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Mrs S Deacon
Interim Executive Headteacher
Westwood Farm Junior School
Fullbrook Crescent
Tilehurst
Reading
Berkshire
RG31 6RY

Dear Mrs Deacon

Special measures monitoring inspection of Westwood Farm Junior School

Following my visit with Jennifer Cutler, additional inspector, to your school on 22 and 23 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 February 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 appoint one newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection, after consultation with me.

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 Director of Children's Services for West Berkshire.

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching by:
 - making sure teachers check pupils' progress carefully in every lesson
 - ensuring leaders check pupils' workbooks to see how well they are marked and that pupils have time to respond to teachers' comments
 - making sure lessons move on at an appropriate pace and that teachers provide the right resources and activities to extend and challenge all pupils
 - making sure teachers use information and communication technology in all classes more effectively to support pupils' learning.
- Improve pupils' achievement, particularly in reading and mathematics, by:
 - ensuring phonics is taught well so pupils are able to use their knowledge of sounds and letters to sound out words
 - making sure teachers who have responsibility for subjects and aspects of the school regularly analyse the achievement of all groups of pupils to identify key priorities for rapid improvement
 - ensuring pupils know what to do to meet their personal targets
 - identifying why girls do not do as well as boys and putting appropriate strategies in place to accelerate their learning
 - giving pupils opportunities to extend their reading, writing and mathematical skills through work in other subjects.
- Improve leadership, management and governance, by:
 - ensuring teachers who hold management responsibilities have the appropriate time and resources to fulfil their roles and responsibilities
 - extending the positive links with parents and carers, so they have a stronger involvement in supporting their children's learning at home and school
 - ensuring governors use information about pupils' achievement to challenge the school's leaders to bring about improvement
 - ensuring procedures for performance management support teachers well and hold them to account for the achievement of the pupils in their classes.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 22–23 October 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher, subject coordinators for English and mathematics, the inclusion manager, other teachers, representatives of the interim executive board (IEB), a representative of the local authority, and groups of pupils. They observed 12 lessons, all of them jointly with senior staff, across all eight classes and involving the work of all teachers, and a small-group support session. Briefer visits to some lessons were also undertaken to check the quality of marking in pupils' workbooks.

Context

Plans to bring the neighbouring infants school and this junior school together into a federation are in the consultation stage. Four new staff joined the school in September, including an assistant headteacher who is the mathematics coordinator, and a new inclusion manager who has responsibility for the progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, the most-able pupils, and pupils eligible for the pupil premium.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The proportion of pupils achieving the progress expected of them in mathematics by the end of Key Stage 2 this summer increased to be very near the national average; as a consequence, the proportions reaching Level 4 and Level 5 were better. Fewer pupils made these gains in English, and progress in writing was significantly weaker than in reading. Writing is an appropriately major focus across all year groups this year. Pupils' current progress is still too variable across Years 3 to 6, but useful work has been done to analyse and identify the reasons for these differences, and make the necessary responses. The new system to track the progress of pupils is beginning to offer teachers and senior staff important insights into the performance of groups of pupils throughout the school. This information gives teachers opportunities to plan better lessons to ensure that pupils' needs are met more effectively, and some are doing so. There is no discernible difference in the achievement of boys and girls currently, but the school is monitoring this closely.

The progress made by pupils eligible for the pupil premium is now closely monitored and there is a high level of awareness of the need to narrow gaps in achievement which have opened up in recent years. The majority of these pupils are currently on target to make the progress expected of them in reading and in mathematics, but not yet in writing. There is a wide range of well-thought-through intervention strategies and special provision in place to support them.

The new inclusion manager has undertaken a thorough and accurate assessment of the needs of every pupil who has a special educational need, and has put in place good-quality support strategies, backed by regular monitoring of the quality of these pupils' learning in every classroom. The new systems in place have the capacity to accelerate these pupils' progress, but it is too soon to see this happening yet.

Pupils in the Hearing Resource Base do well, because specialist staff work alongside teachers and adapt lessons to meet these pupils' particular needs. As a consequence, they are confident learners with healthy self-esteem. Individual education plans are clear, and each child's targets are easily accessible for them and their teacher to read and check.

The quality of teaching

Most teachers are responding positively to the challenge of changing their teaching style and methods in response to the accent on accelerating pupils' progress. Many are experimenting with new techniques, involving group work, paired work and developing ways of catering for the needs of groups of different-ability pupils in the class. Marking is now much more two-way, and pupils are beginning to respond to the information provided by teachers about next steps and particular ways of improving their work. Pupils are not always given enough guidance about how to do this, however. Year 3 and 4 pupils said 'Teachers' marking helps us to improve.'

Training to enable teachers to regularly check pupils' progress and understanding is making a difference. Most teachers now appreciate the importance of always giving pupils work of an appropriate degree of challenge, and using a range of resources to do this, but the needs of the most able are still not always met well. Younger pupils welcomed this sense of work being appropriately harder; some older pupils expressed concerns that it was not always the case, especially in mathematics.

