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20 March 2015

Mr Russell Gray and Ms Jenny Digges
Head of School and Executive Headteacher
Muskham Primary School
Main Street
North Muskham
Newark
NG23 6HD

Dear Mr Gray and Ms Digges

Special measures monitoring inspection of Muskham Primary School

Following my visit with Roary Pownall, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 16–17 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 July 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 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 Nottinghamshire.

Yours sincerely

Jan Connor
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching by making sure that all teachers:
 - take account of what pupils already know and can do, especially average-ability and more-able pupils, to ensure pupils make best progress
 - have high expectations of what pupils of all abilities can achieve and the quality and quantity of work that they produce
 - ensure that guidance to pupils on how to improve their work leads to improvement.

- Raise pupils' achievement in English and mathematics by insisting that teachers:
 - teach pupils how to spell correctly, use grammar and punctuation appropriately and write legibly
 - expect pupils to solve harder mathematical problems with improved accuracy and always have something more challenging to go on to.

- Improve pupils' attitudes to learning by:
 - encouraging pupils to sustain good learning behaviour in class by ensuring they concentrate fully on their learning, insisting on high quality presentation of work.

- Improve the impact of leadership by:
 - improving teamwork across the different tiers of leadership and management and among governors
 - ensuring that safeguarding and health and safety requirements are met and that pupils are kept safe while in the school's care
 - improving the management and supervision of pupils' behaviour in the playground
 - ensuring that assessments of pupils' learning are accurate
 - ensuring that the school development plan quantifies more precisely how success will be measured
 - making sure that governors develop their skills so that they can hold leaders and managers to account more robustly.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 16–17 March 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher and the head of school, the deputy headteacher and subject leaders. Inspectors also met with the Chair of the Governing Body, four other governors and a local authority representative. Inspectors spoke with parents and pupils. Inspectors observed 14 lessons, nine jointly with either the executive headteacher or the head of school. Pupils' books were scrutinised. Safeguarding procedures and the single central record were checked.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, the school business manager has resigned and will retire in May 2015. The mathematics subject leader has relinquished her role and mathematics is now being led by the deputy headteacher. The English subject leader has also resigned and will leave at Easter. The head of school will lead English until a new subject leader can be appointed. The early years leader has relinquished her role and a temporary lead teacher for the early years has been appointed. One part-time teacher is undertaking a phased return to her role. The existing temporary teacher covering this absence has been retained until the end of the school year. The site manager's post has been upgraded and further responsibilities added to his role, including health and safety management and fire safety.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Since September, the achievement of pupils has improved in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' progress is accelerating as a result of better teaching that caters for the abilities of different groups of pupils. However, rates of progress are inconsistent across year groups and subjects.

School data show that, currently, Year 6 pupils' attainment is broadly in line with age-related expectations for reading. However, attainment gaps remain, particularly for girls in mathematics and for boys in writing. Progress for this year group has accelerated since September. Pupils are gaining skills and knowledge more quickly than in previous years. However, the most-able pupils are not reaching the standards they are capable of in either mathematics or English.

Pupils across other year groups have also accelerated the progress they are making in mathematics, reading and writing this school year. In Year 5, for example, pupils' attainment is broadly in line with age-related expectation in reading and writing; in mathematics, it is not as strong. Starting points for this year group from Key Stage 1 were high and, over time, they have not made enough progress to demonstrate the progress they should in all three subjects. This is particularly the case for girls. Their

progress is less than that of boys in writing and reading. Pupils in Year 3 and Year 4 have fewer attainment gaps to close and, because of that, standards in mathematics, reading and writing are broadly in line with age-related expectations. Pupils are making good progress in both year groups in writing and mathematics, and in reading in Year 4. However, progress in reading is not as strong in Year 3. Boys and girls make similar amounts of progress in all three subjects.

School data for Year 2 show that these pupils are attaining above age-related expectations in mathematics, reading and writing. Predicted outcomes for this year group show an improvement on the previous year. Boys and girls are making similar progress to each other. In Year 1, pupils' attainment is broadly in line with age-related expectation in mathematics, reading and writing. Pupils in this year group are making expected progress in relation to their starting points. Children in the early years are also making expected progress.

The progress of different groups varies in mathematics, reading and writing. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are generally making progress in line with their peers. Pupils funded through the pupil premium are also making similar progress to others in school, in that it is inconsistent across year groups and subjects. The most-able pupils are accelerating their progress much more quickly than other groups across the school. However, the most-able pupils in the older year groups have many gaps to fill in order to reach their full potential.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved. It is now much better than at the last section 5 inspection. As a result, pupils are making better progress in their learning. Some elements of weaker teaching remain, and these weaknesses are the cause of the inconsistent progress pupils make in mathematics, reading and writing. The school's leaders are systematically addressing these weaknesses through training and support.

