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27 June 2015

Theresa Luter
Headteacher
Maple Grove Infant School
Maple Grove
March
PE15 8JT

Dear Mrs Luter

Special measures monitoring inspection of Maple Grove Infant School

Following my visit with Christine Senior, Additional Inspector, to your school on 24–25 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 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 Cambridgeshire.

Yours sincerely

Philip Mann
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and accelerate pupils' progress by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what different pupils can achieve and providing greater challenge, particularly for the most able
 - checking on pupils' progress and learning during lessons so that any problems are addressed promptly
 - ensuring the teaching and assessment of phonics (sounds that letters make) are consistently good across the school and pupils are able to use the knowledge to read with fluency
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop skills in writing and mathematics through different subjects.
- Increase the effectiveness of leadership at all levels by:
 - setting up systems to check the quality of teaching and achievement, to enable action to be taken quickly to rectify any areas of weakness
 - driving an ambitious vision of how the school needs to improve, with well-defined plans which are shared with staff and governors
 - ensuring any teacher with significant responsibilities makes improvement in their areas or subjects
 - giving leaders more training to improve their leadership skills in strategic planning, monitoring and self-review
 - ensuring that governors have access to the information they need to be able to check on how well the school is doing.
- Improve the effectiveness of the governing body by:
 - developing the ability of governors, in partnership with school leaders, to have a clear and aspirational vision for the school
 - ensuring that governors hold the leadership of the school to account for the continual improvement in standards
 - making sure that the appropriate checks are in place particularly regarding safeguarding policies and procedures.
- Improve behaviour so it is consistently good at all times by:
 - ensuring that procedures and policies for the management of any incident of racism or bullying are in place, and that staff are all confident in tackling these issues
 - making sure that pupils develop good learning habits so time in lessons is not wasted by low-level disruption.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 24–25 June 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the coordinator for those pupils who are disabled and those who have special educational needs, teachers with a specific responsibility for the early years and mathematics, a group of pupils from Year 2, parents, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority and the headteacher from the adjacent junior school.

Context

There are currently two teachers employed on temporary contracts. The school will formally close at the end of this term. All pupils currently registered with the school will be transferred to the adjacent junior school when it becomes Westwood Primary School on 1 September 2015. Two teachers and six teaching assistants currently employed at Maple Grove Infant School have been appointed to work in the primary school.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Analysis of progress data, the scrutiny of pupils' books and observation of teaching and learning in lessons confirms the establishment of an upwards trend of improvement in reading, writing and mathematics across the school. However, some variations in the achievement of different groups of pupils still exists in Key Stage 1 due to remaining weaknesses in teaching and a legacy of previous underachievement. Scrutiny of pupils' books in Year 2 confirms evidence of good progress in writing since the last monitoring visit. Attainment in writing is now broadly in line with nationally expected levels in Year 2. These pupils are writing at greater length for a range of different purposes. However, although presentation has improved, handwriting is not always neat in the pupils' books.

All pupils, including those who are disabled or have special educational needs, are making good progress in their phonics (the sounds letters make) with increased performance evident in the Year 1 screening check and the Year 2 retakes this year. This is an improvement on the findings of the previous inspection. Analysis of the latest teacher assessments for the Year 1 phonics screening check confirms good achievement and improved levels of performance to at least the national average. Pupils are applying their better phonic knowledge in helping them to read unfamiliar words in more complex text. As a result, pupils in Year 2 are keen to spell those more difficult words and use them in their writing. Letter formation is generally accurate but handwriting is not cursive in style. This is because not enough opportunities are taken, from an early age, to model correct letter formation in all phonics sessions to establish a cursive approach to writing from the outset in the Reception classes.

Achievement in mathematics is good as a result of effective leadership and good support from the local authority adviser. Pupils are developing their fluency in handling numbers and in solving practical problems. They show confidence in tackling mathematical investigations as a result of the introduction of the 'mathematical estimation tables' to each class. As a result of this initiative, pupils in Year 2 are keen to apply their mathematical skills through investigations and practical learning experiences; such as organising an array of numbers within a Carroll diagram.

All of the children in the early years are being well prepared for the next stage of their education in Key Stage 1. Children in these Reception classes achieve well, and this is borne out by an improving trend in the end-of-year assessments. Analysis of moderated teacher assessment data confirms that 69% of these children have attained a good level of development in all areas of learning. Good provision has led to a significant closing of gaps in attainment between those children eligible for the pupil premium, (extra government funding for looked after children and those known to be eligible for free school meals). Progress data confirm significant gains in all areas of learning for these children since the last monitoring visit and the reduction of gaps in attainment with other children in the year group.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching over time still requires improvement but there is evidence of good teaching in all year groups. In the most effective lessons in Key Stage 1, teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge in both English and mathematics. Often lessons progress at pace because learning is interspersed with short bursts of focused teaching input which accelerates the pupils' learning. Most teachers demonstrate good use of questioning to probe pupils' understanding and deepen their learning. Lessons are well resourced and technology is used well to support teaching and consolidate pupils' learning further. The teaching of mathematics is improving, with evidence of consistently good teaching in Year 2. However, some weaker teaching still exists within Year 1 due to insufficiently demanding lessons and insecure subject knowledge in English.