Sometimes, teachers are unclear about exactly what it is that they want pupils to learn over a lesson, or part of a lesson. When this is the case, learning intentions written on the board are poorly expressed and teachers do not steer a confident path through a topic. Work has begun on building in more opportunities to extend learning in mathematics and English into other subjects, but this lack of precision in the nature of the desired outcomes means that it cannot be as effective as it should be yet. The effectiveness of some teaching is diminished by weaknesses in subject knowledge; the teaching of science is in need of urgent improvement.

Phonics teaching (associating letters and groups of letters with certain sounds) has been supported strongly and is improving. Teachers and teaching assistants have been trained in leading intervention in phonics skills, and this is continually monitored, but there is more to be done to ensure that phonics is taught consistently well.

Teaching assistants play a useful role in many lessons, often usefully supporting pupils with specific learning needs. Many teachers are not yet directing the work of other adults in the room to best effect, and getting the most out of this valuable support for learning.

There has been little improvement in the sophistication with which teachers use information and communication technology such as interactive whiteboards in lessons, but we agreed that there were other, more significant, priorities to be addressed at the moment.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Attendance is being maintained at near the national average because there are assertive responses to the poor attendance of a small number of pupils. Pupils' attitudes to their work are generally good, except when teaching fails to stimulate and challenge them sufficiently. When this happens, they stop listening and daydream; there is usually no disruption to the learning of others involved. This is especially true for the more able who are sometimes required to do work which is not difficult enough for them. Some pupils feel that behaviour can be poorer when their usual teacher is not taking the lesson. Exclusions continue to be used sparingly and after considerable reflection about their impact on the child and others.

Behaviour around the school and in the playground is usually calm; pupils can show care and consideration to each other. When friendship problems arise, some older pupils are not always confident that things will be better if they ask an adult for help. Some boisterous behaviour was seen on the playground, but it dissipated quickly and no one was hurt or upset; several pupils commented that they do not like what they see as over-assertive behaviour by a few others. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 are more positive about behaviour, and they have obviously picked up clear messages about the school's new expectations, using words and phrases such as 'respect' and 'challenging ourselves' often in conversation with inspectors.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The executive headteacher evaluates the work of the school accurately and she knows exactly what has to be done to improve things. She leads with a quiet, and very real, determination to drive up achievement for pupils and has earned the respect of parents and carers, pupils and staff. She and her deputy make accurate and perceptive judgements of the quality of teaching and learning. Together, they are beginning to make a real difference to these pupils' lives.

The school development plans for this term, and the associated monitoring and evaluation plan, identify appropriate areas to improve. There is a good emphasis on staff training and the interim executive headteacher is planning to spend more time in staff meetings addressing teachers' subject knowledge and their understanding of the ways in which pupils learn certain topics.

Subject leaders for English and mathematics now have designated time to spend addressing the quality of learning in their subjects. They are very aware that their role is to generate significant improvements in all pupils' quality of learning. Accordingly, they are beginning to concentrate on analysing the performance of groups of pupils in every year and class, in order to drive specific support and training for staff, and to encourage them to provide for the needs of these groups in every lesson. They appreciate that the next step is to be in those lessons, checking that teaching and learning improve.

Systems to manage the performance of teaching staff have been reorganised and improved significantly. Links between performance and pay are now more robust. The appraisal of support staff has begun.

Members of the IEB demonstrate a detailed and accurate understanding of the school's current strengths and weaknesses. This is obtained through visits, the analysis of performance data, and via local authority-supported self-reviews undertaken every half term. This gives them a good capacity to hold the school closely to account. They offer very good levels of support to the school, for example working successfully to improve the organisation of its finances. They and the local authority express high levels of confidence that the interim executive headteacher and her deputy are bringing about the changes needed to secure improvement.

Only a few parents and carers have contributed to Parent View this term, but their responses are considerably more positive than the views expressed last year. Their confidence in the leadership of the school is significantly higher. Parents and carers spoken with during the inspection visit commented that communications between them and the school are now much better.

External support

The local authority is providing good support for the school, which is under continual review in response to changing patterns of need. This includes the school improvement adviser's frequent and well-targeted assistance, which has so far involved advising on the best uses of the pupil premium and good practice in monitoring its effectiveness, developing the appraisal system and pay policies, and supporting the development of systems to track and analyse pupils' progress. The local authority undertakes half termly reviews of the school; these are helpful and informative. The special educational needs support team has worked closely with the new inclusion manager, and other advisers have assisted with checking the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' work in Years 3 and 6 in English, and will soon do this in mathematics. The school employs an external consultant to check teachers' assessments of reading standards.

The local authority has also provided specialist support and advice around health and safety provision, and associated training. Its representative on the IEB provides good training on the use of school performance data for other members.

In addition, the school is a member of a local mathematics network which provides useful support for ensuring that pupils in Year 6 who may underachieve make the progress expected.