

Tribal
Kings Orchard
1 Queens Street
Bristol, BS2 0HQ

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 3115307
Direct email: rachel.evans@tribalgroup.com

22 May 2015

Mrs J Heyes
Acting Executive Headteacher
Byron Primary School
Byron Road
Gillingham
ME7 5XX

Dear Mrs Heyes

Special measures monitoring inspection of Byron Primary School

Following my visit with Teresa Davies, Additional inspector, to your school on 20 and 21 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.

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 not making enough 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 Medway.

Yours sincerely

Melanie Cox
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good across Key Stages 1 and 2 by:
 - making better use of all available information about what pupils already know and can do to make sure that work is at the right level for them to keep them interested, particularly the most and least able
 - focusing on ensuring that tasks move pupils on in their learning, understanding or skills more rapidly and conducting lessons at a brisker pace
 - developing better questioning techniques to check pupils' understanding and extend their thinking during lessons
 - helping pupils to gain a clear understanding of the next steps they need to make to improve
 - ensuring teachers regularly use marking to help pupils improve their work and always giving them chance to respond to a teacher's comments.
- Accelerate pupils' rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics across Key Stages 1 and 2 so that they reach at least average levels by:
 - lifting teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving
 - insisting on a high quality of work in response to all tasks set
 - giving pupils more frequent opportunities to use and apply mathematical skills in mathematics lessons as and when they acquire them
 - raising teachers' expectations of the capabilities of pupils who are lagging behind with their phonics skills to help them catch up quickly
 - ensuring writing skills motivate and stimulate both boys and girls to do their best
 - developing pupils' skills in being able to work by themselves.
- Increase the impact of leaders and managers at all levels by:
 - urgently and rigorously drawing together information about the school's performance and acting swiftly, using this information to identify, plan and implement precise actions to secure improvements
 - setting clear, regular and measurable milestones to check whether actions are making a difference quickly enough
 - focusing sharply on the learning and progress of all different groups of pupils, including the most and least able, when evaluating the quality of teaching and learning
 - implementing systematic and well-planned training and professional development to improve the quality of teaching
 - strengthening the role of senior leaders beyond the headteacher and middle leaders in driving improvements
 - increasing the capacity of the governing body to rigorously challenge school leaders and hold them to account.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management 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 20–21 May 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed teaching in 11 lessons. Shorter 'drop-in' visits were made to six other classes. Several lessons were observed jointly with the two deputy headteachers, and the phase leader of lower Key Stage 2 or the coordinator of provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Inspectors scrutinised the school's documentation, including records of behaviour and tracking of pupils' progress. They also looked at the school's improvement plan and reviewed the short-term and long-term targets set for pupils' achievement. They met with school staff, a group of pupils, two members of the governing body, a group of parents and carers and a representative of the local authority.

Context

A new teacher has joined the school in Year 4. As a result, the lower Key Stage 2 phase leader no longer has a full-time teaching commitment and is able to focus on her leadership role.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Progress across the school is still very uneven. Children in the Reception classes continue to make the good progress that was recognised at the time of the section 5 inspection in January 2014 and many pupils across the school have made strong progress in reading this year. However, progress in writing and mathematics in Key Stages 1 and 2 is too slow. As a result, standards in these subjects are not rising quickly enough. For example, at the end of March the school's tracking information shows that only a third of pupils in Year 5 had reached the expected level in writing, whereas almost two thirds of pupils had reached the expected level in reading. At this stage, they are not on track to meet the end-of-year targets that were set for them.

Work in English and topic books shows that less-able pupils, in particular, do not make adequate progress in writing. Pupils have plenty of opportunities to practise their writing skills, but repeatedly make the same basic mistakes. Teachers point out that punctuation is missing when they mark pupils' work, but they do not tackle misconceptions effectively through their teaching and so the pupils continue to struggle to write fluently.

Across the school, disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs do not make the progress in reading, writing and mathematics that is needed to help them catch up with their peers. The school has started to check the impact of extra small-group tuition for pupils and it is clear that some interventions, such as intensive coaching in phonics (letters and the sounds they make), have been effective. Nevertheless, there is more work to be done to ensure that the day-to-day provision in class consistently meets the needs of these pupils.

In mathematics, teachers have begun to plan regular opportunities for pupils to use reasoning and apply their mathematical knowledge to solve problems, but some teachers do not yet have the skills to teach this aspect of mathematics well and need further training.

