

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22

West Lancs Investment Centre T 0300 123 1231

Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566 937

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: jsimmons@cfbt.com



17 October 2013

Mrs C Holgate
Headteacher
Lowerhouse Junior School
Liverpool Road
Burnley
Lancashire
BB12 6LN

Dear Mrs Holgate

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lowerhouse Junior School

Following my visit with Susan Barkway Additional Inspector, to your school on 15 and 16 October 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 January 2013. 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.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Interim Executive Director for Children & Young People for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils make at least good progress and reach the standards of which they are capable, especially in mathematics, by:
 - making sure that teachers allow sufficient time in lessons for pupils to practise new skills and to find things out for themselves
 - making sure that teachers always have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and plan lessons that are not too easy, so that all pupils are challenged
 - making sure that teaching assistants are deployed to support pupils' learning during all parts of the lesson
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop and use their skills in mathematics to solve problems, including when they learn in other subjects
 - improving the quality of marking, particularly in mathematics, so that teachers' comments help pupils to understand exactly how to improve their work.

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels, including governance by:
 - ensuring leaders know how to review and analyse information about pupils' progress and use it to check whether their actions are helping to improve pupils' achievement
 - making more regular and rigorous checks on the quality of teaching and learning in order to strengthen the way that leaders evaluate the school's effectiveness
 - providing support to subject leaders so that they develop their skills and can confidently check the quality of teaching and make sure that good teaching practices are shared
 - developing the skills of the governing body especially in understanding how well pupils are doing, the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and how to check that pupil premium funding is having a positive impact on pupils' achievement.

Report on the monitoring inspection on 15 – 16 October 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the executive headteacher, members of the school's leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body, groups of pupils and two representatives from the local authority. They observed teaching in all classes, including undertaking paired lesson observations with the headteacher and executive headteacher. Inspectors considered 38 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, ParentView.

Context

The acting headteacher at the time of the previous monitoring inspection has been appointed as substantive headteacher. Governors have begun the process of recruiting a substantive deputy headteacher. An experienced teacher has taken up the post of Year 5 teacher. Pupil numbers have remained stable. There has been significant change in the composition of the governing body.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The achievement of pupils is improving. Pupils who left the school in summer 2013 achieved better results than in previous years. The proportion attaining expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics rose. It remained lower than the national figure but the gap began to narrow. Standards in reading showed particular improvement, with more pupils making strong progress, resulting in an increased proportion attaining higher levels. In mathematics, pupils' progress accelerated, leading to higher attainment and an increased proportion of pupils gaining and exceeding national expectations.

The achievement of pupils currently in school is improving. Teachers are working hard to compensate for pupils' past underachievement. The progress pupils make is systematically tracked and swift action is being taken to support pupils who are performing below expectations. Pupils' work books indicate that more is being expected of them and they are rising to new challenges. In mathematics, further opportunities for pupils to use and apply their skills are resulting in more secure learning. Most pupils enjoy reading and their competence in understanding different types of text is growing. Standards of spelling are not high enough across the school. Leaders recognise that this is an issue and are starting to tackle it. The school recognises, from scrutinising pupils' performance information, that the achievement of higher-attaining pupils and of those supported by pupil premium funding needs to improve. There is a strong focus on boosting the learning of these pupils in lessons and through additional activities. The school's monitoring indicates that interventions that are led by teachers after school are having a positive effect

on boosting the progress of identified pupils in order that gaps between the performance of groups can be narrowed.

The quality of teaching

Teachers have responded positively to raised expectations of their performance. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated and the school's records, confirmed by inspection evidence, indicate that an increasing proportion of teaching is good. Some teaching requires improvement; where this is the case, teachers and leaders are clear about development points and how they should be addressed. There has been a strong focus on improving lesson planning so that the needs of different groups of pupils are met. Teaching assistants have received additional guidance on how to support pupils' learning and often make a valuable contribution, such as in a mathematics lesson in which a group supported by the teaching assistant made excellent progress in developing their understanding of standard measure and used correct mathematical terminology. Teachers' questioning has improved and pupils are often given good opportunities to provide extended verbal answers that illustrate their thinking. Sometimes opportunities are missed for pupils' work to be used as exemplification for others.

Teachers' marking is of a good quality. It provides pupils with guidance on how to improve their work and often provides an additional challenge or question to which pupils respond during 'fix it' time. For instance, pupils are sometimes asked to do a specific calculation to extend their mathematical thinking or to punctuate a sentence correctly to show that a misconception has been overcome. Pupils are encouraged to sign teachers' feedback to show that they have read and understood it.

