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Louise Venables
Headteacher
Cherry Tree Primary School and Speech and Language Unit
Holt Drive
Mersea Road
Colchester
CO2 0BG

Dear Mrs Venables

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cherry Tree Primary School and Speech and Language Unit

Following my visit with John Lucas, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 23–24 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 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 not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers 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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Essex local authority.

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching so that it is all at least good by:
 - ensuring that teachers expect more from their pupils, including the more able, and encourage them to aim for much higher standards, especially in writing and mathematics
 - providing work that engages pupils' interest and attention, particularly that of boys
 - insisting that pupils concentrate in lessons and pay careful attention to what their teachers are saying
 - giving consistently clear guidance to pupils on what they need to do to improve their work and checking that pupils act on the advice given
 - providing effective training for staff in the teaching of mathematics
 - improving the work of teaching assistants.
- Raise achievement, especially in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - setting clear expectations for the standard of presentation of pupils' work
 - reinforcing pupils' understanding of the sounds that letters make (phonics) as they move up the school so that their reading skills continue to develop
 - ensuring that the rules of spelling, grammar and punctuation are understood and accurately applied by all pupils
 - encouraging pupils to write at length
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to use their knowledge and practise their skills in mathematics
 - using data from assessments to plan work which helps pupils to make more rapid progress by accurately identifying their specific learning needs, especially those eligible for the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, as well as pupils who join at times other than the usual starting dates.
- Improve all levels of leadership and management, including governance, by making sure that:
 - leaders' evaluations of achievement and teaching are accurate and used for improvement
 - the effectiveness of action plans is regularly reviewed so that they result in more rapid and demonstrable improvements
 - the position regarding the leadership of the Speech and Language Unit is swiftly resolved

- leaders are identified for subjects other than English and mathematics so that all the requirements of the new curriculum are planned for and met
- governors hold leaders and managers stringently to account for the quality of teaching, and pupils' progress and attainment.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 23-24 June 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, visited lessons, some jointly with the headteacher, and evaluated learning in pupils' books. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's monitoring of its own work, pupils' progress data, and records of meetings, attendance records, behaviour records, and safeguarding requirements in the school. Inspectors met with the headteacher, subject leaders, staff, pupils, parents, and a representative of the Interim Executive Board, a representative of the local authority and also the executive headteacher from the new academy trust.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit on 20 – 21 January 2015, there have been changes to the leadership of the school. The acting headteacher left at Easter, together with a seconded teacher, who was leader of the Speech and Language unit and Head of behaviour.

From 1 April 2015, a new substantive headteacher started at the school. A new teacher also started in the Early Years. A new family support worker was employed and started in the summer term. The existing SenCo has been appointed as the Head of the Speech and Language unit. All other staff remain the same.

The school was due to convert to an academy in April 2015. This process will now be completed on 1 September 2015.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Evidence seen during this monitoring inspection indicates that standards for all groups of pupils have declined since the last visit, and remain woefully low in comparison to their peers nationally. Pupils are not making the accelerated progress needed to make up for the inadequate teaching they received in previous years, especially the most-able pupils.

The proportion of pupils, in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, that are on course to attain the required level in reading, writing and mathematics, continues to be significantly below the national average, and falling further still. Standards in spelling, punctuation and grammar are not improving fast enough. Disadvantaged and disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs continue to perform far less well than their classmates and do not make enough progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

The presentation in pupils' books is still widely variable, and often of a very poor quality. This is because adults do not model what is expected of them, nor demand

high standards. Too little is still expected of the pupils in terms of the quality and quantity of work, particularly in writing and mathematics. As a result, the vast majority produce a minimum amount of work to a standard well beneath their capabilities.

Assessment remains a concern as inaccuracies have still not been eradicated. Teachers are over-generous in their evaluation of the achievement of pupils in their class. As a result, pupils are still not participating in appropriately planned and interesting activities that help them achieve well. Pupils rarely see work of a high quality that would inspire them to achieve the same.

Achievement is improving in the early years, following the recent changes to the teaching. Children have a daily writing routine at the start of their day. Writing is valued, and adults provide opportunities and encouragement to children to record their learning in interesting ways. As a consequence, the proportion of pupils able to write at the required level for their age has increased significantly, over a relatively short period of time.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has simply not improved fast or well enough since the last visit. Widespread weaknesses in teaching remain, with the individual needs of pupils, not being adequately catered for during the school day. Teaching seen during this monitoring visit confirms this to be the case. Lessons are often very dull, and do not focus on providing appropriate interest and enjoyment, for individuals or groups of pupils. Pupils still do not receive the full range of curriculum subjects on a regular basis. Teachers do not ensure that pupils receive spiritual, social, moral and cultural education sufficiently well. As a result, pupils are not developing sufficient understanding, respect and tolerance of each other and adults.

