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20 June 2013

Emma Ward
Headteacher
Highlees Community Primary School
Ashton Road
Westwood
Peterborough
Cambridgeshire
PE3 7ER

Dear Ms Ward

Special measures monitoring inspection of Highlees Community Primary School

Following my visit with Alan Jarvis, Additional Inspector, to your school on 18–19 June 2013, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2012. 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Peterborough.

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2012

- Make teaching and learning consistently good in lessons by:
 - improving the way teachers plan work so that it is set at the right level for all groups of pupils
 - improving the quality of support provided by teaching assistants so that they contribute to pupils' learning in and out of the classroom effectively
 - making sure that pupils who speak English as an additional language receive the support they need so they make at least good progress.

- Raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 by:
 - ensuring that pupils are taught to read effectively
 - providing pupils with more opportunities to write in their exercise books in English and other subjects rather than using individual white boards and worksheets
 - ensuring that the teaching of basic number skills, especially in Key Stage 1, is done effectively.

- Ensure that leadership and management are effective in driving improvement by:
 - requiring leaders at all levels, including the governing body, to focus rigorously on tackling the key priorities identified in the school improvement plan and then checking the impact of their work to ensure pupils make much faster progress
 - making sure that subject leaders, and the new progress and attainment leaders, focus on improving teaching and accelerating pupils' progress, particularly for those pupils who speak English as an additional language
 - ensuring that pupils making sure that governors set challenging targets for teachers and leaders so that they are held fully to account for their performance.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 18–19 June 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. The teaching in all classes was observed, with the exception of a Year 5 class because they were on a school trip. The headteacher and deputy headteacher joined inspectors for five of the 14 observations. Meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, the progress and attainment leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and three governors, the headteacher of the pupil referral service and a local authority adviser.

Context

The Department for Education has confirmed an academy order, and a sponsor has been identified by the headteacher and governing body. A period of consultation has begun, with a view to the school becoming an academy from September 2013.

Two teachers and a higher-level teaching assistant have been appointed for September. There are three vacancies on the governing body.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's most recent assessments show that pupils' attainment remains low but rates of progress for this academic year are much stronger than last year. This means that pupils are starting to catch up for previous underachievement. It is likely that the government's minimum floor standard will be met this year and that the progress of current Year 6 pupils could be good. These pupils, in particular, have benefited from good teaching this year by teachers who relentlessly challenge them to achieve high standards. The proportion of Year 5 pupils already achieving Level 4 in reading, writing and mathematics indicates accelerated progress, particularly linked to changes made to improve reading.

Improvements this year are linked to three particular things. First, assessments are now accurate and provide a complete set of data. The data is used frequently and well, particularly by the headteacher, to check the progress of different groups, subjects and classes. For example, underachievement of boys in reading and writing was identified recently and is being investigated further. Second, changes to the curriculum and teaching are well-thought through and have been effective this year in closing gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding, particularly in reading and writing and for pupils new to learning English. Third, and underpinning higher aspirations for pupils' achievement, the headteacher and deputy headteacher are unfaltering in their expectation that pupils will make four points progress each year in Key Stage 2 and five points each year in Key Stage 1. This is very ambitious but

early indications suggest that, when the right changes are made and put into practice properly, this can happen.

There is still more work to do to make sure that pupils reach standards that are at least in line with national averages and that current improvement is sustained for all pupils. Further improvements are needed to increase pupils' progress in mathematics and for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The quality of teaching

Lesson observations by inspectors, senior leaders and local authority advisers confirm that teaching has steadily improved during this academic year. More good teaching and virtually no inadequate teaching mean that pupils are challenged to achieve greater things. Pupils make most progress when teachers know exactly what they want pupils to achieve by the end of each lesson and plan carefully for each group to have the activities, clues and prompts that they need to show how much they have understood. Some teachers and support staff are very good at making sure that each pupil has the chance to show what they know by themselves, and at helping them to learn from their mistakes. Not all teaching provides pupils with clear explanations, specific guidance or enough time to show what they can do independently. As a result, work in pupils' books is not always of sufficient quality or quality to be an accurate or helpful record of what they have learned.

