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30 May 2017

Mrs Kay Butler
Headteacher
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Worcestershire
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Dear Mrs Butler

Special measures monitoring inspection of Birchen Coppice Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 16 to 17 May 2017, 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 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 July 2016.

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.

Having considered all the evidence, newly qualified teachers may not be appointed without prior discussion with HMI.

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

Yours sincerely

Ann Pritchard

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in July 2016.

- Urgently improve the procedures to safeguard the welfare of pupils by ensuring that:
 - the single central register of checks on staff meets statutory requirements
 - leaders and governors frequently and thoroughly monitor the content and accuracy of the single central record
 - the organisation of personnel files ensures that documents are in one central place and are easy to view.
- Improve the impact that leaders and governors have on pupils' outcomes, behaviour and attendance by ensuring that:
 - leaders analyse closely all aspects of the school's work, use this analysis to notice patterns and trends, and plan and implement their actions accordingly
 - the progress made by different groups of pupils is understood by everyone and closely targeted action is taken to remedy any underachievement
 - action plans are precise about the improvements the school wants to achieve
 - plans include measureable milestones and a clear timeline for reviewing the impact that teaching is having on pupils' progress
 - middle leaders are given suitable training to help them respond quickly to pupils' underachievement.
- Improve the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - teaching offers a greater level of challenge and all teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - sequences of learning and intended outcomes are carefully planned and accurately identify the skills that are being taught
 - pupils are given greater opportunities to practise and apply their English and mathematical skills across the curriculum
 - feedback in books is in line with the school's policy in order to help pupils make better progress
 - the most effective practice is shared widely.
- Improve standards of behaviour, personal development and welfare by making sure that:

- leaders and staff at all levels have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and consistently help pupils to meet these standards in lessons and around the school
- the use of physical intervention is reduced and records are completed in full
- exclusion rates are reduced
- systems for monitoring pupils' behaviour and physical intervention are analysed to show patterns or trends, and any findings acted on
- leaders continue to work with families in order to improve attendance.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 16 May 2017 to 17 May 2017

Evidence

The inspector observed pupils' learning in English and mathematics lessons in key stages 1 and 2. Other areas of the curriculum were not evaluated during this visit. The headteacher and deputy headteacher accompanied the inspector for some of the observations. The inspector looked at pupils' work, spoke to them about their learning and observed behaviour in lessons. The inspector met formally with a group of pupils and observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime.

Meetings were held with the headteacher, school leaders, including those who are responsible for safeguarding, staff responsible for behaviour and attendance, and two members of the governing body. A further meeting was held with a representative from the local authority, and a telephone conversation was held with the national leader of education (NLE) who is supporting the school.

The inspector evaluated a range of documents, including the school's analysis of current pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. Additional documentation was evaluated, such as information about how teachers' performance is managed, the school's action plan, safeguarding information and policies.

Context

Since the last inspection, the school has increased the number of classes. There are now two classes in each year group, apart from Year 6 where there is one. This has resulted in smaller class sizes. Two newly qualified teachers have been appointed. There has been a period of stability in the staffing levels overall. The local authority has brokered the support of a NLE who is now working with the school. There has been a change in the chair of governors since the last inspection.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

An NLE undertook a review of safeguarding procedures in the autumn term 2016. Clear and immediate actions were identified to address the inadequacies of the single central register of checks on staff, and other safeguarding documentation. Leaders addressed the weaknesses quickly and the single central record is now complete and accurate. Leaders check it weekly and governors check it monthly. Records and information about staff are now organised carefully. The safeguarding policy has been reviewed and is in line with current legislation. As a result, policies and procedures are now securely in place and monitored regularly to safeguard the welfare of pupils.

Leaders, governors and the local authority have developed an action plan to address the areas for improvement following the last inspection. This is largely fit for

purpose but requires some improvements. The plan clearly identifies the necessary actions to improve the school. Milestones set within the plan are realistic. However, clear expectations about the outcomes expected as a result of the actions undertaken are not consistently used throughout. Parts of the plan are precise, while others are vague and do not set clear expectations. Consequently, leaders do not review how effective the actions have been in enough detail. The plan is due to be reviewed in the very near future. Leaders, the local authority and the NLE recognise that they need to work together to further identify and develop the key actions the school needs to address to secure further and rapid improvement.

