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14 July 2016

Mrs Sally Bloomer
Woodside Community School and Little Bears Nursery
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Dear Mrs Bloomer

Special measures monitoring inspection of Woodside Community School and Little Bears Nursery

Following my visit to your school on 28 and 29 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in April 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

Leaders and managers are 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.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. 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 that 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 between 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 lessons for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities 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 third monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 June 2016

Evidence

During the inspection, the inspector carried out observations of teaching and learning in different classes and looked at pupils' work in books and on display. The inspector talked with pupils and observed their behaviour at break- and lunchtimes and when moving around the school.

The inspector met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, the early years leader, phase leaders, members of the pastoral support team, pupils, governors and a representative from the local authority. The inspector examined several school documents, including those relating to pupils' progress information, the school's own evaluations of teaching and learning, school improvement action plans, minutes of meetings of the governing body and several school policy documents. The school's single central record of safeguarding checks on staff was also examined.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in March 2016, two new teachers have started work at the school. Both teachers teach a Year 1 class on a job-share arrangement. Three teachers are on a period of planned absence for family reasons, so some pupils are being taught by temporary teachers. Two teachers with subject leader responsibilities are giving up their leadership positions from the end of the summer term 2016. New appointments have been made to fill these posts from September 2016.

The school governors are currently consulting with parents about their proposal to convert to academy status within a local multi-academy trust. The proposed conversion would be likely to take place sometime in the next academic year.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leadership has continued to improve. The headteacher steers the school with a steady hand, an ambitious vision and a great deal of common sense. She is able to step back from situations and view events in an objective, pragmatic way and make tough — sometimes unpopular — decisions when necessary. Together with the deputy headteacher and recently appointed assistant headteacher, she has managed to secure some key improvements. Pupils' behaviour has improved and standards in the lower part of the school are rising. In the main, this is because expectations are higher and communicated with greater clarity than was previously the case. However, these higher expectations have yet to bring about the necessary improvement in academic standards in key stage 2.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, communication between all tiers of leadership has improved. All leaders meet together at a weekly meeting so that information can be shared, decisions made and action taken. This has increased the school's expectations of middle leaders and has resulted in a few changes. Some subject leaders have stepped down from their roles and new appointments have been made. The impact of these changes remains to be seen. However, at the moment, phase leaders for key stages 1 and 2 do not have a good enough understanding of the quality of teaching and learning in their phases. In part, this is because other responsibilities take much of their time and this is set to change in the future. Even so, while checks on teaching have increased, phase leaders' involvement in evaluating the information gathered by these checks, be this from observations of teaching, findings from 'book looks' or analysis of assessment information, is underdeveloped. Consequently, their awareness of how teaching could be improved further is based on a limited view or on reports from subject leaders. Given that some subject leaders are giving up their roles and that it will take time for new subject leaders to get up to speed with the requirements of their posts, this is a key development area that needs urgent attention.

Teachers' awareness of the requirements of the national curriculum has been enhanced by their work with the school's new assessment system. The new system, brought in this year to replace the now redundant national curriculum levels, still requires further refinement. Nevertheless, by using this new system, teachers have become more familiar with the standards and progression now expected in the primary years. This is helping them to set suitably challenging work and to spot key gaps in pupils' knowledge or skills, although the efficiency with which this is done still varies from one class to another.

The quality of leadership in the early years, which had improved considerably at the time of the previous monitoring inspection, has strengthened further. The early years leader has worked hard, and successfully, to develop her own leadership skills and is clearly bringing out the best in others. Under her leadership, the early years provision has built on previous strengths and embraced change where it was needed. All is going well in the early years.

The support provided for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities continues to develop and evolve in response to pupils' different and changing needs. As previously noted, this is now a relative strength of the school's work. The leadership provided by the special educational needs leader is well organised, articulate and evaluative. Consequently, further monitoring visits will not focus very heavily on this much-improved aspect of the school's work.

The attendance and behaviour of disadvantaged pupils also continue to improve. Leaders' and governors' systems for checking on the provision for different groups and its impact on pupils' performance and attitudes are now thorough and effective. Records from recent governors' meetings, and especially the minutes from the school improvement committee, provide a careful log of governors' questions and discussions about the impact of their work on raising standards for all groups of

pupils. Indeed, the impact of governors' decisions is now a standing item at governors' meetings. This clearly prompts reflective, evaluative debate and helps to inform strategic planning.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Across the school, it is now rare for a lesson to be disrupted by poor behaviour. Most lessons proceed smoothly; pupils get on well with one another and work hard. In all classrooms, pupils are kept occupied on productive tasks and display a much-improved ability to cooperate with others. On top of this, the school's work on pupils' rights has helped all to realise the responsibility they have towards others. Whereas in the past, pupils who 'larked about' in class were viewed with amusement by other pupils, now such behaviour is far less likely to be tolerated. Pupils themselves are quick to remind others about how they should behave so that everyone can make the most of lessons.

Pupils are getting more work done and their attitudes to learning are much improved. However, the challenge provided in some classes serves to highlight gaps in pupils' learning or misunderstandings rather than move learning on further. During this inspection, for example, pupils in upper key stage 2 who were working on measurement tasks displayed a limited understanding of reasonable estimates or failed to grasp the importance of accuracy when making measurements. Others were unsure about the relationship between different units of measurement. In all cases, the teachers were alert to these matters and could explain how they would plan follow-up lessons. Nevertheless, this takes time and some of these learning points could have been picked up there and then rather than waiting for the next lesson. In some classes, this does happen. In the early years and in Year 4, teachers are quick to pick up on what pupils can do and adjust their teaching on the spot.