Teachers' planning better reflects the abilities of different groups of pupils. The tasks pupils undertake demonstrate, for the most part, a more precise match to their specific learning needs. For example, in Year 4, pupils' progress in learning to spell common words is accelerating because the teacher knows exactly what pupils need to learn and pupils are also clear about what is expected of them. Teachers have a much better understanding of where gaps in pupils' learning are, and they are working to fill them. However, the learning needs of the most-able pupils are not always well planned for, and they are not always set demanding enough work. As a result, they are not reaching the highest levels of learning of which they are capable.

Teachers' marking and guidance have improved. During lessons where teachers' guidance was at its best, teachers' questions enabled pupils to deepen their understanding of learning. For example, in Year 2, pupils were encouraged to be

precise in their answers and demonstrate their understanding of mathematical concepts. The teacher expected her pupils to think for themselves, and supported them through prompts and direction. As a result, pupils' progress accelerated rapidly in this lesson. Teachers' marking is more consistent in telling pupils what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils have the opportunity to respond to marking and they clearly benefit from this. Pupils' spoken with during the inspection were very clear about how they use teachers' marking to deepen their understanding. However, marking and guidance are not of the same standard across all classes.

The work of teaching assistants is most effective when supporting teachers to focus on the particular learning needs of different groups of pupils. For example, in Year 6, the teacher needed to work with a number of pupils who did not understand their task. The teaching assistant skilfully ensured that other pupils continued to make progress by addressing their questions quickly so that learning continued.

Teaching in the early years provides children with opportunities to develop their skills, knowledge, and understanding, particularly in mathematics, reading and writing. However, when children are not working closely with adults, the activities they engage in are not challenging enough to keep their attention and so they do not learn as much as they could.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour around school and in classrooms is polite and courteous. Pupils' attitudes to learning have improved considerably. This is a direct result of improvements to the quality of teaching. Pupils demonstrate an interest and engagement in their work that was not seen at the last inspection. Pupils say they enjoy being challenged by harder work and want to learn more. Consequently, they are concentrating on their tasks and making better progress. In the most effective lessons, there is a tangible sense of excitement as pupils engage in their work.

Supervision has increased, particularly at lunchtime. Any incidents of poor behaviour are rare and are dealt with quickly. As a result, the playground is a more harmonious place for pupils to play. Pupils cooperate well with each other and say they feel safe in the playground.

Work, beginning in the Easter holiday, to enclose exposed areas of the school playground with secure fencing means risks to pupils' safety are expected to diminish considerably.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The head of school and the executive headteacher demonstrate a determination and commitment to improve teaching and raise standards for all pupils. They are ably supported by the deputy headteacher. This leadership team is ambitious and has

been effective in accelerating the progress of pupils and eliminating poor-quality teaching. The new leadership team has successfully begun to raise teachers' expectations of what their pupils can achieve. Leaders have developed a vision for school improvement and communicated this well to staff, pupils and parents alike. They have begun to create a cohesive team, and it was clear during the inspection that staff feel very positive about their work. There is a palpable sense of teamwork developing at this school.

Systems for checking the quality of teaching are robust. Leaders are not prepared to accept poor-quality teaching. Consequently, they are quick to identify each teacher's individual strengths and weaknesses. Teaching is improving quickly because of bespoke support to address the weaknesses in individual teachers' practice.

Leaders' plans for school improvement are clear, precise and based on a sound analysis of pupils' abilities and specific learning needs. Leaders adjust plans regularly in order to maximise their impact. Subject leaders for mathematics and English, and the leader of special educational needs, also share senior leaders' ambition to improve. They know their subjects well and have appropriate drawn up plans for improvement. The leadership of the early years is new. School leaders are aware that provision for children in this key stage needs to improve and leaders are developing plans to address this.

The governing body is well led by the Chair. He is supporting his fellow governors to develop their strategic role in managing the school. New systems for checking risks and managing health and safety on site mean the safeguarding of pupils is more robust. Governing body systems for checking the work of senior leaders are rigorous. Governors do not accept information on face value but probe further and challenge leaders through regular meetings and visits to the school. As a result, the governing body has a sound knowledge of the school's work and knows what needs to be done to increase its effectiveness further.

External support

The local authority has provided timely and effective support through the continued funding for the secondment of the senior leadership team. It also sets priorities and challenges school leaders through regular meetings attended by local authority officers such as governor support, human resources and finance, as well as the challenge to raise achievement. The local authority has brokered effective support for the training and development of leadership and teaching from a number of local schools, including Selston Church of England Primary, Stanhope Primary School, Bowbridge Primary School, and Greasley Beauvale Primary School.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the achievement of children in the early years by ensuring that those activities not led by adults are carefully planned for and assessed so that children make accelerated progress across all seven areas of learning.