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18 June 2015

Miss Angela Clarke
Acting Headteacher
Lower Meadow Primary School
Batemoor Road
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S8 8EE

Dear Miss Clarke

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lower Meadow Primary School

Following my visit with Rosemary Batty, Additional Inspector, to your school on 16 and 17 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 fourth 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

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 Sheffield.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly between Years 1 and 6 so that it is at least consistently good, in order to quicken progress and raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics, by making sure that:
 - inadequate teaching is eradicated
 - activities and tasks are carefully planned to enable pupils of all abilities to build on what they already know and can do, especially for the most able, so that all achieve highly
 - pupils have plenty of time to practise what they have learnt
 - teachers' expectations of the quality, quantity and presentation of pupils' work are always high
 - pupils have regular opportunities to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects
 - marking tells pupils what they know well, what they need to do next and teachers ensure that pupils act on the advice given.
- Raise standards and accelerate pupils' progress in reading by ensuring that:
 - pupils' knowledge and understanding of phonics (the sounds that letters and groups of letters represent) is reinforced throughout the day, as well as in phonics lessons
 - there is a clear purpose to guided reading sessions so that all pupils can add to their reading and comprehension skills
 - pupils supported through the pupil premium funding, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, receive specific support relevant to their particular needs.
- Improve pupils' behaviour in lessons so that it is good or better by making sure that:
 - teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning from the start to the end of lessons
 - teaching is interesting and makes pupils want to learn.
- Make sure that leaders and managers at all levels, including governors, quickly acquire the skills to rapidly drive forward improvements in achievement and teaching, so that:
 - all leaders can check the quality of teaching much more rigorously in order to be clear how well pupils are learning
 - all leaders are clear about what actions are necessary to improve learning and to make sure teaching builds well on what pupils already know and can do
 - the governing body has a much better understanding of the school's work, particularly pupils' achievement and teaching, so that they can challenge senior and middle leaders about its performance.

An external review of governance should be undertaken, to include a specific focus on the impact of pupil premium funding, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance can be improved.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 16 to 17 June 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, middle leaders, a group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors made visits to lessons jointly with senior leaders, spoke to parents at the school's breakfast club and scrutinised achievement and attendance data. During the monitoring inspection, Year 6 pupils and staff were out of school on a residential visit.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection the headteacher has left the school. The deputy headteacher continues to lead the school as acting headteacher. The governors intend to recruit a new headteacher early next term.

A middle leader has returned from a period of sickness absence. A safeguarding liaison officer has been appointed and has taken up post. Two newly qualified teachers have been appointed and begun teaching in Key Stage 1. Two other newly qualified teachers have been appointed to teach in lower Key Stage 2 and will join the school in July. In addition, two experienced teachers have been seconded to the school for one year beginning from September. Further teachers have been appointed on part-time contracts to release middle and senior leaders to support new teachers and to work in the Reception Year. Two new parent governors have been appointed.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils across the school continue to make better progress than in recent years, but not enough progress to overcome weaker teaching in the past. As a result, attainment at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 remains below the national average. Recent assessment data suggest the school in 2015 will be below the government's current floor standard in primary schools for attainment and progress, by the end of Year 6.

In the early years, the proportion of pupils making expected or good progress is rising. As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level of development by the end of the Reception Year has increased to be in line with the national average. Teachers have improved the resources in the outdoor area so that they contribute more effectively to pupils' language and number development. Good teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) in both the Nursery and Reception Year is helping the majority of pupils to acquire sound reading skills by the time they enter Year 1.

Standards attained at the end of Key Stage 1 have also risen, particularly in reading and mathematics, where they are now close to national averages. However, standards in writing remain lower, reflecting the weaker teaching of language skills in the key stage over the last two years. In order to address this, leaders have introduced a new programme to better develop pupils' reading and writing skills. Following training, teachers and support staff have begun to deliver the programme confidently and, although at an early stage, this has begun to accelerate the progress pupils are making. Teaching assistants now play a more active role, which is allowing pupils to be taught in smaller groups. Most pupils are responding well to the new teaching approaches. Some parents told inspectors their children have become more enthusiastic readers at home because of the new programme. Pupils that did not attain the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check last year are benefitting from the more focused teaching they receive and are now reading fluently. The classroom environments have also been improved with stronger displays of pupils' work and better resources designed to support their learning.

In Key Stage 2, pupils are also making better progress in reading and writing. However, progress in mathematics is mixed. Pupils that enter Key Stage 2 with lower levels of attainment in mathematics make poor progress, but the most able pupils do relatively well. Because of this, the school has revised the way it groups pupils for mathematics lessons and is preparing training materials to support teachers new to the school. Improving rates of progress in mathematics remains a key area for improvement.