A key reason why the pitch of some lessons is not quite right is because assessment still lacks precision. Leaders' and the inspector's checks on the new whole-school system revealed that assessments in mathematics are less reliable than those made in reading and writing. In part, this is because different teachers have different views about the evidence required to confirm whether a pupil has acquired a particular skill or not. In other cases, it is because some teachers underplay pupils' achievements or are not confident with the newly implemented assessment system. In any event, it leads to teachers planning lessons that either cover old ground unnecessarily or introduce pupils to new work before they are ready. Consequently, progress, especially in mathematics, is still too erratic.

In all classes, teachers regularly remind pupils about the importance of careful presentation and incentivise them with rewards such as a class cup or house points. Pupils generally respond well to this. Books seen during this inspection showed that, for many pupils, presentation is improving. Even so, it remains a key focus for the school, as careless work still causes some pupils to make mistakes.

As for the previous concern about opportunities for pupils to speak in class, this no longer presents as a particular problem. Pupils of all ages readily engage in conversation, exchange ideas and collaborate, and are given plenty of chance to do so. They are attentive to teachers and one another and are at ease with their peers and adults.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

In lessons and on the playground, pupils usually behave well. Incidents of poor behaviour have reduced and those that do occur are dealt with swiftly, sensibly and fairly. In addition, all staff are quick to recognise and praise positive behaviour. Consequently, pupils understand the school's raised expectations and most follow the rules, try to be helpful and are keen to please.

During this inspection, pupils with particular responsibilities, such as the head boy and head girl and the house captains, made a special effort to welcome the inspector with a confident handshake and cheery greeting. These pupils and others were able to explain how behaviour has got better. They could also talk about how the school's work to become a Rights Respecting School has helped everyone to develop a better understanding of how their actions affect others. It has also helped them to realise the responsibilities that come with the choices they make.

Outside on the playground, it has become easier to spot lunchtime supervisors as they now wear bright jackets so they stand out from the crowd. There is plenty for pupils to do and a sports teacher helps out by organising games. For those pupils who find it hard to cope outside, the school continues to offer peace and quiet in the 'rainbow room' and 'snoozelum'. All of this provision helps to ensure that lunchtimes are usually trouble-free and pupils are kept safe.

In the dining hall, there are now plenty of posters reminding pupils about the importance of good manners. Supervisors and duty staff are more attentive to pupils' conduct and requests than was previously the case. This has resulted in calmer, more polite behaviour at the table. Having said this, some of the routines for managing the coming and going of pupils to and from the dining hall could be improved. Currently, there is a lot of movement in different directions. This is a touch chaotic and makes it hard for staff to keep track of pupils and what they are doing. In response to the inspector's feedback about this matter, the pastoral team immediately tried out a new arrangement to see whether it reduced the jostling and noise. Currently, it is not possible to say whether this experimental change brought about any long-term changes for the better. However, this prompt response is indicative of this particular team's 'get up and go' approach.

As noted in the previous monitoring inspection, incidents of pupils using racist and other unpleasant language continue to reduce. Incidents that do occur now tend to be the result of ignorance about what can cause offence to others, rather than any

intent to upset. Nevertheless, it is still unacceptable and all staff challenge it when it happens. The school pastoral team keeps a careful record of any incidents and takes constructive action, when needs be.

Overall, attendance has improved and, for the current year to date, is not far below average. The number of pupils who arrive late in the mornings has also reduced. There is no doubt that this is the result of the pastoral team's tenacious approach to following up poor punctuality or low attendance. These staff provide challenge when necessary and support where appropriate. In response, the number of pupils who arrive just a few minutes late has reduced considerably from 222 in the spring term to 65 in the current term. However, the number who arrive very late and after the registers have closed remains constant. In the spring term, 75 pupils were very late for school; in the summer term so far the figure stands at 63 pupils. A common reason given for such lateness is oversleeping. This is a poor excuse and one that, if left unchecked, could hamper pupils' future prospects.

The school works hard to keep parents involved and informed. The website is kept up to date and parents receive regular texts and letters to keep them informed. A parents' forum has been set up and parents are invited into school for social events such as coffee mornings. During this inspection, an open afternoon took place and many parents came into school to join their children in class. Parents spoken to during the open afternoon had many complimentary words to say about the school and the provision for their children.

Outcomes for pupils

Standards in the younger year groups continue to rise. In the early years, almost 60% of children reached a good level of development this year. This is an increase from 2015 and is not far below last year's national figure. These improved and improving standards in the early years are the result of increasingly effective provision and well-informed leadership.

The situation in key stages 1 and 2 remains similar to that seen at the time of the previous monitoring inspection. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1 are rising and are not too far behind age-related expectations. In key stage 2, especially in Years 5 and 6, many pupils still have some significant gaps in their skills and understanding. In part, this is due to weaknesses in previous teaching. The current, and better, quality of teaching is certainly resulting in faster progress. However, it is also true to say that teachers do not use assessment information with sufficient precision to plan lessons that help pupils to catch up or make the best use of time. In the main, this affects the most able and middle-ability pupils. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are usually identified quickly and, while progress rates vary depending on pupils' specific circumstances, most respond well to the effective support they are given.

As mentioned earlier, school leaders and staff are still getting to grips with a new whole-school assessment system, and consequently have an incomplete view of current standards, especially in mathematics.

External support

External support continues to be effective. A local authority team makes termly visits to the school to review teaching and provide feedback about progress and the impact of leaders' and teachers' work.

In addition, the school continues to benefit from supportive links with Hales Valley Teaching School and Russells Hall Primary School. It is also worth noting that some practice at Woodside has been called upon to assist other schools' work. The special educational needs leader, for instance, has been asked to work with the educational psychology service to help with aspects of training.