Leaders have developed more robust monitoring systems to enable them to analyse the school's work. For example, leaders carefully log behaviour incidents, which have enabled them to develop effective support for groups of pupils and individuals. This has resulted in a significant improvement in behaviour across the school. Leaders monitor attendance figures to review the effectiveness of initiatives such as the 'walking bus' which was introduced to improve attendance. Some improvements in attendance are beginning to show. However, the monitoring systems are not yet refined enough in all aspects of the school's work to enable leaders to evaluate the full impact of actions undertaken. Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning, and are providing effective feedback to help teachers improve their practice. However, leaders do not then track how well teachers respond to this feedback. Leaders do not have a clear overview of the main strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. As a result, leaders do not have a detailed plan in place to further develop the quality of teaching and learning.

Leaders have developed detailed analysis of assessment information. They hold half-termly meetings with teachers to review pupils' progress, and identify those pupils who are not making the progress they should over the year. Leaders are tracking pupils' progress only from the end of the previous year, and not from their original starting points. Therefore, leaders have not accurately identified pupils who are underachieving, especially in mathematics. The school's action plan sets targets for pupils' outcomes. However, the plan focuses on attainment and not progress. Consequently, leaders do not have clear actions in place to remedy underachievement across the school.

Middle leaders have received support and training from the local authority. This support is effectively developing their leadership skills. Middle leaders have a clear and accurate understanding of the necessary actions they need to undertake to accelerate pupils' progress. Action plans are focused on the right areas for improvement. Although these plans contain clear actions, they require further refinement to identify the precise outcomes expected as a result of the actions undertaken. Middle leaders work with teachers to support and develop teaching and learning. However, middle leaders recognise the need to undertake more detailed monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning to enable them to provide further support and development where teaching is weakest.

Leaders and governors have worked on processes to convert the school to academy status. However, these processes have not progressed at the rate expected. There is no confirmation of when the school will convert to an academy.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching is providing a greater level of challenge for pupils now in English and mathematics. This is because teachers have a greater understanding of how to provide challenge and support to help pupils achieve well. For example, in an English lesson, pupils of all abilities were encouraged and challenged to improve their writing about life on the Titanic. As a result, the quality of writing they achieved was impressive. However, the quality of teaching remains variable across the school, which results in not enough pupils achieving as well as they should. Leaders are aware of where further support and development is needed. However, they have not developed robust monitoring systems to effectively address teaching, which is less than good.

Where teaching is stronger in English and mathematics, learning sequences focus and build on the skills pupils need to develop their knowledge. Teachers plan activities that are matched closely to pupils' needs and develop their learning at pace. However, this is inconsistent across the school. Too much planning focuses on what pupils are going to do, rather than what they are going to learn. As a result, work is not helping pupils to develop and build on their learning and, therefore, the pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

The majority of teachers are providing feedback to pupils in line with the school's policy in English and mathematics. Feedback highlights what pupils have achieved and what they need to work on to make further progress. However, the effectiveness of the feedback is variable. Teachers' feedback is sometimes unclear so some pupils do not understand what they have to do to improve. Teachers do not consistently expect pupils to reflect on the feedback as expected by the school's policy, and, therefore, pupils do not learn from the feedback. However, where feedback is used effectively, books show that pupils are making rapid progress.

Teachers are giving pupils increasing opportunities to use their mathematical and writing skills in science. In Year 5, a range of mathematical concepts such as graphing and time were evident, alongside regular opportunities to describe and write up experiments.

Teachers are appreciative of the support they receive from leaders to develop their teaching and learning. The newly qualified teachers welcome the opportunities they have to work alongside and observe other teachers within the school. Teachers share good practice between one another. However, leaders recognise that this needs further development, including the setting up of coaching models between teachers to develop more consistently good or better teaching and learning across the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders now monitor the behaviour of pupils in detail. Leaders have identified where behaviour issues were most frequent, the causes of them and why they were escalating. As a result, effective actions have been put in place, which have significantly reduced poor behaviour incidents. The behaviour and pastoral teams work closely together to support individual pupils. Bespoke targets are set for pupils to help them work on their behaviour to improve it. The teams work closely with families to further address and support any issues. Leaders' analysis of behaviour shows a considerable decline in the number of behaviour incidents across the school.

