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Miss Jo Donnellan
Interim Headteacher
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Guinions Road
High Wycombe
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Dear Miss Donnellan

Special measures monitoring inspection of Beechview School

Following my visit to your school on 20–21 January 2016, 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 third monitoring inspection since the school again became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 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 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 Buckinghamshire.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good or better by ensuring that teachers:
 - provide tasks that take full account of pupils' prior learning and have enough challenge for pupils of varying abilities
 - plan lessons which inspire pupils to learn as well as they can
 - make regular checks to assess accurately how well pupils are learning
 - give pupils opportunities to respond to advice given in marking and feedback.
- Accelerate pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics by making sure that they:
 - have more opportunities to apply mathematical skills to problem-solving activities
 - read more regularly to adults
 - have regular opportunities to write at length and put into practice the skills they are developing
 - always record and present their work accurately and with care.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - including clear measures of success in plans, so that all leaders can more readily check the rate of improvement in teaching and learning
 - making sure that procedures for managing teachers' performance are fully effective and staff are held to account for their impact on pupils' achievement
 - ensuring that the checks that all leaders make on the quality of teaching take account of the progress pupils are making
 - broadening and deepening the curriculum so that it fully meets the needs of pupils and develops their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding
 - monitoring and evaluating the impact of pupil premium funding on raising pupils' attainment
 - ensuring that governors hold leaders to account for the performance of the school.

Report on the third monitoring inspection

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) observed lessons in all the classes in the school, many jointly with the interim headteacher. He observed pupils at lunchtimes and playtimes. He met with the interim headteacher, deputy headteacher, members of staff, an officer of the local authority and members of the interim executive board, which provides governance to the school. He also met with the headteacher of the linked grammar school, which is anticipated to be the lead school in the multi-academy trust that Beechview is expected to join. He heard pupils read and scrutinised pupils' work. He looked at documentation, including minutes of meetings and school plans. He noted parents' opinions from the small number of responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, a new interim headteacher has taken up post. She is employed by the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust, on behalf of the local authority. One of the two deputy headteachers has also left and there have been a number of other staffing changes. Some classes continue to be taught by staff on temporary contracts.

Outcomes for pupils

Across the school, pupils' progress in English and mathematics continues to show considerable improvement. The positive beginnings of this improvement, which were reported at the last monitoring visit, have continued well. Pupils work hard. They are keen to learn. They take part in a wide range of useful and efficiently planned learning activities to good effect. For example, Year 5 pupils worked hard when writing a 'mystery', working out together the best ways they could find to do this effectively. Year 3 pupils enjoyed group tasks, learning successfully how to use expression better in their talking and writing.

Pupils in Year 3 have made a good start in the school. These pupils had strong results from their infant education and they are continuing to develop their skills well. For the older pupils, there is a backlog of long-term underachievement. Consequently, although pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 are, in most cases, now making strong progress, their attainment remains low. While pupils have many more opportunities to write at length, the writing seen by HMI in Years 5 and 6 is of a standard below that which is expected. Pupils too often make basic grammatical errors, such as leaving out full stops. Their use of vocabulary, while improving, remains limited. Their handwriting and presentation also shows improvement, but continues to be of mixed quality.

Since the last monitoring visit, the school has made considerable, necessary efforts to improve pupils' reading. It is too early to be sure of the impact of these changes but there are positive early signs. The pupils who read to HMI did so with confidence and enjoyment. They showed sound levels of comprehension and were often able to self-correct if misreading a word. Pupils take their books home regularly and their parents are actively involved, alongside staff, in hearing them read and enjoying the books together. However, in some cases, pupils' reading books are a little too easy for them, showing the need to raise expectations further.

Pupils who are entitled to the support of pupil premium funding have underachieved in the past as much as their classmates. Recently, their progress has improved at similar rates to the other pupils. The school has, however, correctly identified that pupils with disabilities and special educational needs are not all making as much progress as they should.

The school is rightly concerned to ensure that pupils can achieve success across the full range of subjects. In a magnificent music lesson observed, all pupils played African djembe drums with improving accuracy and control. They began to use simple musical notation effectively to guide their performances together. This also helped their understanding of the basic musical theory behind what they were doing; for example, about having four beats in a bar. Pupils understood and used musical vocabulary, such as tempo, usefully and accurately. As in this lesson, the school uses selected specialist staff from the linked grammar school to teach lessons in a range of subjects, including music and physical education. This is very useful, though the school is not yet making thorough assessments in these subjects, to check closely how well pupils are doing.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Despite the changes in staffing, the quality of teaching has become much more secure and consistent across the school. Teachers give calm and clear explanations. Pupils understand what they need to do to be successful. Groups of lessons are well planned and organised so that the pupils' learning builds up logically over time. Problem solving is increasingly well used in mathematics lessons. Teaching assistants are clear about which pupils they are supporting and why, and they make a useful contribution. Teachers mark pupils' work in accordance with the school's expectations and pupils generally respond usefully to the marking by writing their own comments or improving what they have done.