Phonics is taught well across the school. This is an improvement on the findings of the last inspection. Sessions move along at a brisk pace and resources are used well to support teaching. Teachers demonstrate better subject knowledge and an understanding of what constitutes good practice in the teaching of these important early literacy skills. Sessions are practical in nature and support assistants provide good teaching input and effective targeted support for less-able pupils and those who are more able and need more challenging activities.

Teachers use marking appropriately to provide feedback to pupils about what they need to do to improve. Pupils respond well to this and the good verbal guidance given to them by teachers and support staff in lessons. The progress of each pupil is

recorded carefully and the data gathered is used well to identify where extra support is needed to narrow gaps in achievement.

The quality of education and teaching in the early years has improved considerably since the last monitoring visit due to good leadership. Teamwork among the teachers and support staff is a strong feature in this year group. As a result, all of these children make good progress because a well-planned and balanced curriculum meets their particular learning needs. Play is purposeful and children respond well to adult-led activities, either inside the classrooms or in the recently improved and extensive outdoor play areas. Assessment is thorough. It is supported by regular observations and a growing involvement of parents.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Inspectors observed good behaviour in the vast majority of lessons, around the school and in the playground. Discussions with pupils in Year 2 confirm that they like being at school and have seen many improvements since the last monitoring visit. They say that the teachers provide more interesting things for them to do in lessons. Pupils are happy at school and generally feel safe. However, they say that some pupils can annoy them in lessons or in the playground but that adults tackle these issues quickly when they occur. These incidents and the action taken are recorded effectively in the school's behaviour log. Scrutiny of this confirms a reduction in the number of these incidents since the last monitoring visit.

When teaching is weak, pupils become inattentive and interrupt the learning of others. However, pupils are especially keen to learn when teaching moves at a brisk pace and teaching is good. These are characteristics of many of the lessons observed by inspectors. In most lessons, the teachers and support staff manage any low-level disruption or inattentiveness by pupils quickly in a subtle but effective manner. Pupils are eager to learn in these lessons. They are learning to take a pride in their work and presentation is improving. Pupils respond well to support from extra adults in class and in small-group sessions in other areas.

Attendance is below the national average at 94.35% for the current academic year. Safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Supported by the deputy headteacher, the headteacher has set high expectations of staff in pursuing the school improvements identified in the action plan. Together with the year group leaders, they adopted a very professional approach in driving forward improvements under very difficult circumstances related to the closure of the school at the end of this term. Teamwork is a strength, and staff have worked hard to improve the learning experiences for all pupils. This has led to a trend of improvement since the last monitoring visit.

School leaders have continued to address weaknesses in teaching through a programme of monitoring and extra support. The headteacher makes good use of regular observations of teaching and learning to identify strengths and areas for development for each teacher.

Middle leadership is improving. The effective year leader structure has helped to maintain an improving trend in educational provision and greater levels of consistency in teaching across the school. The leaders for mathematics and early years have led improvement effectively in their areas of responsibility. Their actions have had a positive impact on pupils' achievement and outcomes overall. The provision for disabled pupils and those who have special education needs is good due to effective leadership. The progress of these pupils is tracked well. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) provides good-quality support for staff and makes good use of a range of external professionals to support provision. This effective support is having a significant impact on the literacy skills of these pupils.

Governors have risen to the challenge of ensuring that school leaders tackle the key issues from the last inspection effectively during a period of staffing instability and imminent school closure. Individual governors have embraced their respective roles in monitoring the school's work through specific school visits. These are formally recorded and shared with the governing body to measure the impact of the action plan priorities on the outcomes of the pupils. As a result of good training, they make better use of data to monitor school improvement and ask challenging questions of school leaders about the progress made.

External support

The local authority has supported the school effectively in tackling the key issues from the last inspection. Local authority advisers for literacy, mathematics and the early years provide good levels of support for middle leaders and effective training for staff. As a result, teachers' confidence and competencies have improved since the last monitoring visit and pupils' achievement has improved. The progress of the school against the post-inspection action plan is monitored rigorously by the local authority implementation group (LAIG). The minutes from these meetings and local authority adviser visit notes confirm that the school has continued to improve on the key issues from the last inspection. Improvement advisers acknowledge several strengths within the leadership team.