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6 March 2015

Miss Angela Clarke
Acting Headteacher
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Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S8 8EE

Dear Mrs O'Connor

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lower Meadow Primary School

Following my visit with Lesley Butcher Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 4 and 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 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 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 Sheffield and as below.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly between Years 1 and 6 so that it is at least consistently good, in order to quicken progress and raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics, by making sure that:
 - inadequate teaching is eradicated
 - activities and tasks are carefully planned to enable pupils of all abilities to build on what they already know and can do, especially for the most able, so that all achieve highly
 - pupils have plenty of time to practise what they have learnt
 - teachers' expectations of the quality, quantity and presentation of pupils' work are always high
 - pupils have regular opportunities to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects
 - marking tells pupils what they know well, what they need to do next and teachers ensure that pupils act on the advice given.
- Raise standards and accelerate pupils' progress in reading by ensuring that:
 - pupils' knowledge and understanding of phonics (the sounds that letters and groups of letters represent) is reinforced throughout the day, as well as in phonics lessons
 - there is a clear purpose to guided reading sessions so that all pupils can add to their reading and comprehension skills
 - pupils supported through the pupil premium funding, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, receive specific support relevant to their particular needs.
- Improve pupils' behaviour in lessons so that it is good or better by making sure that:
 - teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning from the start to the end of lessons
 - teaching is interesting and makes pupils want to learn.
- Make sure that leaders and managers at all levels, including governors, quickly acquire the skills to rapidly drive forward improvements in achievement and teaching, so that:
 - all leaders can check the quality of teaching much more rigorously in order to be clear how well pupils are learning
 - all leaders are clear about what actions are necessary to improve learning and to make sure teaching builds well on what pupils already know and can do
 - the governing body has a much better understanding of the school's work, particularly pupils' achievement and teaching, so that they can challenge senior and middle leaders about its performance.

An external review of governance should be undertaken, to include a specific focus on the impact of pupil premium funding, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance can be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 4 to 5 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and met with the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, middle leaders, the Chair and three other members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. Seventeen part lessons were observed, of which most were observed jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of pupils' books and looked at documents including achievement and attendance data, records of recent checks on the quality of teaching and minutes of governing body meetings.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the headteacher has been absent from the school. A middle leader has also been absent since January. A Key Stage 2 teacher has begun a maternity leave. One teacher left the school in December and two left in February. Consequently, there has been a significant number of supply teachers working in the school. Currently, there are eight supply teachers teaching classes across Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. A new teacher, who is also the Key Stage 1 leader, has recently joined the school. The school is currently seeking to recruit a safeguarding liaison officer and five teachers to permanent posts.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils across the school continue to make better progress in reading, writing and mathematics than seen in previous years. As a result, the school expects standards at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 to improve this year. However, current predictions suggest attainment in reading, writing and mathematics in both key stages is likely to remain below national averages. Pupils continue to make sound progress in the early years, where the skilled teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters and groups of letters represent) supports the development of reading and writing skills effectively.

In Key Stage 1, the teaching of phonics remains insecure and has not developed sufficiently since the previous monitoring inspection. This is because there has been too much turbulence in staffing. Nevertheless, senior leaders have worked closely with supply staff and teaching assistants to ensure pupils, particularly those who did not reach the expected standards in last year's phonics assessment, receive the support they need. These pupils can now read with more confidence and fluency and are on track to reach the expected standard this year. Senior leaders have recognised that more needs to be done. A new programme designed to develop reading and writing skills is currently being rolled out. Teachers across the school have undergone training to support the introduction of this programme. In addition, an experienced permanent teacher has now been appointed to lead Key Stage 1. This appointment will provide greater stability for the school, going forward.

In Key Stage 2, guided reading time is now more effective and leads to better progress. This is because teachers are clearer about the skills pupils need to develop and teaching assistants are far more effective in the contributions they make. Consequently, more pupils now read fluently and deduce or infer far more from the texts they study. A key focus at present is to improve standards in mathematics, as this remains an area of relative weakness. In order to support those pupils in Year 6 to address gaps in their knowledge, the school has appointed an additional teacher to provide small group work. These sessions are well planned and are helping pupils make up lost ground.

Senior leaders now utilise data effectively to track the progress of different groups of pupils. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs make similar or better progress to other pupils and, consequently, gaps in attainment are relatively narrow and are closing.

The school is continuing to introduce its preferred approach to assessment. Teachers continue to receive training on how to make accurate assessments and identify next steps in learning. Teachers have also had opportunities to moderate their assessments by working with colleagues in other schools. Senior leaders accept that teachers are still developing their assessment practice and that assessment information is not yet sufficiently precise to be fully reliable.

The quality of teaching

Senior leaders have struggled to recruit suitable permanent teachers and a large number of teaching posts continue to be covered by supply teachers. Recruitment problems have been exacerbated by the long-term absence of a Key Stage 2 teacher and another teacher beginning a maternity leave. Although the teachers on supply contracts are contributing effectively to planning of lessons, marking of books and assessing pupils' progress, some do not have the necessary subject expertise to facilitate rapid progress and some do not consistently challenge pupils to think deeply and present their work to the highest standards. As a result, teaching in Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2 continues to require improvement.

