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5 February 2015

Mrs Morven Stroud
Headteacher
Gorsefield Primary School
Robertson Street
Radcliffe
Manchester
M26 4DW

Dear Mrs Stroud

Special measures monitoring inspection of Gorsefield Primary School

Following my visit with Sheila Loughlin, Additional Inspector, to your school on 3 and 4 February 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.

This was the fourth monitoring visit 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 at that time 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 them to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director for Children, Young People and Culture for Bury.

Yours sincerely

Aelwyn Pugh

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 remaining inadequate teaching raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should achieve
 - making sure that all teachers use information about pupils' progress to plan lessons which meet pupils' varying needs and abilities and provide good levels of challenge, particularly for the middle-ability and most able pupils
 - ensuring marking consistently provides clear guidance for pupils about what they need to do next to improve their work and giving pupils time to act on it
 - making sure that teaching motivates and engages pupils enough in their work so that their attitudes to learning are always good
 - ensuring that support staff play an active role in all parts of lessons.
- Raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics, so that they are at least in line with national standards by the end of Year 6, by:
 - improving pupils' accuracy in their use of grammar, spelling and punctuation
 - improving the teaching of phonics (the links between sounds and letters)
 - making sure that all pupils read high-quality and varied texts that are appropriate for their differing ages and abilities
 - ensuring that all teachers insist on high expectations of good standards and presentation of pupils' work, including neat, correctly formed handwriting and numbers that are always modelled accurately by staff
 - placing less emphasis on the completion of worksheets and giving more opportunities for pupils to set out their own work
 - providing pupils with more open-ended challenges which encourage them to further develop their mathematical thinking, especially in a real-life context, particularly the middle-ability and most able pupils.
- Urgently improve leadership and management, including governance, so that the school's improvement is rapid and its capacity to improve strengthens by:
 - providing training for leaders at all levels so they can accurately evaluate the quality of provision in their areas of responsibility, including through reviewing teachers' planning, observing lessons and scrutinising pupils' work
 - making sure that senior and middle leaders check more carefully that all teachers are providing work that is well matched to pupils' varying abilities
 - ensuring improvement plans are clear, identify specific outcomes in terms of pupils' achievement and include interim measures against which progress can be regularly evaluated
 - improving the systems to manage the performance of staff so that they are held fully to account for the progress of pupils

- improving the skills and knowledge of the governing body so it is able to effectively hold leaders fully to account for rapidly improving teaching and pupils' progress
- undertaking an external review of governance, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership may be improved.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 3–4 February 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, the Chair and four members of the Governing Body, teachers and a representative of the local authority. They spoke to pupils in class and around the school and held meetings with nine pupils, chosen at random, from Years 1 to 6. One inspector also spoke to parents as they brought their children to school.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, a full-time, temporary teacher has been appointed to support intervention work and to enable the assistant headteacher to devote more time to management activities. Relevant consultations have been completed and the school is due to become an academy on 1 March 2015. The executive principal of the sponsoring academy attended the feedback at the end of the inspection.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Data collected by the school show that, in Key Stage 1, standards are improving. The proportion of pupils on track to achieve the expected standards by the time they are seven is close to, or slightly above, the national averages for last year.

At Key Stage 2, the proportion of pupils likely to achieve the expected standards by the time they are 11 is higher than in previous years but lower than the national averages for 2014. Pupils perform less well in Year 3 than in later years.

At both key stages, the proportions of pupils who are on track to reach the higher levels of achievement are considerably lower than the most recent national averages. Standards in writing are lower than in reading and mathematics. The gap between the achievement of vulnerable pupils and the rest of the school population is closing gradually.

The pupils who were heard reading did so with fluency and expression. However, at times, they read too quickly, with the result that they stumbled over some words or ran one sentence into another. They all enjoyed reading and spoke knowledgeably and enthusiastically about their favourite authors and books, supporting their views with well-chosen illustrations.

The opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in a range of contexts have increased but are still rather limited.

The quality of teaching

The school's own analysis indicates that the quality of teaching is improving but is still variable. It tends to be better in the Nursery and Year 6 than in the rest of the school. This was borne out by the observations undertaken during the monitoring visit.

