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

Dear Mrs Dingle

Special measures monitoring inspection of Hurst Hill Primary School

Following my visit on 13–14 May 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 in March 2015.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in 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 newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection. No more than one newly qualified teacher may be appointed.

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 Local Authority.

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
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- The lead and team inspectors.

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 third monitoring inspection on 13–14 May 2015

Evidence

In addition to observing lessons, some of them jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, the inspector observed two school assemblies and scrutinised documents and pupils' workbooks. Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, a parent governor and the Chair of the Governing Body. The inspector spoke to some parents at the start of the first of two inspection days and met the school's Education Improvement Adviser from Dudley Local Authority to discuss the actions taken to support the school. Meetings were held with three groups of pupils to listen to their views.

The foci of this monitoring inspection were to establish: the quality of early years provision in the Reception classes; the impact that teaching is having on pupils' achievement; the extent to which pupils' attendance and the school's engagement with parents and carers are improving; and how much pupils' progress in writing and mathematics has improved since the last monitoring inspection in March 2015.

Context

There have been no significant changes to staffing, leadership or governance since the last monitoring inspection. The headteacher will be taking family leave in July 2015. The local authority and governing body have made firm arrangements to cover the headteacher's leadership until she returns.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Standards continue to improve across the school and are currently in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6. The quality of pupils' writing is improving. The most able pupils in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 are doing better and making more progress than previously in reading, writing and mathematics. An increasing proportion of pupils across the school are making or exceeding the nationally expected rate of progress in English and mathematics.

These improvements have come about because teachers' expectations are higher than previously. Pupils' writing shows marked improvement in its accuracy, form and structure. Achievement in reading is improving. Teachers use consistent methods in the early years and Key Stage 1 to help pupils use letter sounds (phonics teaching) so they can spell more accurately when writing and break down unfamiliar words into composite sounds when reading. In mathematics, pupils are now provided with a broader range of challenging problem solving tasks and core number skills are being taught effectively across the school.

Despite these improvements, children in the early years are not all making enough progress and provision in this part of the school is a relative weakness. The most able Reception children in particular are not being challenged sufficiently so their progress is stalling. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development is in line with that of other schools nationally but should be greater.

Workbooks, assessment data and lesson observations show that pupils who have additional learning needs benefit from some well-focused support and guidance. These pupils continue to make reasonable progress in English and mathematics.

Assessments and pupils' work show that gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others are closing. Last year's national test results for Year 6 pupils show that the attainment of disadvantaged pupils was behind that of other pupils by over a year in reading, writing and mathematics. The latest assessments for current Year 6 show that the gap has narrowed to less than half a year.

The quality of teaching

The school's leaders continue to monitor and support teachers and support staff, and there is further potential to continue improving teaching. Leaders have eliminated all inadequate teaching but the overall quality is still not good enough across the school to help all pupils catch up on lost ground. This is particularly the case in the early years, where the quality of teaching and learning requires improvement.

Teachers' marking has improved and pupils' books show that teachers are intervening more during lessons to support and correct pupils' work. This increased intervention is helping most pupils to improve their writing and mathematics work. Nonetheless, those pupils who have not developed a joined or cursive style of writing do not improve their handwriting structure as well as those that have adopted and maintained a joined style. In some mathematics books, despite the interventions and corrections that pupils make, some teachers are not always checking enough to identify the reasons why pupils make calculation errors. The most effective marking in mathematics provides opportunities and time for pupils to try again and correct errors, with clear pointers to help pupils understand the next steps in their learning.

Teachers are now using more accurate assessments than previously to group pupils by ability. In addition, leaders are already considering further refinements to assessment in preparation for the new National Curriculum in September 2015. Information about pupils' progress and performance is accessible to both teachers and governors. Staff and leaders are now in a stronger position to extract information about the progress of particular groups of pupils and individuals. This is helping teachers to plan and intervene if pupils need more support, or to adapt their plans to meet the needs of those who may be falling behind. However, work in

books and observations show that some teaching is still not challenging all pupils to do as well as they should.

Where learning is most effective, teaching is responsive to pupils' needs and abilities and includes clear instruction. For example, during a writing lesson, Year 5 pupils were taught to extend complex sentences. The teacher expertly directed the pupils to break down and then reconstruct sentences with accurate punctuation to extend simple sentences to more complex ones using clauses. Similarly, pupils in another Year 5 class were asked to apply their knowledge of multiples to extend their understanding of more complex number problems.

