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12 February 2015

Mrs J Heyes
Acting Executive Headteacher
Byron Primary School
Byron Road
Gillingham
ME7 5XX

Dear Mrs Heyes

Special measures monitoring inspection of Byron Primary School

Following my visit with Mrs Jennie Cutler, Additional Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 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 that 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 that took place in January 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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 one newly qualified teacher 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 Medway.

Yours sincerely

Melanie Cox
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good across Key Stage 1 and 2 by:
 - making better use of all available information about what pupils already know and can do to make sure that work is at the right level for them to keep them interested, particularly the most and least able
 - focusing on ensuring that tasks move pupils on in their learning, understanding or skills more rapidly and conducting lessons at a brisker pace
 - developing better questioning techniques to check pupils' understanding and extend their thinking during lessons
 - helping pupils to gain a clear understanding of the next steps they need to make to improve
 - ensuring teachers regularly use marking to help pupils improve their work and always giving them chance to respond to a teacher's comments.
- Accelerate pupils' rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics across Key Stages 1 and 2 so that they reach at least average levels by:
 - lifting teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving
 - insisting on a high quality of work in response to all tasks set
 - giving pupils more frequent opportunities to use and apply mathematical skills in mathematics lessons as and when they acquire them
 - raising teachers' expectations of the capabilities of pupils who are lagging behind with their phonic skills to help them catch up quickly
 - ensuring writing skills motivate and stimulate both boys and girls to do their best
 - developing pupils' skills in being able to work by themselves.
- Increase the impact of leaders and managers at all levels by:
 - urgently and rigorously drawing together information about the school's performance and acting swiftly, using this information to identify, plan and implement precise actions to secure improvements
 - setting clear, regular and measurable milestones to check whether actions are making a difference quickly enough
 - focusing sharply on the learning and progress of all different groups of pupils, including the most and least able, when evaluating the quality of teaching and learning
 - implementing systematic and well-planned training and professional development to improve the quality of teaching
 - strengthening the role of senior leaders beyond the headteacher and middle leaders in driving improvements
 - increasing the capacity of the governing body to rigorously challenge school leaders and hold them to account.

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 governance may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 February 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed teaching in 18 lessons and visited two small-group support sessions. Eight lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised the school's documentation and pupils' workbooks. They met with school staff, two groups of pupils, two members of the governing body, a group of parents and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, the leadership structure of the school has changed. The assistant headteacher has been promoted to the post of deputy headteacher and four 'phase leaders' have been appointed. These members of staff have responsibility for provision in the early years, Key Stage 1, lower Key Stage 2, and upper Key Stage 2 respectively. Four teachers have left the school and three new staff have replaced them. There is a vacancy for one teacher in Key Stage 2. The lower Key Stage 2 phase leader currently teaches this class.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Progress in reading, writing, and mathematics is clearly improving in some year groups. The introduction of a systematic programme for the teaching of letters and sounds (phonics) is having a positive impact on pupils' progress in reading and writing in Reception and Key Stage 1. The proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check rose at the end of the last academic year and the school's tracking of information indicates that this improvement will be sustained this year. Parents with children in Reception and Year 1 say that they have noticed a significant difference in their children's reading skills.

In Key Stage 2, improvements in reading and writing are more uneven. The tightly structured programme that has been introduced to develop the reading and writing skills of older pupils is not having a consistently effective impact on raising standards. This is because many teachers do not adapt units of work to meet the specific needs of the pupils in their classes. Higher-attaining pupils say that they find the work boring and lower-attaining pupils struggle to keep up, even with support. Although reading is a focus for improvement, this aspect does not have a high enough profile. Classroom bookcases in Key Stage 2 are uninviting and do little to promote a love of reading.

Although there is some evidence of improved progress in mathematics across the school, pupils' books show that too few teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to use their mathematical skills in real-life situations. In some classes, teachers still set work that involves completing lists of calculations.

Across the school, disadvantaged pupils and those with disabilities and special educational needs make uneven progress in lessons. The school provides extra small-group tuition for targeted pupils, but the impact of this additional support is not monitored closely enough and it is not clear whether pupils' progress has accelerated as a result.

