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21 June 2013

Mrs G Webb
The Headteacher
Telscombe Cliffs Community Primary School
Telscombe Cliffs
Peacehaven
BN10 7DE

Dear Mrs Webb

Special measures monitoring inspection of Telscombe Cliffs Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 and 20 June, 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 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 East Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching by making sure that:
 - teachers have sufficient subject knowledge in writing and mathematics to be able to adapt plans and respond quickly to pupils' needs in lessons
 - the pace of lessons is always good, pupils are engaged in their work and are moved on quickly to their next steps in learning
 - teachers ask questions that deepen pupils' understanding and involve pupils of all abilities
 - pupils have more opportunities to use and apply their mathematical skills in other subjects
 - all pupils make good progress from their starting points by setting work that always matches their needs and abilities, especially for the less able pupils, disabled pupils and those who need extra support with their learning.
- Improve the impact of leaders and managers by:
 - ensuring that plans for improvement include regular opportunities to check and measure the impact of the action taken
 - making regular checks on the quality of teaching and ensuring that points for improving teaching are followed up with teachers
 - developing the skills of all staff with leadership roles so that they can contribute fully to making the school better
 - making better use of information about pupils' progress and attainment to accurately evaluate what works well and what needs to be improved
 - providing the governing body with accessible information about the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement so that it can fully understand the school's strengths and weaknesses in order to better hold leaders to account
 - undertaking an external review of governance.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 19 and 20 June 2013

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, including minutes of meetings and school plans. He met with the headteacher, both of the deputy headteachers, staff, pupils, the Co-Chairs of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority. He scrutinised pupils' work and observed playtimes and several lessons. Two lesson observations were made jointly with senior members of the school's staff.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection, in February 2013, a new deputy headteacher has begun work at the school. The school has advertised for a new headteacher, as the current headteacher retires at end of the summer term. For the autumn term, an interim executive headteacher has been appointed, from a nearby school.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' progress in writing, which was patchy at the time of the inspection, is now much better and more even across the school. In Year 1, for example, pupils write very well for their age, forming letters accurately, often neatly joining up their letters, and shaping sentences correctly and interestingly. Across the school the English curriculum is sensibly devised so that pupils can write at length, and develop their work and ideas, not always in short bursts. Pupils read in lessons with confidence. Key Stage 2 pupils use technical terminology such as 'rhetorical question' or 'perimeter' correctly, and this helps their learning. Pupils enjoy investigative work, when they have to find things out, or come up with ideas themselves.

At the previous monitoring inspection, many pupils in Year 6 were behind where they should be in English and mathematics. As a result of better teaching and well-targeted intervention work, this is now much less the case. Across the school, in reading, writing and mathematics, attainment is close to, and sometimes above, average. Any underachievement in any groups or classes is diagnosed swiftly so that help and support can be given. For example, boys' writing in Year 4 is currently a focus because some pupils have begun to fall behind where they should be. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children make strong progress in writing but do not achieve as well in the other areas.

The pupils entitled to the pupil premium funding achieve almost as well as their peers in the school. This is a significant step forward. Pupils with special educational needs are making much faster progress than before.

In subjects beyond English and mathematics, however, the depth of pupils' learning is more shallow. There are fewer opportunities for pupils to develop knowledge and understanding specific to those subjects. For example, in a Year 1 religious education lesson, the pupils wrote brilliant recounts of the parable of the Good Samaritan but were unsure of whether the story was true or not, why it was told, why it matters that the hero was from Samaria, and what a good neighbour is. It was a great writing lesson, but missed important elements needed to make it equally good as a religious education lesson.

The quality of teaching

There has been considerable improvement in the quality of teaching since the inspection. Teachers are keen to improve their work together. In English and mathematics lessons, work is now usually well matched to the needs of most pupils. In particular, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs usually receive very well targeted support, just right for them. Pupils who are higher or middle attaining also receive useful work which is specially targeted for them, although this is not as precisely focused on their needs as the work provided for pupils with special educational needs. Pupils agreed, 'We used to all get the same task. Now we get different tasks, which is good.' A pupil added, 'I like challenging myself.'

