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Mrs Cath Whittingham
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Whittingham

Special measures monitoring inspection of Acres Hill Community Primary School

Following my visit with Susan Birch, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 7 and 8 June 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 that 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 that took place in November 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 plan is fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sheffield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nick Whittaker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2015.

- Urgently improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better in all classes by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils of all abilities can do in lessons
 - providing work in lessons that is challenging and keeps pupils interested in their learning
 - making sure that the marking and feedback provided for pupils helps them to understand how to make their work better
 - ensuring that pupils take pride in their work and always complete tasks to the best of their ability
 - making effective use of teaching assistants so that they provide support and challenge where most needed to pupils of differing abilities
 - ensuring that all teachers use appropriate strategies to manage the behaviour of pupils.
- Rapidly improve all pupils' attainment and progress in all subjects but particularly so in mathematics by:
 - making sure that pupils' skills and knowledge in each area of mathematics are firmly secured
 - ensuring that teachers' subject knowledge is secure in the subjects they teach
 - helping teachers to assess accurately the progress being made by all pupils.
- Work rigorously to ensure that the attendance of all pupils continues to rise and that the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent decreases significantly.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders at all levels and of governors, so that they can secure rapid and sustained improvement by:
 - ensuring that the information gathered from the checks made about the quality of teaching enables leaders to provide appropriate training and support for teachers so that their knowledge and skills improve
 - setting ambitious goals for the outcomes pupils are expected to achieve.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 June 2016.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils, representatives from the governing body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, the interim headteacher has been appointed as the school's permanent headteacher. In addition, a deputy headteacher and an associate deputy headteacher have joined the senior leadership team. The governing body has re-constituted and four new governors have been appointed.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher and senior leaders are providing a strong, principled and purposeful drive for improvement. Crucially, leaders have secured the strong support of staff, who share their determination to improve the quality of teaching and achieve better outcomes for pupils.

The school's action plan and the local authority's statement of action provide a secure starting point for tackling the school's weaknesses. Actions are sharply focused on the areas requiring improvement and there are clear, step-by-step targets for improving the quality of teaching and increasing the progress pupils make. Currently, the school's action plan does not include targets for accelerating the progress of pupils in all year groups. This aspect of the plan must be strengthened.

External reviews of governance and the school's use of the pupil premium were commissioned and completed quickly. The recommendations from both reviews are clearly identified in the school's plans for improvement. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of actions on the effectiveness of these aspects of leadership and management.

Systems to support improvement are strengthening. A new assessment and tracking system is in place and leaders are systematically checking the accuracy of teachers' assessments. As a result, senior leaders have a clearer picture of pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Equally, senior leaders are routinely monitoring the quality of teaching, for example by observing in lessons, looking at the work in pupils' books and checking assessment information. However, senior leaders are not using this information to pinpoint exactly which aspects of teachers' practice need to improve. In addition, their actions do not always have the focus and urgency required to secure rapid improvement.

Governors are now a smaller, more focused and determined group. They are more knowledgeable about the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make because senior leaders give them better-quality information more frequently. In addition, governors are working more closely alongside senior leaders to check whether the impact of their actions can be seen 'on the ground'. Importantly, governors are now challenging the headteacher and senior leaders and, in doing so, are beginning to hold them to account for improving the quality of education at Acres Hill.

Middle leaders are new and inexperienced. The impact of some middle leaders can be seen, for example in improving the teaching of phonics in Years 1 and 2 and tackling the high levels of absence of a targeted group of pupils. However, much needs to be done to improve the effectiveness and impact of middle leadership.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment varies widely between classes. The teaching of mathematics and phonics is improving because teachers have higher expectations and their subject knowledge is better. Year 2 pupils told inspectors that teaching is better and, as a result, they are 'doing more learning'. This is not, however, the case in all classes and there is a wide gap between the most and least effective practice.

Pupils make fastest progress when the work set is interesting and challenging and when they are expected to use and apply their knowledge and skills. In Year 1, for example, pupils gained confidence and consolidated their phonics knowledge as a result of the teacher's effective explanation and because pupils were challenged to use their knowledge and skills to read and write unfamiliar words. However, on too many occasions the progress pupils make is limited by learning activities which are not pitched at the right level and do not capture and hold their interest.

The quality and impact of marking and feedback is similarly variable. In Year 5 mathematics books, for example, the teacher's feedback is clearly focused on each pupil's next steps in learning. This is helping them to make faster progress. In other classes, marking and feedback are less effective and, sometimes, pupils' work is unmarked.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare is improving, but remains variable. When the teacher's expectations are high and their practice is effective, pupils are keen and highly motivated learners. They apply themselves well, work hard and have a growing pride in their learning and achievement. Too often, when the teacher's expectations are low, classroom routines are insecure and the work is not pitched at the right level, pupils are inattentive, some 'switch off' and too many do not learn well. While there are fewer incidents of disruptive behaviour and pupils willingly follow direction from adults, positive attitudes to learning are not the norm in all classes at Acres Hill.

Attendance is not improving quickly enough. While the high levels of persistent absence are being tackled and attendance in some classes is improving, current levels of attendance remain substantially below the national average for primary schools. Poor and irregular attendance continues to have an impact on the learning and progress of too many pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes for current Year 6 pupils have not improved significantly. Approximately half of Year 6 pupils are working at the age-expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' attainment in Years 1 and 2 is higher. However, attainment in Year 3 is low, with only one fifth of pupils working at age-expected levels in writing and mathematics.

Rates of progress remain variable between classes and across year groups. Year 5 pupils are making faster progress, as are Year 6 pupils in mathematics. Critically, disadvantaged pupils are not making the accelerated progress needed to close the gap on other pupils.

Pupils needing extra help, for example those who need help to catch up or pupils who speak English as an additional language, are increasingly well supported through carefully targeted additional teaching. At times, however, pupils' progress is held back because teaching assistants are too slow to move some pupils on to the next step in their learning.

An increasing proportion of children in the Reception class are achieving a good level of development. However, the outdoor learning environment does not provide a rich or stimulating enough range of learning opportunities for early years children.

External support

The local authority acted quickly and decisively to strengthen leadership, management and governance at Acres Hill. A range of well-planned support, including support from other schools and outstanding school leaders, has been swiftly and effectively mobilised. Consultancy support in mathematics, for example, is having a noticeable impact on teachers' subject knowledge and confidence in teaching mathematics. Plans to secure the school's long-term future leadership and governance are advancing quickly.