Teachers are implementing the marking policy with increasing consistency. However, there are still too many instances where they do not make clear how pupils can improve their work and do not check whether the required corrections have been made. In non-core subjects, such as geography and history, marking tends to focus on grammar and presentation. Little emphasis is placed on ensuring that pupils are developing the knowledge, skills and understanding relevant to those subjects.

In some of the lessons seen, teachers did not demand enough of pupils, particularly the most able. As a result, progress was slower than it could be. For example, in one lesson, pupils knew what adverbs were but were not asked to point them out in an exercise on identifying parts of speech. In a science lesson on electric circuits, the main focus was on conductors. Several pupils also knew about insulators but were given little opportunity to use and develop this additional knowledge.

Pupils are increasingly encouraged to use dictionaries to extend their vocabulary and check their spelling. However, they do not always know how to find words quickly and efficiently. The school now has a policy for spelling and grammar but this is not being consistently reflected in practice.

In the lessons seen, teachers did not always adapt their questions to the varying abilities of the pupils and did not use supplementary questions to help pupils correct errors or extend their ideas. In both key stages, there were too many instances where teachers asked a question of the whole class and relied on volunteers to answer rather than checking on the understanding of specific individuals.

Teachers continue to place considerable emphasis on improving the quality of presentation and legibility of handwriting. In some instances, however, the concern with presentation results in too little work being completed.

The Nursery continues to be a strength of the school. Here questioning is of a high quality and teaching is carefully adapted to the interests and experiences of pupils. For example, in the week before the monitoring inspection, the children had become very interested in the frost and ice on the roads and in the playground. This had led to a discussion about countries with permanently cold climates and to the decision to invite a penguin to the school. In the discussions with the penguin, it became evident that several children had never seen or handled fresh fish. Therefore, during the inspection, they were preparing a meal using fresh fish.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school conducts thorough checks on the suitability of staff to work with children and its records are up to date and comprehensive. Prompt referrals have been made to external safeguarding agencies where necessary.

Pupils relate well to each other and treat adults and visitors with respect. In class, some pupils occasionally lose concentration but they do not attempt to disrupt the learning of others.

Attendance remains above the national average as a result of the continuing focus that the school has placed on this.

The pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they enjoy coming to school. They feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe, including when using social media. They say that there is very little bullying at the school and are confident that, if it were to occur, it would be dealt with effectively and promptly. They are able to get on with their work without disruption. The 'three card' system to tackle misbehaviour and reward good behaviour works very well.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since the last monitoring visit, leaders have developed a clearer and more streamlined approach to tracking progress and attainment. Their commentaries on pupils' progress data identify some of the areas where further improvement is needed, but not all. For example, they do not highlight the subjects or year and ability groups where pupils are underachieving.

The school continues to use a wide variety of strategies for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and these are bringing about improvements, but not consistently. The appraisal of teaching assistants has helped them to extend their skills and to have a greater impact on pupils' experiences. In one lesson, for example, the teaching assistant's expressive reading of a section of a poem captured the attention of the pupils and renewed their interest in the work they were doing.

Middle leaders continue to make a strong contribution to the monitoring of teaching. They have been central in identifying and disseminating good practice and, as a result, their colleagues now have the confidence to ask for advice and to observe, and be observed by, other staff.

The school's published curriculum statement shows appropriate breadth. However, discussions with staff and pupils indicate that it is not being consistently implemented in practice.

The governors have continued to visit classes to observe teaching and have conducted an analysis of pupils' work. They have undertaken further training in data analysis and have supported the headteacher's drive to increase the rigour of performance management. This now focuses more closely on the national teaching standards and career stage expectations, as well as on the impact of teaching on pupils' outcomes.

Following consultation, the school is due to become a sponsored academy on 1 March 2015.

External support

The School Improvement Officer from the local authority continues to provide support and guidance to the governors' Raising Achievement Committee. She has delivered training for senior leaders and governors on data analysis and conducted joint lesson observations and work scrutiny with senior and middle leaders. She also brokered a meeting with the academy sponsor, as part of the support provided for the school's change of status. The senior leaders value the local authority's contribution.

In addition to the support from the local authority, the school also employs its own external consultants and is making good use of their expertise to help develop reading, phonics (the sounds that letters make) and provision in the early years.