The learning environment has been substantially improved across school. All classrooms now have 'working walls' that feature useful prompts and evidence of pupils' current working processes in English and mathematics. A substantial investment in technology has equipped classrooms with interactive touch screens enabling more imaginative approaches to teaching. Pupils' work is proudly displayed around the school.

The curriculum is being developed to provide more opportunities for pupils to investigate topics for themselves. Pupils showed great interest in their 'Passport to Burnley' work which involved researching local history. Some have continued this in their own time, drawing upon the recollections of older family members to help them.

The school's teaching of reading during guided sessions requires improvement because pupils are not always challenged by texts that are suited to their capabilities or activities that extend their thinking.

The teaching of mathematics has been a major focus for improvement. The school's new calculation policy is being systematically followed so that pupils can learn sequentially. Teachers' mathematical knowledge has been enhanced through training and coaching from the numeracy leader and the local authority consultant and this has given confidence to their work, although there are still instances where mathematical concepts are not explained to pupils as clearly as they might be.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' thoughtful and considerate behaviour continues to be a strength of the school, both in lessons and at social times. They show enthusiasm for learning, evident when they participated with gusto during a music session led by a visiting opera singer. They appreciate the school's rewards system and think it is fair that any breaking of the school's code of conduct results in a sanction. Pupils are responding well to teachers' provision of increased opportunities for them to work collaboratively during lessons, such as in mathematics when they test their problem-solving methods with partners. Pupils are confident that the school is a safe place and they wholeheartedly trust staff to work with them to resolve any issues, such as bullying.

Attendance declined slightly in the last academic year. The school has analysed the reasons for this and is taking appropriate action to deal with the very small number of pupils whose absence is unauthorised. High attendance is promoted strongly and pupils are able to explain the link between attending regularly and doing well. Pupils arrive at school and to lessons punctually.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher is driving the school with passion and commitment. Staff comment on her strong, pragmatic leadership of learning. She is rigorous in her analysis of all aspects of the school's performance and open in her communication with staff, governors and parents. Her improvement plan is ambitious. There is a regular programme of monitoring of teaching, through lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' books, analysis of progress data and discussions with pupils. The outcomes of monitoring are reported back to teachers and good provision is made for their continued professional development. The school's self-evaluation is honest, recognising that the school is making strong progress on its improvement journey, but with no hint of complacency.

The headteacher is very well supported by the leadership team who have benefited from training and coaching to increase their effectiveness and now have a clear grasp of the school's priorities and how they should be addressed. Leaders of literacy and numeracy have begun to observe colleagues' practice in order to monitor the impact of school policies and advise on improvement.

The school is increasingly outward-facing and is working effectively with partners, including the local infants' school, in order that pupils' transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 is smooth and their learning is maximised. The establishment of a parent teacher association is a further indication of the school's commitment to being a hub of the community. Parents are appreciative of the improvements being made to the school. A recent workshop to help parents support their children with mathematics proved popular. The overwhelming majority of parents would recommend the school.

The acting deputy headteacher has been seconded from a school within the local authority. Governors have begun the process of appointing a substantive deputy headteacher and rightly identify that this is crucial to ensuring the school's capacity for continued improvement.

The governing body has been strengthened by new members, several of whom have expertise in education. The structure and purpose of governors' committees has been reviewed. The Chair of the Governing Body meets with the headteacher on a weekly basis through which he keeps closely apprised of developments and asks challenging questions. Governors have welcomed training from the local authority to improve their effectiveness. They have established links with class teachers and agreed protocols for visiting lessons. Governors are also regular visitors to family assemblies.

External support

The local authority has provided extensive, well-judged support to the school and this has been positively received. An executive headteacher from a successful junior school within the authority has supported the headteacher in developing robust management systems. Staff have benefited from visiting her school to observe good practice. Local authority consultants have worked with staff to develop teaching in literacy, numeracy and other subjects. The school adviser meets regularly with the governing body and is supporting it in the recruitment of a deputy headteacher. The monitoring and intervention adviser has worked with the headteacher to ensure the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation. She also ensures that the advice and guidance provided by local authority staff working with the school is consistent and complementary. Induction training has been provided to the teacher with responsibility for coordinating special educational needs provision.

The local authority has a phased approach to reducing the intensity of its support as the school becomes increasingly able to sustain its own improvement.