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6 March 2015

Caroline Dingle
Headteacher
Hurst Hill Primary School
Paul Street, Hurst Hill
Bilston
WV14 9AJ

Dear Mrs Dingle

Special measures monitoring inspection of Hurst Hill Primary School

Following my visit with Sarah Noble, Additional Inspector, to your school on 4–5 March 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 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 appoint no more than one newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection. If appointed, the newly qualified teacher must only be deployed in Key Stage 1 and supported by leaders with a strong track record of teaching, coaching and mentoring.

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 Dudley.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- The Secretary of State

Annex

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

- Improve the progress of all groups of pupils so that it is at least good and pupils' attainment in English and mathematics is at least in line with national averages by:
 - setting appropriately challenging progress targets for all groups of pupils each term and holding teachers to account for ensuring they are met
 - monitoring teaching and providing clear feedback to teachers that enables them to improve their practice
 - ensuring the school's information on the attainment and progress of groups of pupils is accurate and revised half termly so that governors, school leaders and teachers have a clear and timely understanding of the performance of all pupils so they can monitor and take action to improve it.
- Improve learning and behaviour in and outside of lessons by:
 - ensuring the school's good behaviour policy is applied consistently across the school and that exclusions, instances of bullying and low level disruptive behaviour are reduced.
- Work with parents and external agencies to ensure all pupils benefit fully from the opportunities provided by:
 - working effectively with external agencies and parents to ensure the level of persistent absence is reduced to be in line with or below the national average
 - improving communication with parents so that all parents have confidence in the leadership of the school and know how to help improve their children's learning at home.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance 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 4–5 March 2015

Evidence

In addition to observing lessons, some of them jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leadership team and three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. An inspector also met with the executive headteacher of a teaching school who is also a National Leader in Education (NLE) and is providing support and guidance for leaders and staff. Inspectors spoke to parents at the start and end of the first of two inspection days. Other meetings were held with a National Leader of Governance (NLG) to discuss parental engagement and the guidance he is providing for governors. An inspector met one of the local authority's education improvement advisers to discuss the actions taken to support the school.

The focus of this monitoring inspection was the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' attainment and progress in Key Stages 1 and 2, and pupils' behaviour and safety. An inspector checked the single central record to ensure that the details for new staff have been added and that the school complies with safeguarding and staff vetting procedures.

Context

Two teachers have left since the last monitoring inspection in September 2014 and two teachers have reduced their hours and work part time. Two new part-time teachers have joined the school, one permanently and one on a temporary basis. A teacher who was previously working through a fixed-term secondment has been appointed to a permanent post, and is also a member of the senior leadership team.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Standards are edging closer to the national average by the end of Year 6. The quality of pupils' writing is improving, but too many pupils of average or higher ability make repeated or unnecessary spelling errors, and the form and structure of pupils' handwriting is inconsistent across the school.

Pupils in Key Stage 1 are doing much better than previously. This is reflected in much-improved national assessment results for Year 2 pupils in 2014. In the past three years, there has been a consistent rise in the proportion of pupils at the end of Year 2 attaining levels that are in line with or higher than expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards are rising at Key Stage 2, reflecting improvements to teaching and a more stable and effective staff team. Nevertheless, pupils' achievement and rates of progress vary across classes and between subjects, particularly in writing and mathematics. This reflects inconsistencies in the expectations teachers set for pupils of average or higher abilities.

The legacy of some inadequate teaching in the past left some groups of pupils and individuals behind and with a lot of ground to catch up. For example, pupils eligible for pupil premium funding, which is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or in the care of the local authority, make slower progress than other pupils. Some consistently good teaching and improved assessments are starting to have an impact on narrowing the attainment gap for pupil premium funded pupils. However, some of the teaching still requires improvement so that, for some of these pupils, their learning and progress falls behind even more.