Teachers' questioning skills are much better as a result of useful school-based staff training. In many cases, teachers apply the training they have received thoughtfully and help pupils to think more deeply. However, in some cases, teachers still do too much of the thinking for the pupils, sometimes answering their own questions. Many lessons are well paced and pupils get down to working on their own quickly. Just occasionally, teachers talk for too long. Classroom routines are well established, so time is rarely wasted, and teachers choose interesting resources for pupils to use. Classroom and corridor displays provide helpful stimuli for learning. Pupils know how they can be successful. This is due to a combination of 'steps to success' in each lesson and their own personal targets, which raises aspirations.

Teachers' marking of pupils' work is thorough. Pupils like the 'green for growth' and purple marking colour codes and respond well to teachers' improvement suggestions. This sometimes leads to a good dialogue with the teacher, helping pupils to improve. For example, a teacher responded usefully to a pupil's written comment, which showed only partial understanding, by suggesting, 'Think more about the impact on the reader.'

Teaching is weaker in subjects beyond English and mathematics. This is because of a lack of depth in the subject content. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 enjoyed a pleasurable, well-managed, music lesson about a Ghanaian song, but there was too little depth in the musical activity. The quality of their singing and understanding of musical elements were below expectation.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

As at the October inspection, pupils are eager to learn. The working atmosphere in lessons is consistently positive and pupils settle well and work hard. Pupils continue to say that behaviour in lessons is good. Relationships between adults and pupils remain very constructive.

Pupils enjoy playing together and feel safe. The school has worked hard with parents to gain their confidence in the school's ability to deal with any incidences of bullying. There has been progress with this, although the pupils who met with HMI said that bullying still sometimes occurs and can occasionally re-occur later.

The rate of attendance has dropped since the autumn and is slightly below average. This is due mainly to some pupils who are persistently absent. The school has appropriate procedures for following up these cases.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The school is very capably led by its senior team. This is a big improvement. The headteacher has responded sharply to the challenges of the inspection report. She is now driving significant improvement. She has shown great determination to begin to turn the fortunes of the school round before she retires.

The two deputy headteachers make very substantial contributions. The new deputy headteacher has revolutionised the school's work for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and is working very effectively towards improving teaching more widely. The way in which the existing deputy headteacher oversees the data about pupil progress, with very sharp insights into how this links to the quality of teaching, is excellent. She adeptly ensures that the school knows how well each group of pupils is doing, in each class, making sure pupils who need it receive extra help. The success of the school's work in improving the progress of those pupils entitled to pupil premium funding is an example of this. The mathematics and English subject leaders are also making a real, positive difference. They know how well pupils are doing in the subjects and use this data well to provide focused support for teachers and pupils.

The leadership in other subjects is beginning to develop. All subject leaders have devised useful action plans and are checking on how well pupils are doing in their subjects. The school has useful overall plans for what is taught in each subject in each year group. But these lack detail and depth. This is what causes the teaching to be weaker in the subjects beyond English and mathematics. However, pupils enjoy a wide range of visits out and school clubs.

The school improvement plan is now a well-targeted document which has shaped recent changes very well. It is well linked to the school's self-evaluation, which is accurate and well focused, and also to performance management targets for individual staff. When senior staff observe lessons, they now check carefully that when they recommend that a teacher works to improve some aspect of their teaching, this is checked on at the next observation. In both joint observations with HMI, senior staff picked out the strengths and weaknesses in the lessons correctly and fed back to the teachers very usefully. But they were tempted to grade the lessons slightly too highly, when not all pupils were making as rapid progress as they might.

The governing body has improved its work and standing in the school community. It is now much more credible and effective. Governors have aptly followed up the recommendations from the external review of governance. They have benefited from useful well-focused training and their own action plan is effective. As a result, they ask more searching, appropriate, questions of senior staff. They now receive the information from the school that they need. Their frequent meetings help keep the school on track. Governors' visits to the school are better focused, although the governing body has no specific involvement with evaluating or monitoring school improvement plan. The Co-Chairs of the Governing Body are right in saying that there is still more to do. They lead the governing body well and thoughtfully, ensuring it carries out its key strategic purposes suitably.

External support

Local authority support is good. The lead officer provides and arranges valuable support and advice. She visits regularly but without mollycoddling the school, rightly ensuring it is building up its own capacity to improve itself. Local authority consultants are instrumental in supporting improvements in teaching and middle leadership.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop further the role and impact of all subject leaders, so that the subject-specific content of lessons is increasingly rich and ambitious in all subjects.
- Sharpen the planning of the work provided in lessons to middle and higher attaining pupils, so that it helps them better to reach their next learning steps.