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29 June 2012

Mrs Joanne Raybould
Bridgtown Primary School
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WS11 0AZ

Dear Mrs Raybould

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Bridgtown Primary School

Following my visit with Mary-Jane Edwards Additional Inspector to your school on 27–28 June 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 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 and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted 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 Staffordshire.

Yours sincerely

Paul Weston
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve pupils achievement by:
 - ensuring that teachers make good use of assessment information to plan lessons that are effective in meeting the needs of all groups of pupils
 - making better use of marking and pupils' personal targets to raise aspirations and guide pupils in their learning
 - increasing the range of opportunities for pupils to practise and extend their literacy and numeracy skills in different subjects.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the impact of actions rigorously to inform strategic planning
 - developing the ability of the governing body to hold leaders firmly to account for pupils' levels of attainment and progress
 - setting realistic and challenging targets for pupils that raise expectations for their performance.

- Renew efforts to work purposefully with parents and carers to improve punctuality and raise pupils' attendance to at least the national average by April 2013.

Special measures: monitoring of Bridgtown Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 27–28 June 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including 14 lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, groups of pupils, the Chair and two other representatives of the Governing Body and the Local Leader of Education who is supporting the school. A telephone conversation was also held with a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a new deputy headteacher has taken up her appointment and three new governors have been recruited to strengthen the governing body. Three experienced teachers who were absent at the time of the inspection have returned to work. In addition, the Year 3 and 4 classes have been reorganised into ability groups. School leaders are in the process of restructuring the school leadership team. The school is being supported by a Local Leader of Education from another Staffordshire primary school and a learning partnership has been established with that school. The local authority has provided a range of consultant support for subject leaders.

Achievement of pupils at the school

There is an upward trend in the proportion of pupils who are making at least satisfactory rates of progress. However, there is still some way to go to eradicate all underachievement. Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics remains low throughout the school. Teachers' current assessments show that too few pupils reach or exceed the levels expected for their age. There remain inconsistencies in the rate of progress pupils make across classes and subjects. Nevertheless, there are signs of improvements in classes where the teaching is strong and more focused on pupils doing well. The most significant sources of underachievement remain where the teaching, although satisfactory, is not accelerating quickly enough to help pupils catch up on lost ground, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.

Pupils are keen to do well. They try hard and persevere with tasks, especially when cooperating with others or engaging in group discussions. This was seen in a Year 2 phonics (letters and sounds) lesson, where pupils worked well together to investigate and group words with the 'ee' sound. There are signs of improvement in pupils' reading and writing development, especially in Years 3 and 4 where pupils work in small ability groups. However, too many pupils across the school make common and frequent spelling and punctuation errors when writing independently. Pupils have more opportunities now to write more extensively, but teachers do not

provide enough time for them to edit and improve the accuracy of their tasks. In mathematics lessons, pupils are becoming more systematic in their approach and increasingly use the most appropriate method to solve problems but gaps in knowledge prevent more rapid progress. Oral and mental starters are not used effectively to sharpen pupils' mental recall of number facts. Pupils with disabilities, special educational needs and with emotional and behavioural difficulties are well supported and make satisfactory progress as a result.

Pupils' reading remains below average because skills are not always systematically taught in guided reading or phonics lessons. Strategies to apply basic reading skills, such as combining the sound letters make, are not always rigorously demonstrated. As a result, some pupils are not confident to tackle unfamiliar words. School leaders rightly identify that these sessions are not well coordinated and focused on developing pupils' reading and comprehension skills. . To this end, a new phonics programme will be implemented from September 2012. Pupils are provided with insufficient opportunities to read independently at an appropriate level in school, which also limits their progress.

The quality of teaching

Although teaching remains satisfactory overall, there are some signs of improvement. In all classes, relationships are good. Senior staff and teachers undertake more robust evaluations and assessments of pupils' progress and performance. For example, 'learning journeys' have been implemented in the Nursery and Reception classes. The training and support provided by external partners and consultants, as well as the improved use of assessment, is beginning to increase the pace of learning. A closer scrutiny of pupils' progress and attainment is helping teachers to identify those who are making slower progress. Work is increasingly being matched to the needs of pupils and teachers are becoming better at targeting support for particular individuals and groups. For example, special booster groups such as 'Quest' are helping pupils to catch up on lost ground.