Teachers provide a range of topic work and opportunities for pupils to write at length. However, in some classes, the quality of writing and the accuracy of punctuation and spelling are not consistent enough. This is not always being picked up by teachers and support staff. Pupils of average and higher ability make some unnecessary spelling errors and do not form letters correctly or uniformly when writing independently. This has, rightly, been identified as a priority so that pupils now have specific learning targets to improve the accuracy of their writing.

Teachers have started to improve pupils' achievement in mathematics. Pupils are now given more challenging problem-solving tasks but the most-able pupils should still be doing better. In lessons where there is consistently good teaching, the most-able pupils are taught efficient methods of calculation and given appropriately challenging tasks. However, some workbooks show that pupils use inefficient methods of calculation when using their knowledge of number facts to solve problems. Assessment data and workbooks show that the progress pupils make still varies because there is still some teaching that requires improvement. The school has, rightly, made problem solving and calculation key priorities for improvement, as leaders and staff recognise that pupils do not always build on their mathematical understanding, or extend their knowledge of more complex methods of calculation.

Pupils who have additional learning needs benefit from some well-focused support and intervention. Observations of pupils identified as having special educational needs, their assessments and the scrutiny of some case studies, show that these pupils make reasonable progress towards reaching age-related levels in English and mathematics.

The quality of teaching

Most classes are now taught by permanent staff, and recently appointed teachers have strengthened further the consistency and quality of teaching since the school was placed in special measures in May 2014. The learning observed in lessons, assessments of pupils' progress and the quality of work seen in books show that the amount of teaching that requires improvement is reducing and the proportion of teaching that is good or better is increasing.

Teachers have improved the way they plan and organise lessons. They use assessments well to group pupils by ability. Leaders and teachers check assessments of pupils' progress and performance and are now better able to extract information about the progress of particular groups and individuals. This is helping teachers to plan and intervene if pupils need more support. However, teachers do not always adapt their plans or the activities prepared for pupils to extend learning further, and particularly for those who are capable of reaching or exceeding age-related levels in writing and mathematics. The teaching that requires improvement is not challenging all pupils enough and teachers are not always expecting pupils to do enough work.

The most effective teaching encourages more productive and purposeful learning and is responsive to pupils' different learning needs and abilities. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils in Year 5 applied their knowledge of numbers to explore the most effective ways of solving a complex combination of addition facts. In Year 6, pupils were thoroughly engaged and enlivened by the challenges of finding number patterns to decipher symbols representing numbers between one and 100.

Teachers are improving the way they mark pupils' writing. There is now more useful information provided for pupils to help them improve their writing, but there remain significant inconsistencies of expectation across classes. Some workbooks do not show enough writing or the expectation that pupils write accurately. The most effective teachers ensure that pupils speak clearly during question and answer sessions and they check the accuracy of pupils' writing, particularly spelling and punctuation. However, this is not yet consistent practice in all classes, as pupils are not always encouraged to explain their ideas fully in complete sentences or offer suggestions clearly and accurately. Some workbooks show that, when pupils write at length for sustained periods, they are not always shown how to improve their handwriting and punctuation, or how best to correct spelling errors to avoid repeating the same mistake.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning and school have improved significantly. All the parents spoken to during the inspection agree. Pupils behave well. They are polite and attentive in lessons and when moving between sessions or playing outside at break times. Pupils show consideration and respect for pupils with disabilities and they often help and support each other in lessons when working in groups or pairs. The recently introduced behaviour code is very effective and was devised by both pupils and staff. The success of the behaviour code is clearly evident in lessons and at break times. Pupils say that they feel valued and respected by staff. Relationships between pupils, parents and staff are very good.

Expectations and aspirations are rising across the school. At the time of the inspection, some pupils in Key Stage 2 who are eligible for support through the pupil

premium participated in a project led by two external consultants. They worked with pupils to raise aspirations through art and creativity. This project is having a positive effect on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

In lessons, pupils debate, discuss and share ideas, although there are occasions when pupils are unable to express themselves clearly and with confidence. This is because many pupils do not use a broad enough vocabulary or have enough opportunities to organise their ideas and explain fully when responding to questions during class discussions. This limits their speech and language and affects the quality and accuracy of their writing.

