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23 January 2015

Beryl Banester
Acting Headteacher
Dell Primary School
Dell Road
Oulton Broad
Lowestoft
NR33 9NU

Dear Ms Banester

Special measures monitoring inspection of Dell Primary School

Following my visit with Susan Cox, Additional Inspector, to your school on 21–22 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 not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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 Suffolk County Council.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority
- For the Secretary of State use the following email address:
CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good and raise pupils' achievement, especially for the more-able pupils at Key Stage 1 and all pupils at Key Stage 2 by making sure:
 - teachers always have high expectations for pupils' learning
 - pupils know how to improve their learning when their books are marked
 - pupils know how well they are using the basic skills of literacy and numeracy in subjects other than English and mathematics
 - teachers consistently use the information about the previous learning of pupils to provide tasks which extends their thinking.

- Strengthen leadership and management by making sure:
 - leaders rigorously and regularly check the impact of teaching on pupils' learning over time and use this information to form an accurate view of the school's work
 - teachers' assessment of pupils' progress and attainment levels are checked for accuracy, and leaders ensure that teachers use this information to extend pupils' learning
 - governors robustly hold the school to account for the quality of its work
 - leaders and governors restore the confidence of those parents who have concerns about the school.

- Deal with recent bullying incidents consistently so that all pupils and parents know such incidents are always dealt with effectively.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 21 and 22 January 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher and other leaders, a group of pupils, the acting Chair of the Governing Body and the Chief Executive of the Active Learning Trust. The lead inspector spoke with two representatives of the local authority on the telephone.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit, a sponsor has been found and the school is due to become an academy – sponsored by the Active Learning Trust – on 1 March 2015. The deputy headteacher is currently acting as headteacher during the substantive headteacher's long-term absence. The Chair of the Governing Body and the vice chair resigned at the beginning of January. Another governor is acting as chair until the 1 March, when the school becomes an academy and a new governing body is appointed. Three supply teachers are currently working at the school, on long-term contracts, covering maternity leave, a vacant teaching post and a phased return to work.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's data show that progress is inconsistent across classes, subjects and year groups. The school has set aspirational targets for all year groups but they appear to be unrealistic. For example, the target set for reading at the end of Year 2 represents attainment approximately a year above the national average; the school's attainment in reading at the end of Year 2 has been in line with the national average for the last five years.

The school's tracking system shows that pupils are already failing to meet the interim 'milestones' which have been set to monitor success. In writing, only two year groups met the interim targets set for the end of the autumn term. In mathematics, whilst most year groups met or exceeded the target set for them, the school's data show that Year 5 has made no progress since July 2014. Pupils in 'class 7', the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs, do not make good enough progress and the school is already addressing this issue.

The work in pupils' books is variable and too much of it is poorly presented and careless. Progress is not always evident and, in some books seen during the inspection, the quality of pupils' work has deteriorated. Pupils' work indicates that teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils' capabilities, nor high enough standards in terms of the work that they are prepared to accept.

The quality of teaching

At the time of the first monitoring visit, the school had recently introduced a new, commercially produced, assessment system. This system is now becoming more embedded, particularly in mathematics. Staff and pupils told inspectors that this approach is helping to improve standards because it enables teachers to focus more closely on specific gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding.

Literacy and mathematics books are marked frequently and usually show whether or not pupils have achieved the objective of the lesson. However, marking is not used well enough to show pupils how to improve their work. Where teachers do give guidance on what to do next, this is frequently unclear or difficult to read. Marking has little impact because pupils rarely respond to what their teacher has written or simply initial to show that they have seen it. Pupils' work in their topic books is not marked to the same standard as the work they produce in literacy and mathematics. Although there is some evidence that key literacy skills are being reinforced in other subjects, this is having little impact because teachers' expectations are not high enough and they do not insist that pupils take note of what their marking asks them to do.

In the lessons observed during the inspection, there was some evidence of teachers using their knowledge of pupils' prior learning to pitch their teaching and set tasks, but this was not common. In too many lessons, work is too hard for some pupils and too easy for others. Pupils often appear to be bored and apathetic because the pace of lessons is too slow and work is not pitched at the right level.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave well in lessons and follow the instructions they are given. However, during the inspection, a great deal of low level off-task behaviour (such as daydreaming, fidgeting, or fiddling with shoes) was seen where teaching was less effective.

Pupils told inspectors that the school's efforts to reduce bullying are working and that they feel safe in school. Pupils were able to tell the lead inspector what bullying is and how it differs from other poor behaviour. They were confident that bullying is no longer an issue since the school became 'a bully free zone'.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The quality of leadership has deteriorated since the first monitoring visit. Both the Chair of the Governing Body and the vice chair resigned at short notice and no adequate succession planning was in place to fill the gaps created. To support the school, a member of the governing body has stepped forward to act as Chair of the Governing Body in the short term but she is well aware that the situation is far from

ideal. A review of the governing body has now taken place but it has yet to have any impact. The governing body is currently unable to hold the school's leaders to account.

The school's self-evaluation is neither rigorous nor robust enough. The summary document is descriptive rather than analytical. It does not provide evidence that the school is able to evaluate its own strengths and weaknesses thoroughly enough. The school's action plan has been adapted several times. Following the first monitoring visit, the lead inspector provided suggestions to the headteacher on how the plan could be improved. The current plan bears little resemblance to the previous plan and the identified shortcomings have not been addressed fully. For example, the plan now contains 'milestones' to judge ongoing success. However, these have not been given target dates when they should be achieved. Success criteria are frequently unmeasurable or unclear.

New leaders have been appointed for numeracy and literacy; it is too soon to judge their impact. The special educational needs coordinator is an experienced leader who demonstrates a good understanding of his area of responsibility. Again, it is too soon to judge the impact of his leadership.

Achievement is not improving quickly enough because the school's leaders do not have a clear view of the quality of teaching and are, therefore, unable to improve it effectively. Leaders were unable to provide up-to-date monitoring records during the inspection or to discuss strengths and weaknesses convincingly. Staff told inspectors that morale is low but has improved under the current leadership because they feel supported and listened to.

The school's efforts to restore the confidence of parents have had some success but there are still too many parents that have a negative view of the school. Many parents, particularly of the younger children, told inspectors that they are happy with the school and can see that it is improving. However, a number of parents of the older children told inspectors that they have strong concerns about bullying, turbulence in staffing, preparation for secondary school and pupils' behaviour.

External support

Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection, the local authority has now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose. It is fulfilling the commitments set out in the plan and there are very early signs that these are beginning to have an impact. For example, as a result of the support provided by the local authority's mathematics adviser, the numeracy subject leader has now written a fit-for-purpose action plan.

However, the weaknesses in the school's leadership mean that the school has not gained as much from the local authority's support as it should have done. It is now vital that the local authority addresses these weaknesses as a matter of urgency.