The behaviour team provide pupils with a range of support to help them manage their behaviour at lunch and breaktimes. A quiet environment is provided for pupils to engage in positive play activities. The reflection room provides pupils with a safe and nurturing environment to calm themselves if necessary. The nurture room also provides additional support for pupils' social and emotional well-being. This support has been very effective at preventing challenging behaviour from escalating. As a result, the use of physical intervention has reduced. While exclusions remain at a similar level to the previous inspection, leaders are taking a wide range of actions to support the very high level of need of some pupils.

Teachers and staff have consistent and high expectations of the behaviour of pupils. There is a calm and purposeful learning atmosphere across the school. Pupils show respect for one another and all adults within the school. Year 5 and 6 pupils confirm that there has been a 'dramatic' improvement in behaviour.

Leaders have developed a range of strategies to improve attendance. The 'walking bus' has been further developed. Analysis shows that this strategy is having some impact on improving attendance, albeit small at this point. Class awards are given for the highest attendance of the week and 100% attendance rewards are given to pupils to encourage better attendance. 'Focus fortnights' on punctuality showed some impact on improving pupils' prompt arrival at school. Leaders work with a range of agencies to encourage families to improve attendance and the further support of an educational welfare officer has been secured recently. However, leaders recognise that absences remain too high and further work needs to be done in this area. This includes leaders developing more rigorous analysis of actions taken to improve attendance to ensure that they are having a positive impact on reducing absences.

Outcomes for pupils

The school received its published assessment information shortly after the previous inspection in 2016. This information showed that the proportions of pupils at the end of key stage 2 in 2016 achieving expected standards were below national

averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was in the bottom 10% of schools nationally in 2016.

In 2016 standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 were also below national averages. The proportion of pupils achieving the required standard in the phonics screening check in 2016 was below national averages. Outcomes at the end of early years have improved over a three-year period. At the end of 2016 the proportion of children achieving a good level of development was broadly in line with national averages.

Leaders expect the proportion of pupils achieving the required standard in the phonics screening check at the end of 2017 will show a considerable improvement on 2016 figures. This is as a result of a high focus on developing the quality of phonics teaching across early years and key stage 1.

Leaders' analysis of current pupils' progress shows improvements, particularly in Years 1 and 2, with all groups of pupils making progress, which will enable them to achieve the outcomes of which they are capable by the end of key stage 1.

Across key stage 2, leaders' assessment information shows that pupils' progress in reading and writing is improving. Work in books also shows that the majority of pupils are making the progress of which they are capable in writing. However, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and lower-attaining pupils are not making as much progress as they should.

Leaders' analysis shows that all groups of pupils have not made enough progress in mathematics to achieve the standards of which they are capable by the end of key stage 2. Leaders recognise that progress from pupils' starting points has not been tracked carefully enough to identify which pupils are falling behind in their learning. As a result, pupils are underachieving in mathematics and are not reaching the standards of which they are capable.

External support

The local authority has provided some effective support to the school, especially in the autumn term. Leaders, governors and the local authority worked together to produce an action plan to address the improvement areas identified at the last inspection. The local authority carried out a school review in December 2016 and worked with leaders to identify further areas for development. The review noted the considerable improvement in pupils' behaviour.

The services of an NLE have been brokered through the local authority. This leader has quickly ensured that the school has addressed all safeguarding concerns, which has led to robust safeguarding procedures being put in place. Learning and teaching

advisers also provide support to the middle leaders and are developing their leadership capacity further.

The local authority has identified where its support needs to develop further. It recognises that the various support systems that are in place need to be drawn together into one cohesive group. The statement of action is to be revised with all parties involved to ensure that targeted action and support leads to more rapid improvements, especially in the quality of teaching and learning and the effectiveness of monitoring systems.

The local authority has enabled the school to become part of the Kidderminster key priority area project to further support leaders' effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation.

Priorities for further improvement

- Further develop and refine formal monitoring systems to:
 - analyse and evaluate the strengths and areas for development in teaching and learning
 - identify the actions needed to improve teaching and learning
 - evaluate the impact of these actions.