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Mrs Sally Bloomer
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Bloomer

Special measures monitoring inspection of Woodside Community School

Following my visit to your school on 15 and 16 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in April 2015.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plans are fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Dudley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Pye
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2015

- Improve teaching and accelerate pupils' progress so that they reach at least average standards by the time they leave Year 6 by ensuring that teachers:
 - deal effectively with low-level disruption in Key Stage 2
 - check more frequently that pupils in all years are working hard
 - assess pupils' work accurately in Key Stage 2
 - set pupils suitably demanding tasks in Key Stage 2 and the early years
 - provide more opportunities for pupils to speak at length.

- Improve behaviour and reduce the number of incidents of physical violence towards other pupils, so that fewer pupils are excluded from school, by:
 - checking the current strategies for helping individual pupils modify their behaviour to find out which ones work best
 - using the most successful approaches more frequently
 - ensuring pupils attend the extra classes that are provided for them
 - encouraging pupils to report racist and derogatory language.

- Improve attendance to at least the national average by:
 - writing to parents when their child's attendance falls below 92%
 - analysing attendance data in greater depth to identify emerging patterns of poor attendance
 - analysing data on the attendance of disadvantaged pupils in order to target extra funding at helping them to attend more frequently.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - setting more demanding targets for teachers' performance that include improving pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics
 - taking stronger and more decisive actions more quickly when a teacher's performance is found to be inadequate
 - using all available evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching more accurately
 - developing the role of subject and other leaders in checking the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in their areas of responsibility
 - ensuring teachers cover the requirements of the National Curriculum in full at Key Stage 2
 - checking the effectiveness of extra support outside of lessons for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs more closely and modifying such support when it is clear that it is not proving successful
 - making more effective use of the extra pupil premium funds to accelerate the progress and improve the behaviour and attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

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 management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 December 2015

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, subject leaders, the pastoral support team, pupils, governors and a representative from the local authority. In addition, the inspector examined several school documents and had a telephone conversation with a national leader in education who is supporting the school.

This monitoring inspection was carried out in the last week of the autumn term so the normal teaching timetable had been changed because of Christmas activities. Due to these seasonal events, it was not possible to observe much teaching and learning in classrooms. Instead, the inspector looked at pupils' work and made short visits to classrooms.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in April 2015, a new early years leader has been appointed. The school leadership team has been restructured. An assistant headteacher post has been created and this post will be filled from 1 February 2016. Another new teacher is due to start in January 2016. Existing members of staff have been appointed as new subject leaders for English, mathematics and science. Two teachers are due to leave at the end of the autumn term 2015. The Key Stage 1 leader is absent on family leave and her class is being covered by a temporary teacher.

Outcomes for pupils

In the 2015 end of Key Stage 1 assessments, standards in reading, writing and mathematics rose and were in line with the national averages for writing and mathematics and just a bit below average in reading. Over the past three years, standards at the end of Key Stage 1 have risen year after year. It is also worth noting that the results from the Year 1 phonics (letters and sounds) screening check have also risen over time. In 2015, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard for their age was above the national figure. Within the early years, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development also rose in 2015.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 2, however, are still some way below average. At the end of Year 6 in 2015, there was little difference between the standards reached by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils at the school. Both groups were around a year behind other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.

Looking at the school's current work, it is clear that expectations are on the up and pupils' progress is being tracked more carefully than before. Work in pupils' books shows promise and indicates that standards are rising. Even so, there is still some way to go in order to make sure pupils in Year 3 are given every chance to build successfully on their previous learning in Key Stage 1. In addition, pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 have some catching up to do if they are to achieve in line with their capabilities.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Checks on books and school records, and conversations with pupils and staff, confirm that teachers' expectations of what can be achieved in lessons are rising. Pupils' attitudes to learning have also improved. During this monitoring inspection, no incidents of disruptive behaviour in class were observed and the school's behaviour logs show that poor behaviour has reduced. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, teachers' use of assessment information to plan lessons has improved. Consequently, the work given to pupils is more closely matched to their learning needs, so they are more purposeful and productive in lessons. Pupils are working harder and getting more done in the time available. Secondly, clear and consistent guidance for classroom behaviour is in place. In every classroom, a code of conduct is displayed for all to see and this is clearly bringing benefits.

Leaders are now doing more to check on the quality of teaching and learning. This term, the newly appointed subject leaders have checked teachers' planning and pupils' books. Teachers have received feedback about their work and been given targets for improvement that are followed up with further checks. This is helping to iron out inconsistencies in practice and is raising standards. Already, the approach to marking, for example, is more consistent. Having said this, some staff are more receptive to change than others so improvements are happening more quickly in some classes than in others. In Year 3, for instance, some extra challenge and support has been put in place to help the pace of improvement in this year group keep pace with the improvements seen elsewhere.

