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14 December 2015

Mrs Sonia Allen
Acting Headteacher
Hurst Hill Primary School
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West Midlands
WV14 9AJ

Dear Mrs Allen

Special measures monitoring inspection of Hurst Hill Primary School

Following my visit with Martin Pye, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 1–2 December 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 May 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint no more than 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 Dudley.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the progress of all groups of pupils so that it is at least good and pupils' attainment in English and mathematics is at least in line with national averages by:
 - setting appropriately challenging progress targets for all groups of pupils each term and holding teachers to account for ensuring they are met
 - monitoring teaching and providing clear feedback to teachers that enables them to improve their practice
 - ensuring the school's information on the attainment and progress of groups of pupils is accurate and revised half termly so that governors, school leaders and teachers have a clear and timely understanding of the performance of all pupils so they can monitor and take action to improve it.
- Improve learning and behaviour in and outside of lessons by:
 - ensuring the school's good behaviour policy is applied consistently across the school and that exclusions, instances of bullying and low level disruptive behaviour are reduced.
- Work with parents and external agencies to ensure all pupils benefit fully from the opportunities provided by:
 - working effectively with external agencies and parents to ensure the level of persistent absence is reduced to be in line with or below the national average
 - improving communication with parents so that all parents have confidence in the leadership of the school and know how to help improve their children's learning at home.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 1–2 December 2015

Evidence

In addition to observing parts of lessons and scrutinising pupils' work and progress, Her Majesty's Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, two parent governors and the Chair and Clerk of the Governing Body. Inspectors also met with senior and middle leaders, teachers, the executive headteacher and consultant headteacher of a partner primary school. The lead inspector met with a senior representative of the local authority. The inspectors spoke to some parents at the start of the first of two inspection days and meetings were held with pupils to discuss their work and progress and listen to their views.

Context

The acting headteacher, who is also the substantive deputy headteacher, is managing the school until the substantive headteacher returns from family leave. Two teachers have left and one temporary teacher has been appointed to cover a class. The partnership with an outstanding primary school continues and directly involves part-time support from its consultant headteacher and the executive headteacher of a local teaching school alliance.

Outcomes for pupils

There is a mixed picture to report following the results of the most recent, and yet to be validated, national test results. Pupils in Year 6 last year did not make enough progress in reading and mathematics in relation to their starting points when they were in Year 2 four years ago. Standards declined as a result, compared with the previous year.

On the other hand, national assessments show that pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 continue to do well as standards are rising in reading, writing and mathematics. National assessments also confirm that pupils in Year 1 continue to achieve well in their knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds they make). Across the school, writing standards are continuing to improve. The disappointing Year 6 results last year show that too many pupils fell short of their expected targets in reading and mathematics. Although the results indicated that some pupils underachieved, most of these had a lot of ground to catch up, reflecting weaknesses that existed in the school during and prior to the school being placed in special measures in May 2014.

Pupils' achievement in writing is improving in all classes but the quality of handwriting is inconsistent, particularly in some Key Stage 2 classes. The work displayed in classrooms and around the school models good quality and well-formed handwriting, but this is not always reflected in pupils' workbooks.

Standards are set to recover this year. Assessment information and work in pupils' books show that current Year 6 pupils are continuing to catch up on lost ground as reported during the last monitoring inspection in May 2015. Writing and mathematics work in pupils' books across the school show that more pupils than previously are reaching or exceeding age-related levels.

The most significant and consistent improvements have been in Key Stage 1, where standards by the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics are improving year-on-year. In addition, leaders and staff have worked very hard to eradicate weaknesses in early years provision. Reception children are doing much better than previously. The most recent national assessments show that an increasing proportion of children reach a good level of development in all areas of learning and the results compare favourably with national figures.

The gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school and nationally are closing in most classes, although there is still more work to be done to identify sooner when pupils fall behind, particularly in reading and mathematics.

Pupils with special educational needs are now doing well across the school. Leaders and staff monitor their progress diligently and effectively. Pupils with additional learning needs or difficulties are provided with the right level of support and timely interventions to help them reach their individual learning targets.

