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11 December 2013

Mrs Lisa Moorhouse
The Headteacher
Emerson Valley School
Hodder Lane
Emerson Valley
Milton Keynes
Buckinghamshire
MK4 2JR

Dear Mrs Moorhouse

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Emerson Valley School

Following my visit to your school on 11 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. 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 was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in January 2013. 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 the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Milton Keynes and as below.

Yours sincerely

Sue Barkway
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good by:
 - improving the teaching of phonics (linking sounds and letters) so that pupils who have disabilities and special educational needs, in particular, make better progress in reading and writing
 - teachers taking more direct responsibility for the progress of pupils who find learning difficult and effectively overseeing the work of teaching assistants
 - ensuring there are more opportunities for pupils to apply their ICT skills in other subjects
 - ensuring teachers adopt similar strategies in helping pupils to learn words which they use frequently but spell wrongly
 - improving teachers' understanding of how pupils are progressing so they can give them harder work when they need it.
- Raise pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics, by:
 - developing in pupils a love of reading by getting pupils to talk more to each other about books and stories they have read
 - improving pupils' comprehension skills, especially in looking more deeply and carefully at the meaning of the text they read
 - helping pupils to remember mathematical vocabulary by providing more visual support for them on classroom walls and in their books
providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills to real-life settings.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the annual reviews of teachers' performance carried out by all school leaders are clearly linked to the progress pupils are making so that the teachers' success in meeting their targets can be measured
 - developing more rigorous systems to check that the action taken to improve teaching and pupils' achievements is working
 - taking effective action to settle the long-standing staffing difficulties.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 11 December 2013

Evidence

The inspector met with the senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. She carried out learning walks in each of the year groups, visiting all classes, and she observed phonics groups (the teaching of letters and sounds). She also looked at pupils' work and school documentation, including pupil progress information, the school's monitoring file and the school's central record of checks on staff.

Context

Since the last inspection, a new headteacher and deputy headteacher have been appointed. They took up their appointments on 1 September 2013. Two newly qualified teachers, four part-time teachers and three teaching assistants have also joined the school. Three teachers are on maternity leave. There are no other significant changes.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The newly appointed headteacher and deputy headteacher have quickly identified the strengths of the school and areas for improvement. Along with the assistant headteacher, they have taken rapid action which is beginning to have an impact and secure improvement. For example, strategies to improve attendance and punctuality have resulted in a significant increase in the proportion of pupils who come to school on time, and there has been a very pleasing decrease in the percentage of those pupils who find attending school difficult.

Although outcomes at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2013 did not show any improvements on previous years, school information on pupils' progress in each year group does indicate that pupils are now making accelerated progress. The local authority and linked training school have worked closely with the school to moderate pupils' work, particularly in reading and writing, and, as a result, there is more confidence about the baseline and accuracy of ongoing assessments.

The quality of teaching is improving. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation through lesson observations, pupil progress information and work scrutiny are providing an accurate view of the quality of teaching over time. In addition, there is evidence to show that the programme of support and opportunities for training and development, combined with a robust approach towards performance management, is being effective in securing further improvements.

Governors are working closely with the school. For example, they carry out learning walks and scrutinise information on pupils' progress and their work books. As a result, they have a greater understanding and awareness of the improvements

made, as well as remaining concerns. They are providing a good level of challenge and support to the school.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement

- The school has revised its approach to the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) so that pupils, particularly disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, are beginning to make faster progress in reading and writing.
- A new approach to collating and presenting information on pupil progress is ensuring that teachers have a very clear understanding of how pupils are progressing.
- There is careful identification of pupils who are not making reasonable progress and a good range of intervention programmes is in place to enable accelerated progress.
- A very systematic approach to identifying what pupils have achieved and what they need to do to next has improved teachers' approach to planning lessons, as well as the way in which teachers mark pupils' work.
- The development of teachers' profiles has identified targets and appropriate support for all teachers.
- Classroom displays provide excellent visual support for pupils to use in their literacy and mathematics work.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement

- There is still variability in the quality of teaching. In particular, some lessons are not planned or structured in a way which maintains pupils' interest and engagement. When this happens, there is low-level disruption as pupils lose concentration or are off task.
- In some lessons, the pace is slow and questioning is not used effectively to ensure that all pupils make the progress of which they are capable during the lesson.

External support

The local authority is providing an appropriate level of support for the school. It enabled the new headteacher and deputy headteacher to spend some time in the school before officially taking up their appointments. As a result, there was an easier transition. It has also brokered support from neighbouring teaching schools. These schools are helping with the moderation of pupils' work and providing opportunities for teachers to observe and learn from good and outstanding practice.