Leaders and teachers are increasingly providing lessons that hold pupils' interests and enthusiasm. The recent visit to Chester as part of their 'Roman' topic, for example, energised pupils in Key Stage 2 and provided them with the inspiration to produce some good-quality writing and design work. Parents also participated in this, when pupils made 'Roman artefacts' at home. As a result, pupils proudly displayed their finished products in school, which included 'Roman Centurion' headgear and decorative artefacts made with cardboard and a range of materials. The subsequent lessons that followed up the visit resulted in positive and productive learning behaviour as pupils reflected on what they had learned about the Roman occupation of Britain.

Attendance is improving and is in line with the national average. Persistent absence rates are reducing and most pupils are punctual and ready for school. Leaders, governors and staff are doing all they can, working closely with the local authority's welfare officers to deal with a small number of families who are not doing enough to ensure that their children attend school regularly and on time.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher, deputy headteacher and governors are monitoring the performance of pupils and staff with more rigour and purpose. This is building further capacity for sustained improvement and is increasing the amount of good teaching. School improvement and subject action plans set out the correct and most urgent priorities for improvement. Leaders and governors have responded well to the recommendations set out in the previous monitoring inspection, as it is now clear who is monitoring each action for improvement.

Having eliminated all inadequate teaching, the staff team and governors are focusing more attention on sustaining improvements to the achievement of pupils across the ability range. All the parents spoken to by inspectors are pleased with their children's progress and the quality of teaching. Parents say that they can talk to their children's teachers, and relationships between parents and staff are very positive.

The headteacher has dealt with some difficult staffing issues with resilience and determination. A stronger and more skilful governing body is working closely with a National Leader of Governance (NLG) from the partner teaching school. An additional governor has been appointed, bringing more expertise to the governing body. The National Leader in Education (NLE) is providing additional guidance and support that focuses on improving further the quality of teaching and learning.

Leaders and staff provide accurate assessments of teaching and helpful feedback to staff after monitoring lessons. Senior leaders who manage subjects or phases of the school are now well established in their roles and provide competent support and challenge through monitoring, including regular scrutiny of teachers' planning and pupils' progress. The outcome of this monitoring is presented to the school improvement committee of the governing body, which is increasingly holding leaders and teachers to account for pupils' progress. Assessment information is being used by leaders and governors to check and track the progress and performance of different groups and individuals. Nonetheless, leaders and staff are not always focusing enough on both raising standards as well as increasing progress rates for pupils of average or higher abilities. The information about pupils' progress and performance is accessible to leaders, teachers and governors, so that monitoring and assessment are now more accurate and robust than previously.

Following an external review of governance and a review of the governors' scrutiny of pupil premium funding, the Chair of the Governing Body has ensured that governors act on the recommendations from both reviews. A useful skills audit of governors has been carried out, and there are now clear terms of reference in each of the governors' committees to hold the school's leaders and staff more to account for the performance of staff and pupils' progress. The focus now for governors and leaders is to sustain a rise in attainment for all groups of pupils in order to close, and then eliminate, the attainment gap between pupil premium funded pupils and others. The school is on track to achieve these aims, although there is still more to be done to reduce still further the amount of teaching that requires improvement.

The school's single central record, staff vetting and safe recruitment policies and practices continue to comply with statutory requirements.

External support

The local authority's support has been effective overall. The education improvement adviser has commissioned a good range of partnerships using outside expertise. The partnership with the National Leader in Education and teaching school, as well as the support from the National Leader of Governance, are working well. This support involves training for governors and staff, as well as subject advisers working with teachers who have management responsibilities. Teachers and support staff are increasingly getting opportunities to see and share good practice with other schools.