In Key Stage 1, the teaching of reading and writing does not build rapidly on the firm grounding pupils develop in the early years. This is because teachers have not had sufficient expertise in teaching phonics and in helping pupils to form letter shapes correctly. In Years 3 and 4, not enough teaching challenges and extends pupils' knowledge and understanding sufficiently. For example, in mathematics, pupils are not taught the key concepts that underpin mathematics and there are not enough opportunities for pupils to apply the methods they learn to mathematical problems. This remains a frustration for middle and senior leaders, as steps have been taken to support teachers to plan and deliver such opportunities. Nevertheless,

most pupils are making expected progress over time, but not enough pupils make more than expected progress.

The quality of teaching in upper Key Stage 2 remains stronger, despite some disruptions to staffing. Pupils in Year 5 and 6 make good progress because teachers have higher expectations and stronger subject knowledge. Lessons are planned to challenge pupils of different abilities and build upon what pupils already know and can do.

Senior leaders scrutinise pupils' books very regularly and check on the quality and impact of marking. These checks show that pupils receive regular marking and teachers increasingly require pupils to act upon their comments and improve their work. Good practice in marking is being gathered and shared so that greater consistency can be achieved.

The quality of teaching and support for pupils in the Hearing Impaired Unit is good. Members of staff are careful not to intervene too often or to provide too much support. This approach ensures pupils develop independence and have the confidence to take part in the full range of school activities.

Teaching assistants now make a more significant contribution to learning. When working in class, they operate as an effective team of adults under the direction of the teacher. They are clear as to their role and responsibilities. They have good questioning skills and challenge pupils to think carefully and to give extended answers to questions. For example, when Year 5 and 6 pupils read sections of *Mr Stink* by David Walliams, teaching assistants skilfully prompted pupils to consider in detail what could be inferred from the text. Inspectors also observed teaching assistants in Key Stage 1 working effectively with small groups of pupils to address gaps in their knowledge.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The level of absence is now a concern. So far this year, attendance is below that seen in 2013-14 and is well below that seen nationally. The attendance of younger pupils is the lowest. Although the school tracks patterns of attendance carefully, and uses a range of rewards to encourage good attendance, the school does not have sufficient capacity to work more closely with families where absence levels are high. In January, the school introduced a breakfast club. This has proved popular and has helped to improve punctuality. However, more needs to be done to respond to those pupils that miss school regularly. The school is seeking to appoint a safeguarding liaison office who will lead on work to improve attendance.

The behaviour of pupils in lessons continues to improve. The vast majority of pupils show positive attitudes and are keen to engage with the topics being studied. Where learning is strongest, pupils have well developed routines for working in pairs or

groups and are very supportive of one another. They show patience and consideration when they need help and look for guidance from one another before asking the teacher. They respond quickly to the teacher's instructions and move quickly from one task to the next. Only occasionally do pupils lack concentration and misbehave. This happens only when the work provided is overly repetitive or fails to engage pupils' interests.

Pupils say they feel safe and trust members of staff to deal with any concerns they may have. The school meets statutory safeguarding requirements and makes appropriate checks on all adults working in the school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since the last monitoring inspection, the headteacher has been absent from school. In her absence, the deputy headteacher has assumed the role of acting headteacher and the assistant headteacher has become the acting deputy headteacher. Although a smaller team, senior leaders have quickened the pace of improvement. They have managed the challenges of high staff turnover effectively and ensured that teachers, including those on supply contracts, have met their expectations for planning, marking and assessment. Targets for pupils' progress and attainment have been set and the performance of teachers is being managed tightly. The morale of staff is rising and the school provides a positive climate for learning. As a result, pupils are making better progress across the school.

A considerable frustration for the acting headteacher and governors has been the difficulty in recruiting good teachers to vacant posts. Instability in staffing has therefore made it difficult to lead improvements in the quality of teaching and build expertise. Therefore, leaders have focused on ensuring long-term supply teachers are well supported to meet expectations. With the support of colleagues at Abbey Lane Primary School, leaders have been more successful in developing the impact of teaching assistants.

Middle leaders have taken on more responsibility for the training and development of others. Pupils in their own classes make good progress and the support they provide to others is helping to ensure other classes increasingly make expected progress. They now take a more active role in developing the curriculum. As a result, the topics provided are becoming more interesting and engaging.

The governors have sound procedures in place to evaluate the school's progress. Steering group meetings take place regularly and the delivery of the school improvement plan is systematically reviewed. A teaching and learning committee meets regularly to review the impact of actions taken to improve the quality of teaching and to consider how the curriculum might better meet the needs of pupils. Their evaluation has led to the new programme for reading and writing being introduced. The governors recognise they need to resolve the continuing absence of

the headteacher as soon as possible, as this is limiting the capacity of leaders to drive improvement. The governing body has identified a preferred academy sponsor, however, no formal process has begun and the timeline for the school's conversion to sponsored academy status is unclear.

External support

Following consultation, the local authority withdrew its proposal to suspend the governing body and instate an interim executive board. A local authority adviser continues to work closely with senior leaders and governors to evaluate the progress the school is making. The local authority is supportive of the proposed academy sponsor identified by the governing body.

Leaders from Abbey Lane Primary School have provided effective support for the leadership team of the school and have been influential in developing the skills of teaching assistants and the quality of assessment procedures. Other local schools are also providing helpful support, including releasing an experienced teacher to work in the school from September 2015.

The local authority is also exploring every avenue to help the school secure good quality teachers to permanent posts, as it recognises instability in staffing remains a key barrier to the school's long-term improvement.