A significant improvement since the full inspection is much greater awareness and attention to the needs of pupils at the early stages of learning English. Their accelerated progress is because staff are better at providing visual clues, clearer explanations and building on previous learning more explicitly. Other improvements include the teaching of reading. Guided reading sessions, and teaching phonics and spelling, are more purposeful, but the difference that they make to pupils varies. There is not yet a commitment to a whole-school programme that will systematically teach pupils of all ages and abilities to read and spell.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' attendance, at around 92%, is at an all-time low. Unauthorised attendance has reduced but too many pupils are absent and therefore not achieving as well as they could. The importance of good attendance has been explained in a recent letter to parents from the headteacher. Referrals to the education welfare service are now made as soon as pupils' attendance drops, and good attendance was specifically discussed at the admissions meeting for children joining Reception.

Pupils respond well to adults, in class and around school. They arrive promptly to lessons and are keen to learn. Staff manage behaviour well, often skilfully so that any inappropriate behaviour is addressed without interrupting teaching or learning.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

In the eight months since the full inspection, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have systematically challenged underachievement of staff and pupils. Accountability for pupils' progress is now firmly established through regular discussions, analysis of data, formal lesson observations and frequent checks of pupils' work. Staff have not always welcomed greater scrutiny or change but now appreciate that these things improve their understanding of what needs to be done. They know how to make the improvements needed because they have had appropriate training and support, provided in-house and externally. Good leadership of teaching by the headteacher and deputy headteacher has improved the performance not only of those who underperform but also for the high proportion of teachers who are in their first years of teaching. This is helping them to build their expertise. As a result, pupils' progress has accelerated, there is now a huge commitment to a common goal of improving pupils' attainment, and staff at all levels of responsibility believe that they are well-placed to keep up this pace of improvement.

Teamwork is a strong feature amongst staff and contributes to open, professional debate. Shared accountability for the quality of teaching and learning is now firmly established but shared responsibility for driving the improvements needed is not as strong. Not all staff take enough initiative, needing too much direction before taking action or not looking at how they can help beyond their individual areas of responsibility or class. So far, it is the headteacher and deputy headteacher who drive most improvement. Under their direction, other leaders take increasing responsibility for checking the quality of teaching and pupils' work. For example, one of the progress and attainment leaders has supported teachers in Key Stage 1 and the quality of teaching and pupils' learning has improved, but not all leaders make a significant difference to pupils' performance yet. Nevertheless, middle leaders know more about the performance of the age-range or subject that they lead, and this contributes to a better capacity for the wider leadership team to make the necessary improvements.

The school development plan was not fit for purpose at the first monitoring inspection but now provides appropriate measurements and actions that are spread across a suitable period of time. The plan, together with reviews of actions already taken, shows that the right things are either in place or planned suitably for the future. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and the governing body accurately identify through their self-evaluation that there is a lot more to do to make sure that all pupils achieve well and that all teaching is of good quality. They know that, although early signs are encouraging, complacency is not an option. They are also mindful that a sense of urgency must go alongside embedding improvements.

The governing body plays its part well to support the headteacher and challenge the performance of staff and pupils. Governors are experienced in asking challenging

questions of what they see and read about the school's performance, especially those members who transferred from the interim executive board. Preparation for transition to academy status is well advanced, and governors ensure that this does not get in the way of the day-to-day priority to raise pupils' achievement.

External support

There is a very open, professional relationship between local authority advisers and the headteacher and governing body. Support from local authority advisers is good and helps staff to have what they need, when they need it. Staff make good use of this support. For example, training to address the needs of pupils learning English as an additional language was well received and has made a difference. When the headteacher asked for help to check the accuracy of assessments of pupils' achievements and the quality of teaching, advice came quickly and was very helpful in confirming further areas for improvement. The headteacher and Chair of the Governing Body are looking into the possibility of maintaining some of this support when the school becomes an academy.