The best teaching ensures there is a good pace to learning, activities are interesting and tasks are practical, varied and challenging. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson, pupils were provided with opportunities to investigate and solve problems using a variety of methods. Weaknesses persist in lessons where some teachers talk for too long and do not provide pupils with enough independence or opportunities to find out things for themselves. Support staff engage well with pupils by providing them with suitable support to participate, ask questions or offer ideas. Marking has improved. Books are generally well marked and include advice and targets on how pupils can improve their work. However, opportunities are not consistently provided for pupils to respond to their teachers' comments. Consequently, some continue to make similar mistakes in subsequent lessons.

Pupils say that they find their lessons more interesting and engaging. Teachers are increasingly extending literacy skills across different subjects such as science and history. Work books and displays of pupils' writing show considerable variation in the style and accuracy of writing. There is inconsistency in the way teachers model their own writing when using whiteboards or displays. In some classes, pupils are provided with specific details about the levels they have achieved or expected to achieve over a series of lessons but again, this is variable across the school.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Improve achievement by ensuring teachers make better use of assessment information, marking, targets and increase opportunities for pupils to extend their literacy and numeracy skills in different subjects – satisfactory.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour and safety around the school is generally good with most pupils being polite and considerate. Some pupils exhibit challenging behaviour but this is well managed by adults. The majority of pupils say they feel safe and secure. They say that bullying is rare and if there is a problem, adults quickly sort it out.

Despite the introduction of a range of strategies, attendance remains low and has not significantly improved since the last inspection. 'Spotlight' attendance weeks show improvement during their operation but this is not sustained. The automatic texting service is beneficial but has had minimal impact to date. Clear procedures are in place when pupils are absent and closer work has been introduced with parents and carers to ensure more pupils attend, especially those who are persistently absent and have too much time off school. The Education Welfare Officer has visited the local Traveller site to promote good attendance and the headteacher has made a number of home visits. However, these initiatives and a range of incentives designed to encourage attendance have not had a sustained impact. School leaders are further developing procedures to raise the profile of attendance and punctuality around the school and in the community, such as introducing posters and visible prompts, and the direct targeting of persistent absent families through letters.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Improve punctuality and raise pupils' attendance to at least the national average by April 2013 –inadequate.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders and managers are determined to develop and improve the school. All staff demonstrate a desire and commitment to school improvement. They are working hard to improve the quality of provision. The governing body has been strengthened by the appointment of new members and following training, they are beginning to hold the school's leaders more to account. The return of three experienced teachers following a period of absence has helped strengthen the teaching team. The new deputy headteacher has swiftly established herself in the school. She has quickly streamlined the school's data systems, making them understandable and accessible to staff and governors. She has also provided good support for staff and participated in a range of monitoring and evaluation work with other senior leaders. More challenging targets are being set for pupils, and teachers are beginning to raise their expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils are clear about their literacy and mathematics targets and know what they need to do to improve.

A good start has been made in setting out more focused priorities for school improvement in the school's post-Ofsted action plan which complements the local authority's statement of action. Senior staff and the governing body are now more involved in rating school improvement, using a colour code, to help measure the pace and scale of efforts aimed at improving attainment and strengthening teaching. Senior leaders are gaining a better understanding of the main issues in the school. Monitoring is more systematic and includes routine lesson visits, more regular meetings with staff to check pupils' progress, and training and professional development led by the local authority's consultants. These combined efforts are helping to develop the skills of middle and senior leaders, and increasing their capacity to improve. The actions taken so far are appropriate and much needed. The leadership team and governing body have made a satisfactory start in dealing with the most immediate priority to improve the proportion of good teaching. At the time of the inspection, the school's procedures for safeguarding pupils met requirements.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority's statement of action provides a sound framework for further improvement, including suitable support for the leadership of the school. There are clear success criteria by which the statement can be evaluated. Good support has been provided by the local authority's literacy and numeracy consultants. The Local Leader in Education has supported the school well, utilising the experience and expertise of staff from her own school to provide additional support. The six-weekly post-Ofsted action plan meetings have helped to maintain the school's focus on school improvement and helped target and address identified weaknesses.

Priorities for further improvement

- Accelerate the progress pupils make in writing by improving the accuracy and structure of their writing, particularly spelling and punctuation.
- Ensure that oral and mental starters are routinely undertaken at the start of all mathematics lessons to increase pupils' mental recall of key mathematical facts.
- Implement consistently the new phonics programme from September 2012 to ensure that pupils in Key Stage 1 get off to a better start with their reading.