Teachers are increasingly using the school's new system for matching work of the right amount of difficulty to each pupil flexibly and effectively, based on ruby, sapphire and emerald levels. This is made possible by the fact that the interim headteacher has shown very clear leadership when ensuring that teachers' assessments of pupils' progress are accurate. She has introduced very effective

systems to do this and, as a consequence, the school has good, reliable information about how well each pupil is doing and what work they need to do next.

However, despite the considerable improvements, there remain some key areas to work on. At times, pupils are capable of meeting a still higher level of challenge than the lessons allow. They say, correctly, that some work is still too easy for them. Pupils who met with HMI feel they are well taught but were also very clear that they think sometimes teachers 'over-manage' them and talk for too long when they (the pupils) are ready to do their work. This bores them. HMI observed some occasions when parts of lessons proceeded too slowly. As at the last monitoring visit, pupils still reasonably feel they could sometimes be trusted to do more thinking for themselves.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils generally behave very well, with further improvements noticeable at this visit. They are self-disciplined and do not require excessive supervision. They are polite, friendly and supportive of each other. In the playground, they play happily and kindly together. Pupils say that there is some occasional misbehaviour, but that this is untypical. They feel safe. They enjoy the increasing range of activities available, such as skipping, ball games, board games and computing. In lessons, pupils are attentive and hard working. They are increasingly willing to take on responsibilities as school councillors and play leaders, for example. The pupils who met with HMI said, 'We make friends and help each other'. They feel the new interim headteacher gives them 'lots of encouragement'. They like the new motivational posters she has put up around the school. They know the 'Beechview Beliefs' well.

The increased levels of pride and enjoyment shown by pupils are significant at this point in the school's journey. Beechview is now rejuvenated as a positive, happy and nurturing place for a child to be. It has regained its sense of wellbeing and 'joie de vivre'. Pupils wear their uniforms smartly. They laugh and smile often. Their body language, and that of the adults, is positive. There have been no recent exclusions, which is an improvement. Pupils' rate of attendance has remained at a decent, average level.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The new interim headteacher has made a very significant and positive impact. She has taken on further the new systems correctly introduced by her predecessor. She has motivated and successfully encouraged the staff to try them out and make them work increasingly well. Appropriate procedures for managing the performance of teachers are now fully operational. Those for other staff are becoming established. The interim headteacher has also usefully and successfully introduced a number of new ideas of her own. She evaluates the school honestly, accurately and precisely.

She involves and respects staff, parents, pupils and the community. In particular, new staff feel included and valued.

Some other staff are developing their management roles. The remaining deputy headteacher has taken on different responsibilities and is developing his work on improving teaching effectively. The school does not yet have a permanent special educational needs co-ordinator, but a very experienced former headteacher is carrying out important work in a temporary role. The school does not, however, have a well-developed system of middle leadership. There have been too many staffing changes and too little impetus over time for this to have grown. This is why the secondary school which is expected to lead the multi-academy trust (MAT), which Beechview anticipates joining, provides its staff to teach and support a range of subjects. The new interim headteacher has taken responsibility for improving mathematics successfully.

It is expected that the school will become an academy during 2016. Moves towards this are advancing, though final decisions are not yet taken. The reservations of members of the interim executive board highlighted at the last monitoring visit have been largely alleviated. However, there remains a great deal still to sort out. The school does not have a permanent headteacher, though an appointment process is underway. There are still decisions to take about what any new headteacher's responsibilities will be, and what the staffing structure should be. These now have to be seen alongside the roles of the headteacher, staff and governors of the lead school within the proposed MAT. Beechview School's staffing situation remains vulnerable, with many temporary appointments.

The interim executive board has continued to improve its work. Its members effectively balance the short- and long-term needs of the school. They are managing the complexities of the expected move to academy status thoughtfully and strongly, with clear purpose. At the same time, they are asking appropriately challenging questions of the interim headteacher about the current quality of teaching and progress of the pupils in the school.

External support

The local authority, through the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust, continues to support the school well. It provides the interim headteacher. It supports and advises the interim executive board expertly. Its regular focus group meetings are sharp in monitoring the school's progress against the targets in the action plan it shares with the school. Its consultant support is well targeted and effective in improving teaching and learning.