Currently, an increasing number of the most-able pupils are exceeding the levels expected for their age in most classes, reflecting the continuing and sustained improvements to teaching across the school. Nevertheless, some pupils should still be doing better, particularly in mathematics, as they are not always provided with sufficiently challenging work in lessons.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching continues to improve. Parents and carers agree, as nearly all spoken to by inspectors feel that their children are doing much better now than previously. They are right. Teachers and support staff set higher expectations for both behaviour and work. As a result, pupils work hard, complete more tasks and engage in their learning more than previously. This improves pupils' attitudes and resilience to learning so they are able to persevere with tasks and work more productively. Very little time is wasted in lessons and very rarely are lessons disrupted by inattention or poor behaviour. This is a significant improvement.

Lesson observations, pupils' work in books and assessments of their progress show that there is some consistently strong teaching in a small number of classes and an increasing amount that is good in others. In the Year 2 and Year 6 classes, the most consistently effective teaching enables pupils to make good progress over short periods of time. This is evident in the quality of pupils' work and the rapid progress

they are making towards their learning targets. In most other classes, there is effective teaching and support, particularly for pupils with special educational needs or those who find learning difficult. However, there are instances in some lessons where pupils are not being challenged enough or the work they complete independently is not matched to their capabilities. In mathematics books, for example, some pupils complete too many number calculations that are too easy before moving on to harder work. Teaching is at its best when teachers use assessment information about each pupil to plan appropriate starting points at the beginning of lessons so that the work provided for them extends their knowledge and understanding and matches their abilities.

Teachers' marking has improved and pupils' books show that teachers are intervening more during lessons to support and correct pupils' work. This increased intervention is helping most pupils to improve their writing and mathematics work, although mathematics workbooks show that some pupils still make avoidable and unnecessary calculation errors.

Progress in reading is slower than in writing because pupils are still not reading often or widely enough. This slows their progress. Pupils are not applying and practising their reading skills often enough. In addition, the lack of experience of a range of authors or genres limits pupils' vocabulary as some find it difficult to explain fully, and in complete sentences, when answering questions. The school has an attractive library but this is underused as pupils have limited access to it. Pupils also say that adults sometimes read to them, but this is not routine and too infrequent for pupils to experience a broader range of literature.

Teachers are now using more accurate assessments than previously to group pupils by ability. This is especially important for the small number of mixed-age classes as, in these classes, teachers are grouping pupils of different ages well to make sure that the work they undertake is appropriate for their age and ability. Leaders and staff are increasingly using and refining assessment information about pupils' learning and progress in line with the new National Curriculum. This sets out programmes of study for each year group rather than levels for them to aim for. Information and data about pupils' progress and performance are accessible to leaders, teachers and governors, so the staff are now in a stronger position than previously to be able to extract information about the progress of particular groups and individuals. Nonetheless, leaders and governors are not analysing assessment information robustly or often enough to identify those pupils who are falling short of their expected learning targets.

Assessments and close monitoring are being used well to plan work and interventions for pupils with special educational needs. This is well managed and enables teachers to track how well pupils are doing towards their individual learning targets.

In the early years, children in the Reception Year are making much better progress than previously in reading, writing and mathematics. This is a transformation and a significant improvement since previous monitoring inspections. The expert advice of a consultant headteacher and the intelligent deployment of staff and resources are having a very positive effect on early years teaching and provision. The children are now thriving in a supportive and stimulating learning environment, enabling them to grow in confidence and become increasingly independent. Sometimes, adults over-direct children, but the range of work and much improved organisation of children into smaller working groups are of enormous benefit to children's learning experiences. Children work and play using more stimulating resources and experience a broad and rich variety of topics and stories. During the inspection, for example, one child gushed with pride as he shared his 'letter to Santa' with an inspector, showing how proud and ready he was to hand over his letter to the 'Jolly Postman' (a children's book they read at the time). This, and many other examples, illustrates how well learning for the youngest children has improved in a short period of time.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are usually engaged and attentive in lessons. There is very little inappropriate behaviour because teachers are well versed in applying the school's behaviour code in classrooms consistently well. Improvements to teaching and higher expectations for work and progress are also helping pupils to behave and learn better. Parents also confirm this, and many pupils told inspectors that they are expected to learn more and work hard.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in attendance rates that are improving well and are in line with the national average. Persistent absence rates are much lower than previously, although a small number of families are not sending their children to school on time in the morning. Leaders and staff are doing as much as they can to address lateness with some indications that this is improving.

Pupils are courteous and respectful and wear their school uniform with pride. There is a positive climate for learning in classrooms and around the school, and pupils are keen to do their best. Pupils are usually courteous and respectful to others and support each other during lessons and breaktimes. Older 'reading buddies', for example, help younger children by hearing them read and this is helping the younger children to grow in confidence when reading aloud to others.

