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Lynn Dunn
Headteacher
Bhylls Acre Primary School
Bhylls Lane
Castlecroft
Wolverhampton
WV3 8DZ

Dear Mrs Dunn

Special measures monitoring inspection of Bhylls Acre Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17–18 June 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 March 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. Newly qualified teachers may be appointed in Key Stage 2.

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 Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils' progress accelerates, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use accurate assessment information to plan and provide engaging and challenging activities that build on what pupils already know, understand and can do
 - use correct grammatical terms when teaching writing, provide stimuli for writing that enthuse and motivate pupils, particularly boys, and ensure that pupils complete a good volume of work in the time provided
 - give younger pupils suitable reading books to build up their phonic skills
 - ensure that pupils learn to form letters correctly, develop neat and consistent handwriting and take pride in the presentation of their work
 - carefully check pupils' work in mathematics lessons, and quickly move pupils on to new learning as soon as they are ready
 - give pupils clear guidance when marking their work so that they learn from their mistakes and know what they need to do to improve.

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - establishing a leadership structure and team that has the capacity to drive the necessary improvements
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels develop the necessary skills in monitoring, evaluating and improving teaching
 - ensuring that teaching and support staff receive high quality training in order to develop their skills
 - assessing the impact of the support and guidance provided to pupils
 - improving the curriculum through giving pupils more opportunities to apply their calculations skills in solving mathematical problems
 - developing the skills of the governing body in evaluating pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching, so that it can hold school leaders to account more effectively for the impact of their work.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved. This should include a focus on the use and impact of pupil premium funding. Ofsted has made recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the school.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 17–18 June 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and held discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, pupils, parents, governors and the local authority's improvement consultant who is providing support for Bhylls Acre's leadership and teaching.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, Class 1 has been largely taught by supply teachers because of the sickness of the substantive teacher. A new teacher has been appointed to the Reception Class from September 2015, when the current Reception teacher will move up with her current class to teach Year 1. The governing body has set in place an action plan to guide its development following a review of governance. A number of new improvement strategies have been implemented through the school, including a new handwriting policy and a new scheme for mathematics. A teacher was appointed as mathematics leader in April 2015, when the Key Stage 1 leader took over responsibility from the headteacher for the coordination of the special educational needs provision. A Deputy Head Teacher was appointed in April 2015 to strengthen the leadership team. The contract for formal leadership support from a Local Leader of Education at a nearby school has come to an end.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement has further strengthened, and significantly so in areas identified as particular weaknesses in the last monitoring inspection. As a consequence, the school confidently predicts an increase in attainment in national tests and assessments at the end of Years 2 and 6 to above-average levels. Early years assessments for the end of the Reception Year have already been moderated and the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is above last year's national average.

Across the school, pupils' handwriting has substantially improved in response to consistently higher expectations for pupils' forming and joining of letters. Pupils are now much more careful in getting spellings right; they routinely correct misspellings in their work and independently consult dictionaries to ensure accuracy. In the Reception class, a focus on good pencil grip, and the frequent opportunities given to children to write in a wide range of activities, have sharply improved progress for many. Across the school, pupils increasingly enjoy the topics they write about, and are becoming more able to draw on what they have learned from books they have read to inform how they should write for different purposes. However, the standard of writing of boys generally still lags behind that of girls. This is reflected in pupils'

books and school attainment information, where some wide gaps are evident between the attainment of boys and girls in writing from Reception through to Year 6.

Pupils are still reading widely and often. They apply their phonics skills (understanding the sounds that letters make) well to help them. Termly reading tests again show striking improvements in the reading ages of some lower-attaining pupils. The new mathematics teaching scheme is having a significant impact on pupils' learning and engagement in that subject. Middle and higher-attainers, in particular, relish being able to move quickly to apply their understanding of basic number and mathematical concepts to the solution of more complex problems.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has continued to improve, so that, in the large majority of classes, pupils are consistently engaged and enthused. Teachers have worked with determination to implement new improvement strategies with great consistency and effect. There have been new approaches to phonics, regular reading, handwriting, the teaching of mathematics, and the use of 'working walls' to give pupils a reference point in developing their work; these have all made significant improvements to pupils' learning and progress. In Year 1, however, progress has been interrupted by the changes to staffing throughout the year.

In English and mathematics, each pupil has clearly defined targets for improvement; teachers' planning of lessons and activities is aimed clearly at ensuring that pupils make progress against those targets. As a consequence, activities generally build very effectively on what pupils already know, understand and can do. Just occasionally, there are instances where lower-attaining pupils need more structured guidance to help them make progress; for example, with vocabulary in English or access to physical resources in mathematics. The criteria for measuring pupils' success in individual activities are very clear, and enable pupils to reflect carefully on how to improve by assessing the quality of their own work and that of their peers. Teachers continue to mark pupils' work assiduously across all subjects. While teachers now ensure that pupils correct their spellings, pupils do not all consistently respond to teachers' suggestions for improvements in other aspects of their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils remain polite, courteous and helpful around the school and enthusiastic for learning in lessons. Attendance has improved further in the year to date, having been above average last year, and persistent absence is low. In a recent survey of parents and carers, 100% of respondents said their children felt safe, and this is reflected in the views of pupils who spoke with the inspector.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The school's capacity to improve continues to build under the clear-sighted and determined leadership of the headteacher. An able and confident leadership team has been established to share responsibilities for monitoring and developing the work of the school. This team has been highly successful in ensuring a consistent application of well-designed school improvement strategies across nearly all classes. Staff have remained highly cohesive around their leaders' vision for improvement. Leaders and governors understand that, to improve further, their evaluations of the effectiveness of teaching now needs to centre more on the impact of teaching on outcomes for key groups of pupils, and to use pupils' achievement data more precisely to inform their monitoring activity. The work of teaching assistants has some marked strengths but is variable, and has yet to be systematically evaluated in terms of its impact in securing good learning and progress for the pupils and classes they support.

Leaders have worked effectively with teachers to develop the quality of work across the wider curriculum. Pupils' books are showing that pupils are increasingly able to apply their literacy and number skills to improve the depth and accuracy of their work across a range of other subjects, such as geography, history, science, technology, and art and design. Displays of pupils' writing around the school celebrate pupils' enthusiasm for their work. There is, however, too little evidence, either in books or displays, of the school's values in promoting understanding and tolerance of the range of faiths and cultures within its diverse community.

Governors have continued to develop the effectiveness of their work. An action plan for governance sets out a clear set of improvement measures for the governing body, including better training, refinement of its structures, and increasingly purposeful contact between governors, school leaders and staff. The action plan has helpful milestones against which improvement can be measured and, at present, progress is on track. Minutes indicate that governors are holding leaders to account by asking challenging questions on many aspects of the school's performance, and governors have provided strong support to the headteacher in addressing elements of underperformance. The involvement of governors in half-termly 'core group' meetings enables them to get a rounded view of monitoring and evaluation information on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

External support

The local authority's improvement consultant has continued to play a central role in developing the school's capacity to improve. The consultant's evaluation reports to the 'core group' have drawn on a broad range of monitoring evidence to give a very clear update of the school's progress. In addition, the consultant has given much-

valued and effective support to those with new leadership responsibilities in developing their practice. The school continues to enjoy a close working relationship with other schools nearby to enable staff and leaders to see and share good practice.