also applies to the separate plans for improvement in English, mathematics and Reception. Without these details there is a risk that improvement will slow. Leaders have welcomed the opportunity to discuss earlier plans with local authority consultants as part of the support to the school. It is important that leaders do not over rely on this support and that they demonstrate confidence in taking the lead in determining the detail of the school's next steps.

The Chair of the Governing Body is working to develop the governing body in line with the recommendations of the review of governance completed shortly before the previous full inspection. Training and closer work with school leaders, including visits to develop governors' knowledge of the school, mean that governors are better informed and are able to ask more probing questions. This is particularly apparent in the work of the governors' standards and effectiveness committee (SEC). The SEC includes the headteacher, representatives of the local authority and governors and meets each half term to check that the school's improvement is on track.

Governors have agreed that the school should become a sponsored academy and work in partnership with an effective school or group of schools. Information on the next stage of this process has not been available as expected. This means that there is additional uncertainty, particularly concerning longer-term planning and staffing decisions. This additional uncertainty is unhelpful and makes improvement harder.

External support

The local authority has an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and officers use this knowledge in their work. Support from consultants in English, mathematics, teaching and learning, and Reception has continued and started to lead to more effective teaching. Teachers and other school staff are still at

an early stage in ensuring that this is fully embedded. This is a long-term challenge, for example, in ensuring the improvement in Reception means that children are ready for the start of Key Stage 1 to give them a fully secure base for their learning throughout the school and the highest possible achievement when they eventually reach Year 6.

The local authority's contribution to the SEC means that it provides robust, professional challenge.

The local authority and headteacher have arranged for teachers to visit other local schools to learn from effective practice elsewhere.