Pupils are encouraged to be active and to eat healthily. Physical education (PE) lessons are well managed and overseen by sports coaches, paid for by the additional primary school sports funding. Pupils enjoy having regular and active PE lessons and they are usually well turned-out in their PE uniform, although a small number of pupils miss PE lessons if they either forget to bring their kit or suitable clothing, or come to school with recently pierced ears making it hazardous for pupils to take

part. Leaders are currently working with some families to encourage them to make sure that pupils are prepared and suitably dressed for PE.

Pupils learn about fairness and moral values through assemblies and religious education. They learn about major world faiths, customs and cultures which prepares them well for life beyond school in modern multicultural and multifaith Britain. The work displayed around the school shows that pupils are taught to respect and appreciate British values of tolerance, respect and democracy.

Reception children are now much better engaged and able to sustain each activity they choose, rather than what happened during previous monitoring inspections when some children used to flit from one activity to another.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting headteacher is very committed, works hard and has managed the school well. As reported during previous monitoring inspections, leaders and staff have continued to secure improvements to teaching and learning. The recommendations set out in the previous monitoring inspection have been acted upon effectively. Early years provision, for example, is now much more effective than previously and children are now getting a much improved quality of education as a result.

Leaders have managed staff appointments well. The intelligent deployment of teaching and support staff, particularly in mixed-age classes, has minimised any disruption to pupils' learning and is building on the work previously done to improve teaching still further.

The executive headteacher and consultant headteacher have been working closely with the substantive and acting headteachers to monitor, support and challenge teachers and support staff. The combined efforts of leaders, staff and governors during the monitoring inspections while the school has been in special measures have eliminated all inadequate teaching.

Nevertheless, there is still work to do to make sure that current improvements are sustained. There remain some significant weaknesses because the substantive headteacher, senior leaders and governors have recently presented an unrealistic and inaccurate appraisal of the school's effectiveness. Although assessments of pupils' learning and progress, as reported earlier, are much sharper and more accurate than previously, leaders are not carrying out regular, systematic or robust analyses of what the assessment information is presenting to them. This makes it difficult for leaders and staff to check and evaluate how well, or how poorly, pupils are doing. This partly explains why last year's national test results for Year 6 were disappointing, and in some respects unexpected, as leaders did not identify soon enough the reasons why some pupils underachieved.

With the effective support and guidance of senior leaders from the partner primary school, self-evaluation and forward planning are being modified so that a more accurate evaluation of the impact of teaching on pupil outcomes is now being communicated to staff and governors. This is providing a more realistic and accurate appraisal of the quality of teaching and learning to date.

The governing body has played its part in securing and overseeing improvements so far. Nonetheless, there remain some significant weaknesses in governance, particularly the way that the governing body is led and managed. The governing body is not challenging leaders and staff enough. Minutes of governor meetings do not reflect, or address with any sense of urgency, the most immediate priority to deal with remaining pockets of underachievement. Despite some refinements to committees and the structure of the governing body, changes have been cosmetic. A lack of robust monitoring or clear leadership from the governing board means that the right level of scrutiny or challenge to the school's leaders and staff is not being provided.

External support

The local authority has been instrumental in securing effective support and challenge to the school's leaders and staff. The role of the teaching school alliance, and a partner primary school within this alliance, has been very productive over the last two monitoring inspections. The involvement of the executive headteacher and consultant headteacher has been highly effective in enabling teachers and staff with management responsibilities to improve provision in their respective areas of responsibility. This is best demonstrated in early years provision where the quality of teaching and learning have been transformed. Early years provision is now building secure foundations for the youngest children in readiness for the good teaching and support that is also evident in Key Stage 1. The involvement of a national leader of governance who also clerks for the governing body has been effective and provides an accurate self-evaluation of their impact on school improvement. This self-review, rightly, recognises the need to hold the leadership and oversight of governance to account in order that the school can sustain its current programme of improvements to teaching and pupil outcomes.

Priority for further improvement

- As a matter of urgency, and by the time of the next monitoring inspection, make sure that the governing body improves the way it and its committees are led to:
 - enable governors to undertake a more effective and strategic role that will secure sustained improvement to pupil outcomes in all classes
 - monitor the analysis of pupil assessment information presented to governors systematically and to be more proactive and robust when checking pupil achievement

- offer greater challenge to the school's leaders and staff so that they are held more accountable for standards and achievement.