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26 March 2015

Mrs Sharon Bates
Headteacher
Mill Hill Primary School
Sunnyside Avenue
Tunstall
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST6 6ED

Dear Mrs Bates

Special measures monitoring inspection of Mill Hill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 24 and 25 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 December 2013. 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 subject to discussion with me.

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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Stoke.

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims
Her Majesty's Inspector

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 so that it is always good or better and thus raise attainment, close gaps in the attainment and progress of different groups and accelerate the progress all pupils make, especially in writing by:
 - ensuring teachers use information from assessments including their marking to help them plan and set targets for individuals in order to meet the needs of pupils of different ability, particularly of the most able
 - making sure that pupils are always given good guidance about how to improve their work, that marking helps them to improve their handwriting and spelling and that pupils are given the time to respond
 - increasing the opportunities pupils have to practise their literacy and mathematical skills in subjects other than English and mathematics
 - making sure teachers increase the opportunities pupils have to think things out for themselves or to take the initiative.
- Improve attendance and reduce persistent absence further by working more closely with parents.
- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, so that there is the capacity to improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - improving the skills of senior, middle and subject leaders, especially in English and mathematics, so that leaders at all levels can drive improvement in teaching and learning
 - improving the effectiveness of the monitoring of teaching and learning and ensuring the assessment of pupils' progress is accurate so that leaders have a clear understanding of what needs to be improved and can hold teachers to account for such improvements
 - ensuring governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses to be able to challenge the school effectively and hold leaders to account
 - undertaking an external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 March 2015

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, associate headteacher, the Executive Headteacher from Haywood Academy's which is part of the City Learning Multi Academy Trust, senior and middle leaders, other members of staff, two members of the Interim Executive Board, groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority. Safeguarding procedures were checked. The inspector also spoke to 11 parents informally at the school gate.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit the date for Mill Hill to become an academy has been postponed from January to April 2015. During the monitoring visit one of the two acting deputy headteachers was absent on sick-leave and the special educational needs coordinator was on maternity leave. The Chair of the Interim Executive Board was unavailable to meet, but was available on the telephone. Three vacant teaching posts have been advertised to start in the summer term.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The recent introduction of a tracking system has ensured that leaders can monitor the attainment and progress of pupils more accurately. The first set of data for February half term indicate that pupils currently in school have made good progress in their learning since October 2014 when the tracker was first introduced. Older pupils in Year 5 and 6 have made rapid progress in their learning. The introduction of additional teachers from the multi-academy trust together with effectively targeted additional support has enhanced their rate of progress. Consequently forecasts suggest that the proportion of pupils reaching at least the expected Level 4 in reading and mathematics will be close to national expectations. In writing, where pupils started at a much lower level compared to reading and mathematics, pupils continue to be well below the national average.

In lessons, pupils are progressing well in Key Stage 2 and in the early years. High expectations of conduct and learning have led to pupils in the Reception class working without assistance from adults on highly challenging reading and writing tasks. Pupils use their phonics skills well to sound out words in their reading and to attempt to write more difficult words unaided such as 'cracker', 'witch' and 'hammer.' Based on present rates of progress the proportion of pupils on track to reach the expected level of development for their age by the end of Reception is set to be in line with that which is typical nationally.

In lessons seen during the visit, pupils were not making enough progress in their learning in Key Stage 1. Too often work was pitched at the wrong level of challenge or was not appropriate for pupils to reach the next stage in their learning. Pupils were frequently engaged in their activities but these did not enable enough of them to achieve their learning objectives. Although the quality of teaching over time remains variable the proportion of Year 2 pupils set to achieve at least a Level 2 in reading, writing and mathematics is set to be favourable with the national average from last year as a result of the effective targeting of additional support.

Although pupils are on track overall to significantly improve their attainment at the end of Year 6 compared to the previous year there remains too much variability in the progress of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding (additional government funding) throughout the school. In some classes, the attainment gap with other pupils is widening. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs have not made enough progress as their needs have not been identified quickly enough. However, the attainment gap between boys and girls is narrowing and pupils for whom English is an additional language are making rapid progress as they increase their fluency in English.

The quality of teaching

Teachers have received a rigorous programme of coaching, mentoring and challenge to improve the quality of teaching. This has had a significant impact in the early years and in Key Stage 2 but as yet the quality of teaching in Key Stage 1 is not consistently good enough.

In the lessons where pupils made the best progress teachers set very high expectations to ensure pupils are ready to learn. Pupils receive challenging but achievable tasks based on previous assessments and their known different starting points. In these lessons pupils are able to work well on their own or in small groups without relying on additional adult support. Children in the Reception class showed a maturity well beyond their years when working on their own on literacy tasks. Relationships between teachers, other adults and pupils are consistently good.

Learning objectives and success criteria inform pupils of what they are expected to learn. Extension work is set for most able pupils and scaffolded tasks for those who require extra help. Marking with green and pink pens show pupils what they have done and what they need to do next. Some additional adults circulate well and ask questions that prompt pupils to think without giving them the answers. Teachers ensure they use technical vocabulary so that pupils are confident to talk about, for example, subordinate clauses and adverbial phrases. Pupils are increasingly encouraged to evaluate their own work and that of others and to provide feedback for how to improve it.