The quality of teaching

All teachers have received appropriate training and support to help them improve their skills. Lessons observed during this monitoring visit confirm the school's view that there is now more teaching that is consistently good. Inspectors agree with school leaders that the strongest teaching is in the Early Years, where all three teachers ensure that children are challenged appropriately by every aspect of their learning. Classrooms provide an environment that is rich in language and displays are used effectively to support different areas of learning and to celebrate children's achievements.

Elsewhere in the school, the quality of teaching is still variable. Where teaching is consistently good, teachers use effective questions to develop pupils' thinking in lessons and pupils respond eagerly. These teachers plan work that provides the right level of challenge for different groups to make learning enjoyable for pupils. As a result, pupils make good progress in their learning. Where teaching still requires improvement, teachers do not use information about pupils' existing knowledge to plan activities that are matched closely to pupils' varying needs. As a result, the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding are not being tackled urgently enough. In some classes, there is too little work in pupils' books.

The teaching assistant workforce has been restructured to ensure that additional adults are deployed effectively throughout the school day. All teaching assistants are caring and supportive, but some do not have the knowledge and expertise to explain concepts when working alongside pupils or to deal with the occasional challenging behaviour of individual pupils.

The quality of teachers' marking and feedback has improved. Most teachers give useful guidance to pupils on how they can improve their work. However, they do not always ensure that pupils have the opportunity to respond to feedback or complete corrections properly.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils clearly want to learn and are keen to do well, but some find it difficult to maintain concentration in lessons, particularly when they are given work that is not pitched at the right level for them, or is uninspiring. Too often, these pupils quickly lose interest, stop work and chatter to others, causing distraction. Although they

respond promptly to the teacher's instructions to get on with their work, valuable learning time is sometimes lost in lessons.

Pupils are respectful to adults, and relationships between pupils and their teachers are clearly good. Break times are lively, but well managed by staff who ensure that pupils play safely. Pupils are required to line up sensibly at the end of break and return to class ready to learn.

Parents say that the systems that have been introduced to celebrate and reward good work or behaviour are working well. Pupils are very proud to have their work published in the newsletter or via the school's website.

The school is currently reviewing its behaviour policy to ensure that any instances of poor behaviour are dealt with and recorded consistently and that agreed sanctions for varying degrees of misconduct are understood by all concerned.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting executive headteacher and head of school are well respected by staff and pupils alike. Rigorous systems to track pupils' progress and monitor the quality of teaching give school leaders a clear and accurate understanding of what is going well and what still needs to be done. They appreciate the crucial importance of improving teaching so that all classes are well provided for. They have plans to intensify support for those teachers whose skills and practice are still not consistently good. The school development plan has appropriate short- and long-term targets and improvements are on track despite some significant challenges over the last two terms. The two deputy headteachers are now well established in their roles and make an important contribution to the day-to-day management of the school.

The school's leadership team has been strengthened by the appointment of the 'phase leaders'. These middle leaders have a clear understanding of their respective roles, but some are inexperienced and will need support to develop their leadership skills in the coming months. The coordinator of support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs has begun to plan improvements to systems and processes to support the school's most vulnerable pupils, but this work is at a very early stage.

The governance of the school has improved considerably. External reviews of governance and of the use of the pupil premium took place during the summer term. Both reviews provided clear recommendations to school leaders and governors and these are being acted on. The governing body has attended training to develop their understanding of the published information about pupils' attainment and progress. Governors regularly visit classes to see the impact of new initiatives for themselves. As a result, governors now have the knowledge they need to hold school leaders to account. One of the deputy headteachers has a new responsibility to develop a more

personalised approach to learning in the school. This is intended to help disadvantaged pupils receive the help they need.

External support

Much of the external support for the school over the past two terms has been provided by the local authority adviser. Her regular visits have been well received by staff, who value her constructive feedback. She continues to work closely with school leaders to ensure that support is targeted appropriately. For example, she is now helping to develop the skills of the less experienced phase leaders. The interim head of school has begun to set up links with several local schools and plans to work closely with the headteachers to provide opportunities for staff at Byron Primary to work with colleagues in other schools.

Since the last monitoring inspection, the local authority has made changes to the way that it supports schools causing concern. The frequency of the formal meetings to evaluate the school's progress has been reduced and the next meeting for Byron Primary is not due to take place until January 2016. It is not clear by whom, when and how the school's progress will be monitored in the intervening period.