The quality of teaching

Although the pockets of consistently good teaching seen at the last monitoring visit remain, the overall quality of teaching has not improved quickly enough despite the wide range of training, coaching and support that has been provided for staff. The issues raised at the last monitoring visit have not been tackled rigorously enough and inconsistencies in teachers' practice are still evident. Most importantly, there are still too few teachers who regularly set work at the right level for different groups of pupils. Evidence seen during this inspection confirms the view of school leaders that teachers can make accurate judgements about pupils' progress. They know their pupils well and understand what they can and cannot do. However, teachers do not use this information sufficiently well when planning lessons; many do not set work that builds on previous learning for higher-attaining pupils or tackles gaps in knowledge for the less able. As a result, too few pupils achieve well over time.

Teachers' marking and feedback continue to be thorough, but there are still some teachers who do not give enough guidance to pupils on how they can improve their work. There are also too many teachers who do not make sure that pupils respond to marking and complete corrections.

Lower-attaining and disadvantaged pupils do not routinely get the necessary attention from the class teacher in lessons, and teaching assistants are sometimes given too much responsibility for leading learning. In the vast majority of lessons seen on this monitoring visit, groups of lower-attaining pupils worked alongside teaching assistants for most of the lesson while the teacher supervised the rest of the class. Although pupils usually completed their work with support, they did not often make progress in their learning or understanding. This is because not all teaching assistants have the expertise to listen to pupils, analyse misconceptions and reshape explanations.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school's behaviour policy has been reviewed and there are now clear sanctions for varying degrees of misconduct and effective systems to monitor incidents of poor behaviour. The new policy promotes the 'positive reinforcement' of good behaviour and visits to lessons during this inspection show that teachers and teaching assistants are generally quick to spot and praise good behaviour. Pupils look forward to the regular 'celebration assemblies' where good effort and achievement are rewarded with certificates and applause from the whole school community.

Behaviour in the lessons seen during this inspection was generally of a high standard and lessons flowed smoothly, but the school's records indicate that this is not always the case. There are still too many incidents of persistent disruptive behaviour that result in pupils being removed from the class for a period of time.

Teachers try to make learning relevant and engaging for pupils in lessons and many pupils respond readily to teachers' questions in whole-class discussions. However, once set to work independently, some pupils are very slow to settle. Others begin work enthusiastically and then lose motivation. When questioned, the pupils say that they do not always understand the task they have been given and that the work is sometimes too difficult. Some pupils give up very easily when faced with a challenge and lack perseverance.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The overall rate of the school's improvement has slowed since the previous monitoring visit. Although senior leaders have continued to develop some important policies and systems, there has not been a coordinated approach to improving teaching and senior leaders have not made best use of the additional leadership capacity provided by the four 'phase' leaders who were appointed in January 2015. Three of these leaders do not have a class teaching responsibility and are therefore well placed to work alongside colleagues and drive improvements in teaching, but they are unsure of their role in supporting teachers and lack experience in this type of work.

In contrast, the leader for provision in the early years has been very proactive in developing her staff team. She has undertaken a thorough review of the three Reception classes and has requested and obtained external advice and support to help her plan next steps. As a result, the pace of improvement in this part of the school has been maintained.

The coordinator of support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is developing her leadership skills well. She has worked closely with the acting executive headteacher and one of the deputy headteachers to draw up an effective plan for the development of this area of the school's work. A structured programme of training and a schedule of regular meetings are now in place for the specialist teachers in her team. It is too early to see the impact of these changes.

Governors are kept well informed about pupils' progress and now have the knowledge they need to hold school leaders to account, but they do not always do so. For example, recent minutes of meetings do not indicate that governors have challenged school leaders to explain the lack of progress in improving the quality of teaching. Governors have received reports from the acting head of school and have had presentations from staff about new initiatives, but have not visited classrooms to evaluate the progress of priorities in the school plan for themselves.

External support

There has been no formal meeting with senior officers in the local authority to evaluate the school's progress since January. The adviser supporting the school (SCIL) carried out an informal review in March, but this did not draw conclusions about the school's progress or provide robust challenge to the leadership of the school.

The SCIL is continuing to work alongside the less experienced 'phase' leaders to develop their skills in monitoring the quality of teaching. Early years consultants from the local authority provided valuable advice and support for the early years leader when she requested this, and officers from the local authority recently moderated the school's judgements on children's progress in the three Reception classes and found them to be accurate.