Older pupils have been given more time for their literacy and numeracy development to which they have responded positively. They are using their phonics skills to access

other work for example in their 'creative learning journeys' where they study historical and geographical topics.

In Key Stage 1 particularly, too many pupils are set work that is not pitched at the appropriate level. Planned activities do not always build on what pupils have already learnt and does not take account of where gaps or misconceptions remain which need to be addressed before pupils can move on to the next task. In one instance, pupils were given a mathematics challenge well beyond the level for most in their class. Elsewhere pupils have been set work on punctuation with the same learning objectives as the previous piece of work even where they achieved the objectives previously. This holds back the progress of the most able pupils and those ready to move to the next stage in their learning. A few older pupils still lack strategies to work on their own and rely too heavily on going straight to an adult as soon as they get stuck.

Although work is marked regularly and adheres to the school marking policy of green and pink pens, teachers do not always indicate whether they have read the pupils' response to their pink questions or challenges. Similarly where pupils do not respond at all this is not consistently followed up. Most pupils spoken to knew their targets but not all were sure how to achieve them or by when. Pupils are not always given time to respond to improvement points for their spelling and handwriting.

Teachers do not always deploy teaching assistants effectively enough. Where they are too rigidly attached to one pupil or group, opportunities are missed to support other pupils who have become either stuck, need additional work or have switched off.

Not all teachers correct pupils who use non-standard English in their response to questions, for example when they use phrases such as, 'I did good at my lessons.' In mathematics, pupils who find multiplication difficult do not have access to additional resources that would help them with their calculations.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour of pupils around the school was good. They acted with courtesy and consideration for others, sharing equipment and taking turns. Most are ready to learn in lessons. There are a few instances of low-level disruption which teachers and adults manage well. Teachers are often quick to pick up on pupils who have gone off task although there were instances especially in Key Stage 1 where this was because the work was too hard or too easy. All safeguarding systems are in place to ensure pupils are kept safe.

The rate of overall attendance is improving steadily. The school has been especially successfully in reducing the rate of persistent absence (where a pupils' attendance falls below 85%). The deployment of two full time family support workers combined with the work of the educational welfare officer has ensured that the number of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced since October 2014. The use of the

new tracker system demonstrates through colour coding where improvements have been made and where concerns remain to follow up further.

Pupils have responded enthusiastically to rewards on offer to promote good attendance. Assemblies are held with parents to celebrate 100% attendance and there are weekly prizes for those pupils eligible. In one Reception class where attendance was 100% during the inspection visit pupils were looking forward to their reward of a big breakfast.

Parents spoken with have responded positively to the challenge to get pupils into school regularly and on time. They reported that pupils were now more enthusiastic to come to school. Open evenings and coffee mornings have extended opportunities for parents to come into school to discuss their children's progress and attendance.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher has been relentless in seeking to improve the school further. Ably supported by other senior leaders the challenge of high expectations is shared with the whole school staff.

Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and are able to identify how teaching can be improved. Middle leaders have developed their skills well to monitor teaching through lesson observations, analysis of pupils' work and pupil progress meetings. The monitoring of pupils' work has led to ensuring that books are marked regularly and in line with the school policy but has not yet led to teachers ensuring they always read pupils responses to their marking. There is increasing leadership capacity through the appointment of assistant coordinators for literacy and numeracy.

The introduction of a tracker has enabled leaders to monitor pupils' achievement more closely and ensure that assessment is more accurate. Checks with teachers through the multi-academy trust and the local authority have ensured that assessment information is now correct. More rigorous analysis of pupil performance by group has highlighted where gaps remain. Regular pupil progress meetings hold teachers to account for the outcomes of all their pupils.

Members of the Interim Executive Board are well informed and receive information in a timely manner so that they are in a position to ask challenging questions of leaders. They know how well pupils are doing in their learning and have a very detailed knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching. They are aware of shortcomings in provision for special educational needs and share the leaders' ambition to raise achievement and improve teaching further. They are involved in strategic appointments of leaders and teachers. They are not up to date on the impact of pupil premium funding and are unaware of where gaps in attainment are narrowing or widening. Current information on the evaluation of the impact of pupil premium funding was not available on the school website during the inspection visit. There has not been an evaluation of the impact of pupil premium funding and

currently information is not available on the school website on how the funding is spent.

Leaders have taken very recent action to address weaknesses in the provision of special educational needs. Provision maps have now been put in place and interventions set up for targeted pupils. Leaders are now starting to track the impact of additional support for pupils and have included special educational needs as a focus for monitoring of teaching. It is too early to see the impact of these recent developments.

Older pupils spoken to were unanimous that the school has improved and that they were benefiting from the additional time allocated to literacy and numeracy. They did report conversely that they were spending less time on other subjects they enjoy including science, art, languages and information communication technology.

Almost all the parents spoken to at the school gate agreed that the school has got better. They said that communication, for example through newsletters and correspondence was much better, their children enjoyed coming to school and were learning more in their lessons.

External support

The local authority is rigorous in providing support and challenge for the school. It conducts regular half termly reviews of the school's performance in partnership with an external consultant. There is a close partnership between the local authority and the multi academy trust as they work together to secure improvements. The local authority has supported the teaching of literacy in the school and has made arrangements to conduct an audit of special educational needs.