In the early years teachers' planning and teaching require improvement. This represents a decline in the quality of early years provision since the school's full inspection last year in May 2014. Reception children are not always building on what they already know and can do. In some sessions observed children were expected to work independently but many were not using this time productively and were not always being encouraged to do so. As a result, too many Reception children, particularly boys, mark time, are not learning or doing enough, and sometimes interrupt or disrupt the learning of other children. The most able children in Reception are not always expected to try more challenging tasks. For example, a very capable child, when asked to complete an exercise to count in twos independently, could easily do the task but had to go through a particular worksheet that stifled their progress as it was not sufficiently challenging.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning in lessons and at other times are usually good. Very little inappropriate behaviour occurs in lessons because teachers apply the school's behaviour code in classrooms consistently well. In lessons where learning is less effective some pupils lose concentration and chat generally about topics unrelated to the work provided, although incidents of such behaviour are reducing.

Teachers often and consistently make sure that pupils understand what is expected, how they should behave and respond to questions, and how to work productively. The teachers who ensure the most consistently effective learning set much higher expectations for both the end product of pupils' work and their attitudes to learning. Some of the books examined during this inspection showed that there are still instances where teachers' expectations for presentation are not high enough, although these are reducing compared with previous monitoring inspections.

Interesting and thought-provoking assemblies, special topics and the use of topical news or themes enrich the school's curriculum and teach pupils important British values of respect, tolerance and democracy. Pupils learn about fairness and the rule of law through democratic means. This was best demonstrated recently when pupils

participated in a special assembly about the recent local and national elections. Pupils reflect on the circumstances of people and communities that are less fortunate than themselves through discussion, prayer and reflection during assemblies. For example, pupils reflected on the recent earthquake tragedy in Nepal to discuss how Britain and communities more generally are helping those affected.

The school makes good use of the primary schools sports fund through the use of specialist sports coaches that lead and support physical education lessons. Physical activity, sport and healthy living are promoted well and pupils also say that they feel 'extra safe' at break times because, in addition to the supervision provided by teachers and support staff, sports coaches are also present to supervise and play games with pupils.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in attendance rates that are in line with the national average. Persistent absence rates, as reported during the last monitoring inspection, are continuing to reduce because the staff and outside agencies act robustly to challenge and support families in greatest need.

Pupils told the inspector that they enjoy reading, writing and mathematics work, especially when it is interesting and challenging. When asked about pupils' behaviour at break times there was a mixed response from some pupils, but generally, most pupils believe that they are safe and trust their teachers to deal with any bullying or hostile behaviour.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have stepped up the intensity of pupil progress reviews and robustly scrutinise teachers' performance. This is building further capacity for sustained improvement and is raising the quality of teaching across the school. Having eradicated all inadequate teaching, the staff team and governors are focusing more of their attention on sustaining improvements to the achievement of pupils across the ability range in all classes. These positive developments are securing a platform for sustained improvement, although a priority for leaders and governors now is to improve the early years provision.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher undertake accurate assessments of the quality of teaching and provide helpful feedback to staff after monitoring lessons. The outcome of this monitoring is presented to governors so they can challenge and hold leaders and teachers to account for pupils' progress. The governing body's school improvement committee holds other committees and the school's leaders to account for their performance. Consequently, governors and leaders are now better placed to gather more precise information about pupils' progress and performance to help them judge whether teachers and support staff are effective enough.

There is now more parental engagement and those parents spoken to report that they are pleased with the progress the school is making and the quality of education it provides for their children. A good start has been made since the March 2015 monitoring inspection to reconstitute the Parent Teacher Association and there have been additional open meetings and forums for parents to attend. Increasingly, open coffee mornings for parents and members of the community are being planned to engage with and act on parents' views about the school. This needs to continue and be built upon so that the vast majority of parents can have more opportunities to express and share their views with others, and can feel that they are able to contribute to the work and life of the school and the community it serves.

External support

The local authority's education improvement adviser has continued the commissioning of a good range of helpful support for teachers, leaders and governors. The link with a local teaching school continues to provide expert advice and guidance through the use of a National Leader in Education and a National Leader of Governance. Local authority support continues to be effective, as do the well-devised arrangements for temporary leadership while the headteacher takes family leave in July. Additional support has been arranged so that a headteacher from another school with a strong track record of leadership will spend two days a week in the school supporting the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher until the substantive headteacher returns.