The early years leader has made a very positive start to raising standards in the early years classes. The learning environment has been improved and staff have been presented with examples of effective practice to follow.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Improvements seen in pupils' attitudes to learning are also apparent in their general conduct. Older pupils talk with proud enthusiasm about the roles and responsibilities they undertake in school. A recently introduced team-point system, which rewards good behaviour and helpful actions, has created a sense of team spirit and

responsibility. The head boy and head girl present themselves as positive role models and gain respect from others. On the playground, pupils usually get on well with one another and know that adults will help them if problems arise. There is some rough play outside and pupils report that fights do happen when tempers flare. However, they also say that this does not happen often. School records show that staff are keeping a careful track of any poor behaviour and are particularly alert to racist or any type of unpleasant language. This term, there have been eight recorded incidents of unpleasant language being used. While school staff challenge such behaviour, it is still unacceptable that it happens. Parents and school must work together to eradicate it.

Pupils who find it hard to cope with aspects of school life benefit from increasingly effective support. School leaders have found that the lunchtime break can be a particularly difficult time for those pupils who find it hard to get along with others. In response, they have provided the 'rainbow room' with its 'snoozelum' annex. These rooms and the support and supervision on offer provide pupils with a calm, safe place where they can be peaceful. For pupils who need more active occupations, the school puts on a range of lunchtime clubs such as bench-ball or dance where pupils can channel their energy in positive ways.

The pastoral support team reviews the effectiveness of these activities. Staff refine provision when necessary and aim to make sure pupils are making the most of the support provided for them. Their efforts are yielding results; since the full inspection in April 2015, exclusions have reduced. This term, there have been two fixed-term exclusions and no permanent exclusions. This is a reduction from the seven fixed-term exclusions and one permanent exclusion seen in the spring term of this year.

Attendance from September to December has been better than it was in the last academic year. The extended services manager, school attendance officer and learning mentor keep a close eye on pupils' attendance and punctuality in order to spot any patterns. Their record keeping is meticulous. Since September 2015, these staff have started to make home visits to follow up any unexplained absences. In the mornings, staff are out on the playground to check that pupils turn up on time. They look out for those who are late and ask questions to find out why. While attendance is improving, there is still much to do to boost the attendance of some pupils. Currently, there are still too many pupils who miss too much school without good reason. They miss learning time and this slows their progress.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher provides down-to-earth, plain-speaking leadership. Her teamwork with the deputy headteacher presents a 'can do' attitude to those they lead.

Together, these two senior leaders work hard to make sure everyone is on board with the key messages about the need for school improvement. In the main, teachers and teaching assistants appear to be united in their aim to lift standards to where they should be. However, here and there, some reluctance to embrace change persists. Specifically, a small number of staff do not apply school policies, in lesson planning for example, in line with agreed requirements. In places, staff have found it difficult to modify their own ways of working when presented with examples of effective practice for them to follow. Where staff have shown reluctance to review the way they work or raise their expectations of what pupils can do, senior leaders have been clear that this cannot continue. Following up progress against this particular aspect of leadership and management and its impact on the quality and consistency of classroom practice will be a key focus during the next monitoring inspection in the spring term 2016.

Newly appointed subject leaders are still finding their way in their roles. They have created worthwhile action plans and have checked teachers' planning and pupils' books to make sure the curriculum is being covered. They know that some teachers interpret school policies in different ways but are not sure if this makes a difference to the quality of teaching and learning in different classes. Their role in finding out this information and giving informed, unambiguous feedback to teachers is yet to be fully developed. They have had some training but more is needed if they are to fulfil the promise that they show. Further down the school, the early years leader models effective practice in what she says and does. She has set out clear and ambitious expectations and is now developing her leadership skills in order to get the best from everyone.

Senior leaders meet with teachers every half term to check assessment information and pupils' work, review progress and set new targets. Teachers are given goals to aim for and, increasingly, these are linked to standards achieved in the classroom and demand more from staff and pupils.

During the autumn term, leaders and staff experimented with a new approach to whole-school assessment. This was not particularly successful. On the one hand, it helped staff to get to grips with the demands of the new National Curriculum and age-related expectations. On the other hand, it did not prove to be successful in tracking progress because the measures involved were not particularly meaningful to staff or pupils. This system has now been abandoned. A new approach has been researched and will be implemented from January 2016. While leaders have evidently made improving assessment a top priority, there is still a lot more work to be done to establish a reliable, accurate and manageable system.

Support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is increasingly effective. The special educational needs leader keeps track of pupils' needs and the quality of the support provided. Since September 2015, the school has introduced 'precision teaching sessions' at the beginning of each day. These are one-to-one teaching sessions that focus on specific skills. The sessions are led by teaching assistants and last for about 30 minutes. School records show that this support is making a difference. Pupils are involved in analysing and recording their progress and are able to see how the support is helping them. This is boosting their confidence and helping them to achieve more in class.

A review of the use of pupil premium has been completed and its findings are helpful. An action plan drawn up as a result of this review was updated in October 2015. There is now a named lead governor with responsibility for pupil premium. Indeed, all governors have a specific responsibility. They meet regularly with school staff and make visits to school to check on the progress being made in different areas of teaching, learning and school leadership.

External support

External support is proving to be effective. The local authority's education improvement adviser has made regular visits to the school. She has a well-informed understanding of the progress made to date and what needs to be done next. The local authority has provided support for newly appointed subject leaders for mathematics and science to help them develop their leadership skills. In addition, the school is receiving support from two local schools, including a teaching school led by a national leader in education. This support is helping to strengthen middle leadership in particular.