The school's tracking data continues to show disadvantaged pupils are making similar progress and attaining similar outcomes to other pupils in the school, although their attainment is below that of other pupils nationally.

The quality of teaching

The school has been successful in recruiting a number of new teachers to the school, some of which have already taken up post. Other new appointments will join the school in July or in September, from when the school should benefit from settled staffing. Staffing is, therefore, currently in a transitional phase, with a number of supply teachers still working in the school. Consequently, the quality of teaching remains inconsistent, with some teaching resulting in slow pupils' progress over time.

In the early years, teaching continues to be stronger and support from teaching assistants is also good. In Key Stage 1, there are three teachers that are all relatively new to the school. All have been trained in how to teach reading and writing and are delivering the school's programme confidently. The key stage leader is systematically addressing areas for improvement and this is bringing greater consistency to teaching.

In Key Stage 2, a number of new teachers will join the school shortly. A key area for improvement will be to strengthen the teaching of mathematics, as some teachers currently in the school have not had sufficiently strong subject knowledge to help pupils make rapid progress. Middle leaders will have a key role to play in supporting new teachers to quickly acquire the skills to plan and deliver lessons that deepen pupils' knowledge of mathematical concepts.

Teaching assistants across the school are making a more significant contribution to pupils' learning and have benefitted from the training they have received.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Attendance levels in the school have only improved marginally since the last monitoring inspection. Over the year to date, attendance remains below the national average and continues to be lower amongst younger pupils. In order to strengthen the school's approach to tackling absence a safeguarding liaison officer has been appointed, and has already started to work closely with a number of families. In addition, better systems for recording and analysing patterns in attendance have been established, although leaders are yet to complete a thorough analysis of patterns and trends in attendance. This analysis needs to be done in order to develop more sophisticated and creative strategies to improve attendance.

There continues to be a positive climate for learning in the school, although some pupils occasionally display negative attitudes when the work provided for them is too easy. For example, in some lessons teachers do not check regularly enough on pupils' progress and some pupils lose interest and do not complete enough work. Pupils' behave well at social times and many take part enthusiastically in organised sports and games. Others make good use of play resources and cooperate effectively with one another to create their own games. Most pupils are a credit to the school. They are polite and courteous and take pride in the work on display around the school.

The school continues to meet statutory safeguarding requirements. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding has recently worked with leaders to complete the annual safeguarding audit to a thorough standard. The necessary checks have been made on the new members of staff that have been appointed.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting headteacher has successfully managed to recruit a number of new teachers to vacant posts so that, from September onwards, there will be stable staffing in the school. The new appointments represent a considerable step forwards, and offers an opportunity for leaders to establish consistently good teaching across the school. However, leaders and governors have recognised the

new teachers will need good induction and training so that their teaching quickly develops to meet the needs of pupils at the school. Mentoring from experienced teachers has been arranged and an additional teacher has been employed to ensure there is sufficient cover in place for new teachers to work regularly with their mentors and with middle leaders. Opportunities for new teachers to visit good and outstanding schools to learn from best practice elsewhere are also being planned. Despite the current turbulence in staffing, the school continues to provide a positive climate for learning.

The new programme introduced to support the development of reading and writing skills, particularly within early years and Key Stage 1, has got off to a good start. Teachers and teaching assistants have quickly taken on board new approaches and are delivering the programme consistently well. Early evidence indicates the programme is already supporting better progress in reading and writing.

Governors continue to monitor the school's progress systematically. A number of governors regularly visit the school and checks are made on a weekly basis to see whether planned actions have been completed. As a result, governors have a detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The governors and staff are currently evaluating the impact of the school's existing plans for improvement and have begun work on planning the school's ongoing improvement over the next three years. Governors are acutely aware of the need to support new teachers effectively so that they settle quickly and thrive. Because of this, one member of the governing body is focusing on ensuring there are good arrangements in place to support staff welfare, as staff absence has been a problem in the past.

Plans regarding the possible conversion to academy status have not progressed since the last monitoring inspection.

External support

The local authority continues to make regular visits to the school to check on the progress being made. The link adviser has been helpful in brokering the release of two experienced teachers from other schools to work full-time in the school next year.

Colleagues from Abbey Lane Primary School and Greengate Lane Primary School have continued to work closely with the school and support ongoing work, including the development of mathematics teaching, the school's programme for the teaching of reading and writing and for moderation of assessments. In addition, Meadowhead School has provided support to strengthen the school's strategy to improve attendance.