Teachers are not using assessment information skilfully enough to plan lessons that ensure pupils are appropriately challenged. They do not choose resources precisely enough to help encourage independence and achievement. Key skills in literacy and mathematics are not reinforced in other subjects as much as they should be, which markedly restricts pupils' progress. For example, in one lesson, inappropriately difficult questions resulted in one pupil, opening and closing pieces of paper, because he was not able to read the mathematics problem written on them. On this occasion, no adult helped.

Feedback on learning does not help pupils to improve their work and has little or no impact. While pupils enjoy using the new pens to make corrections, the success of this new initiative is too variable, because not all adults expect the same quality of responses from pupils. As a result, some books are even more poorly presented than seen previously.

Since the last visit, the deployment of teaching assistants has not improved. Training has been provided for staff to effectively and positively deal with behaviour issues. However, many assistants choose not to put school policy into practice. Too many adults were seen choosing inappropriate actions when dealing with poor behaviour, which resulted in escalating situations.

On a very few occasions, where teaching assistants work well, they are able to use good questioning skills that help pupils understand tasks. However, they are mostly used to support behaviour, rather than extend pupils' learning.

Where assessment is used effectively, children respond well and make progress. Children in the early years are making significant gains in all areas of their curriculum. In one successful example, children were able to gain first-hand experience by 'washing' a real car. The teacher had planned a sequence of lessons around the theme of 'cars' and this activity resulted in boys showing enthusiasm and skill as they developed their speaking and listening. The lessons included many opportunities to record their experiences, and extend their learning further.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

A small minority of pupils, particularly boys, continue to be very naughty. This is due to an absence of clear structure and lack of consistency on the part of adults, including teaching assistants. On too many occasions the inappropriate responses of staff escalate situations further, resulting in too many major incidents.

Pupils and their parents are not confident that adults deal well with situations to resolve bullying incidents, which they say are very frequent in the school. Name calling is an accepted part of a pupil's school life, and adults do not resolve these incidents in a consistent and sensitive way.

Pupils continue to work hard only when directly supervised. They have very few strategies or opportunities to develop their ability to persevere. Too many staff have allowed a culture of low expectations and poor guidance for pupils to continue for too long.

Attendance continues to be too low in the school. Exclusions have fallen during this term, but the behaviour issues highlighted in the full inspection have not been resolved.

The positive attitudes to learning and accelerated progress in early years demonstrates the capabilities of the children, when teaching is interesting and challenges the pupils, and where teachers appropriately command respect.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The new headteacher has a clear vision and ethos for the school. She acknowledges that the actions taken since April have not had enough impact. The leadership has not followed through on the school action plans, written after the last full inspection. The new headteacher has been side-tracked by other issues, and has not yet tackled the major weaknesses in teaching and learning that remain in the school. The leaders of subjects other than English and mathematics are not robust in monitoring the quality of subjects taught, and in holding teachers to account for the progress pupils make.

Since the last visit, the pupils for the Speech and Language Centre have moved location again. They are now based in a very small room inside the school building. This room is used for their intervention classes, and is not suitable for their learning needs, particularly in the case of those who have acute hearing difficulties. As a result, they no longer have opportunity to learn in the bright and more attractive space that was previously provided. When in class, their individual needs are not met well enough. Too often they are not included in the same opportunities as the rest of the class and so they do not make expected progress.

The evidence shows that whilst the Interim Executive Board has a reasonable knowledge of the school, it is not precise or decisive enough in its support and action. It has not robustly held the school to account during the transition to becoming an academy. Representatives of the Interim Executive Board acknowledge that they have relied on information from school leaders, and as a result recognise that progress since the last visit has not been adequate enough.

The one exception to this pattern is in early years, where leadership changes have resulted in improved behaviour. This has ensured that children are now enjoying their education and making accelerated progress.

External support

Although the local authority has supported the school since the previous visit, the preparation for school to become an academy has been a distraction. As a result, there has been little impact on improving the achievement of pupils. The positive changes seen in previous monitoring visits have not been sustained and developed.