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2 May 2013

Mrs Beth Atkinson
Headteacher
The Oak Tree Primary School
Newham Grange Avenue
Stockton-on-Tees
County Durham
TS19 0SE

Dear Mrs Atkinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Oak Tree Primary School

Following my visit with Rosemary Batty, Additional Inspector, to your school on 30 April and 1 May 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 September 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 Interim Executive Board and the Corporate Director Children Education and Social Care for Stockton-on-Tees.

Yours sincerely

Christine Inkster
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring that all teachers plan what they expect pupils to learn more carefully so that the work provided is better matched to meet pupils' learning needs
 - planning challenging work for the more-able pupils in writing lessons
 - checking that all teachers use more effective methods to teach basic reading, writing and mathematics skills, and that pupils have more opportunities to apply these skills frequently, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1
 - providing high quality feedback and marking to pupils in lessons
 - ensuring that pupils are given time to respond to suggestions to improve their work
 - providing more challenging learning targets for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and checking pupils' progress towards achieving them
 - eradicating inadequate teaching.

- Raise attainment and accelerate all pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - setting targets based on an accurate assessment of pupils' needs and reviewing these regularly with pupils and parents to ensure that all pupils make at least comparable progress to pupils nationally
 - checking that the more able writers do not fall behind
 - using records of the progress of different groups of pupils to quickly spot any underachievement so that action can be taken to close gaps in learning.

- Improve the capacity of leadership and management at all levels to make improvements by:
 - ensuring leaders carefully monitor and improve the quality of teaching and evaluate more accurately its impact on pupils' progress
 - providing prompt feedback and support to teachers following lesson observations to help them improve their practice
 - supporting leaders at all levels to take a consistent approach to school improvement by ensuring that actions and measures of success are focused more on pupils' achievement
 - setting high expectations of attendance and taking more effective action to reduce levels of persistent absence.

- Improve governance by:
 - ensuring governors understand how to interpret and use the school's records of pupils' progress in order to hold leaders to account for improving pupils' achievement
 - ensuring that the governing body is more directly involved in checking the performance of pupils and teachers so that it is better able to measure the rate of school improvement
 - ensuring that the governing body asks questions to determine the impact of the Pupil Premium on the achievement of pupils who attract this funding.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 30 April and 1 May 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including observing teaching in every class in the school. They scrutinised documents including pupils' progress information, pupils' work, teachers' planning, the senior leaders' evaluations of the school's work, minutes of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) meetings and information on the support provided by the local authority. The inspectors met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, subject leaders for literacy and numeracy, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection on 18 December 2012, three new team leaders have taken up their posts, with responsibility for the Early Years Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception), lower Key Stage 2 (Years 3 and 4) and upper Key Stage 2 (Years 5 and 6). After a period of long-term absence, one teacher has left. An Interim Executive Board was appointed in February 2013. The school is considering changing to become an academy.

Achievement of pupils at the school

There have been improvements to the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage in recent months. Reading and writing were identified as weaker areas of learning so teachers are now providing short, discrete sessions for children to develop their handwriting skills and learn about letters and the sounds they represent (phonics). As a result, children are making better progress in reading and writing from their very low starting points and in developing their skills in speaking and listening. There is scope to provide more opportunities for children to practise these skills further throughout the day in more exciting and imaginative ways.

Evidence seen in lessons, pupils' work and the school's data shows that pupils are beginning to make better progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the school. More pupils are on track to reach the expectations for their age. The gap has narrowed between the attainment of boys and girls in reading and mathematics but is still too wide in writing. The school has implemented a range of strategies to address this, including extra writing sessions targeted at improving boys' writing through topics which interest them, such as dinosaurs. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, including those pupils in the special resource units, are making better progress because work is targeted more specifically to meet their needs and they are given valuable support from well-trained teaching assistants.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving. In the better lessons, work is matched more closely to pupils' needs and teachers have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils respond with enthusiasm to the 'challenges' posed by teachers to extend their learning. Teachers have better subject knowledge and are building more effectively on pupils' prior learning. In the best lessons, teachers make clear their expectations of what pupils will learn and there are constant changes of activity which keep pupils interested and engaged. For example, in the Year 2 classes, pupils thoroughly enjoyed writing their descriptions of 'Mr Gum' after listening to and joining in the story with actions and role play, drawing their pictures of how they thought Mr Gum looked based on what they had heard and discussing their ideas in groups and pairs. This helped to improve the quality of their writing as the story and activities captured their imaginations. In the weaker lessons, the pace of learning is slow because teachers do not make the maximum use of time available and work is not always matched precisely enough to pupils' individual needs.

Pupils' books show that, although there have been improvements in marking and feedback, pupils do not always have opportunities to respond to marking to help improve their work. Although there is evidence in pupils' literacy books that writing is improving over time, including for more-able pupils, this quality of writing is not as prevalent in other aspects of work, such as in topic books. The school has introduced a new cursive style of handwriting and the benefits of this are beginning to be seen. However, in some books pupils are using a mix of print and the cursive style. There is evidence to show that progress is better in mathematics but the inaccurate recording and presentation of pupils' work is causing difficulties, for example, in place-value or the use of decimal points. There are not enough opportunities for pupils to solve problems to enable them to apply their mathematical skills more widely. Pupils, particularly those in Key Stage 1, have a better understanding of their learning targets and what they have to do to achieve them. They are now using them on a daily basis to help improve their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

In lessons and around the school, the vast majority of pupils now behave better and show respect to adults and to their peers. They work more collaboratively in groups and pairs and there are positive relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves. There are some pupils who display challenging behaviour and the school is taking positive steps to address this, including through gaining support from other agencies. Pupils say they feel safe and know they can turn to adults if they have a worry or concern. Leaders are taking steps to ensure that pupils attend school regularly through contacting parents and carers on the first day of absence and offering rewards for good attendance. As a result, attendance is rapidly improving.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and deputy headteacher are working closely together as a team and are tackling weaknesses with determination and rigour. They make clear their expectations of the quality of teaching required to enable pupils to make the progress they should through the new performance management systems. Teachers are held more to account through regular meetings to discuss pupils' progress and pupils' work is regularly scrutinised. The headteacher's judgements on the quality of teaching are accurate, as shown when carrying out joint lesson observations with an inspector. School monitoring records show that the feedback given to teachers is evaluative and identifies targets for them to improve their practice. These are followed up in the next lesson observation to ensure that the quality of teaching is improving.

Established leaders, such as the special educational needs coordinator and the literacy and numeracy leaders, now regularly check and evaluate the quality of teaching and the progress of pupils in the areas for which they are responsible. They have identified strengths and areas which need to be improved and are taking appropriate steps to address these. However, the impact of the work being done to address the needs of some small groups of pupils has not yet been fully evaluated. New leaders, although they have only been in post three weeks, have quickly produced action plans with targets which can be measured and are rapidly 'getting to grips' with the areas which need to be improved.

Since the last inspection, the governing body has been replaced by an IEB. The members of the IEB are using their expertise in school improvement and the management of resources and finance to challenge the school leaders and hold them to account more effectively. The Chair of the IEB has visited the school and three meetings have been held to discuss and evaluate pupils' progress, the school improvement plan, school policies, attendance information and aspects of safeguarding. Links have been established with a partner school through the Chair of the IEB.

External support

The local authority has provided effective support, particularly in giving advice to staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage to improve provision for children and for other aspects, such as to help improve writing across the school. Local authority officers have also provided advice to improve safeguarding and attendance. The Chair of the IEB has arranged support from a partner school to help ensure a smooth transition to academy status. Staff have valued the one-to-one coaching and mentoring support from staff at the partner school.