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19 December 2013

Mrs Gail Brown
Headteacher
Brotherton and Byram Community Primary School
Low Street
Brotherton
Knottingley
West Yorkshire
WF11 9HQ

Dear Mrs Brown

Special measures monitoring inspection of Brotherton and Byram Community Primary School

Following my visit with Keith Bardon, additional inspector, and Lee Owston Her Majesty's Inspector to your school on 17 and 18 December 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 April 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.

Newly qualified teachers may not 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 Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service for North Yorkshire.

Yours sincerely

Steve Isherwood

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that it is at least good, in order that pupils make good or better progress and attain good standards at the end of Year 6, particularly in reading and mathematics, by:
 - ensuring teachers plan work to better meet the needs and interests of the more-able pupils so that they make the progress they are capable of
 - teachers moving lessons on at a good pace for everyone ensuring no pupil struggles to keep up
 - teachers keeping a careful eye on pupils who may be confused and addressing any misunderstandings so that all achieve well in every lesson
 - helping pupils, particularly girls, catch up quickly and fill the gaps in their knowledge and understanding they have developed because of inadequate teaching.

- Improve pupils' behaviour and safety, by:
 - improving pupils' attendance and reducing the proportion who are persistently absent so their attendance is at least in line with the national average
 - making sure lessons are not interrupted by disruptive behaviour
 - improving the effectiveness with which teachers manage pupils' behaviour in lessons.

- Rapidly increase the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels, including governance by:
 - providing clear direction for school improvement especially by ensuring the quality of teaching is at least good
 - developing a coherent system to track pupils' progress and monitor attainment so that rapid action can be taken to tackle underachievement
 - using reliable information to build an accurate understanding of how well the school is doing in order to rigorously plan for and make the necessary improvements
 - undertaking an external review of governance to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 17 to 18 December 2013.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders and staff, a group of pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit in July 2013 the headteacher has resigned and the acting headteacher has been appointed as headteacher. One teacher and one teaching assistant have also resigned while one member of staff continues on long-term absence. Another teacher has recently commenced maternity leave. The responsibilities of senior leaders have been restructured and a home-school pastoral manager has been appointed to the senior leadership team to lead on behaviour and developing home-school partnerships. From October 2013 the Nursery and Reception classes have come together to create one new class. The school will change status to become an academy in the summer term 2014.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement is strengthening as a result of improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Evidence from lessons and pupils' books alongside the school's own data points to an increasing number of pupils catching up and making better progress than previously. This can also be seen from the 2013 test results, which are much improved from 2011 and 2012. For example, a notable success is that the proportion of pupils achieving the expected Level 4 in mathematics and writing has risen to 100%. In addition, pupils in Year 2 have made greater than expected levels of progress over this last term, particularly in writing. The progress of Year 1 pupils is also accelerating as the number of pupils reaching the expected level in recognising the sounds that letters make is now higher than the national standard.

This better picture has come about because senior leaders have introduced several new strategies to improve pupils' achievement, which in turn are leading to improvements in classroom practice. The regular reviews of how pupils are achieving are empowering staff to pin-point pupils who are falling behind and set appropriate targets. The planning of lessons is more precise, which is improving teachers' skills in designing tasks for pupils of different abilities. The school has also strengthened the way it tracks pupils' achievement and, as a result, staff have a greater understanding of the progress pupils should make. Overall this means that the school is better placed to judge how well pupils are achieving and plan appropriate intervention.

Nevertheless, the progress of pupils across the school is not uniformly good in all year groups. There are still pockets of underachievement and, in some classes, most noticeably in Key Stage 2, some pupils are behind where they should be due to weak provision in previous years. In addition, senior leaders have correctly identified that in some classes tasks for higher-ability pupils are not demanding enough and are restricted to composing a longer piece of writing or tackling a harder sum with insufficient attention given to the higher-order thinking skills that pupils need.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving but remains variable. Nevertheless, senior leaders have made some headway in placing pupils' learning at the heart of planning and in encouraging staff to take more risks and think creatively. Teachers have been willing to change and adapt, which has resulted in pupils' greater involvement in learning with the extended use of discussion activities clearly evident in most lessons. As a group, teachers are far more aware of what constitutes effective practice and are beginning to learn from one another in sharing the good practice that exists. Senior leaders are correct in recognising that the next step is to agree some key principles of what makes an effective lesson for pupils in all lessons.

Where learning is most effective: teachers have good subject knowledge and question pupils effectively; teaching assistants provide an effective layer of support; new skills build well on pupils' prior knowledge; links with other subjects are made clear; and pupils are encouraged to take some responsibility for their own learning.

Where learning is less strong: not enough is expected of pupils, particularly the most able; insufficient attention is given to encouraging pupils to think for themselves and to be able, for example, to infer, deduce, hypothesise and draw conclusions; and in some lessons teachers control too tightly what pupils do, which limits pupils' ability to make decisions and direct their own learning.

Systems to check more effectively on the quality of teaching and learning by senior leaders are gathering pace. However, further improvements are required in establishing a regular pattern of lesson observations to inform the performance and professional development of teachers fully with a clearer focus on the achievement of pupils and groups of pupils in lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour and their readiness to learn are strengthening further. This is because the school has invested a lot of time and energy in making this issue a top priority with the setting up of the 'hub' room where pupils can go to discuss and share their feelings with each other and the newly appointed pastoral manager. Pupils talk enthusiastically about this new facility and commented that, 'It is for everyone one at the school to share their feelings and learn to be happy together, although some angry boys need to use it more often.' They are adamant that behaviour in and around the school is much improved. 'It's a lot safer now because you know that you are not going to be picked on.' and 'The new rewards and sanctions have helped.' were typical responses.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are more positive with the improvements to the quality of teaching. They were quick to point this out to inspectors. 'Before we just worked on paper and from books but now we play games and count our scores.' said one child.

Pupils' attendance is steadily improving and the school has done a great deal to reduce persistent absence and ensure that far fewer lessons are affected by low-level disruption.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior staff and governors are putting the concerns of the past behind them, are keen to move forward and have established a clear agenda for improving the school. The new headteacher has made an impressive start and has quickly gained an accurate view of the school's most pressing priorities. With strong support from the assistant headteacher, who leads on teaching and learning, the headteacher has accelerated the pace of change and has been astute in focusing the work of the school on improving pupils' behaviour and the quality of their provision. Her ambition and clear educational direction have been pivotal in moving the school forward from where it was. As a result staff at all levels, including teaching assistants, are responding well to the higher expectations of pupils' progress and their own accountability. 'We now feel part of the school team.', 'We are listened to more and feel valued.' and 'We now have a greater voice in decision making.' were typical of their comments.

There is clear agreement on where further improvements can be made. Senior leaders are acutely aware that the key to resolving the legacy of underachievement lies in the regular and accurate assessment of pupils' progress and in maintaining the focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Senior leaders are also well aware that the quality of teachers' marking and feedback to pupils, although improving with revised systems, is still too variable. In some classes pupils are given clear advice on how to improve their work and reach the next level. In other year groups guidance from teachers is sometimes limited to what pupils have achieved and does not always give pupils the sharply focused comments they need to improve their work further.

The skills of middle leaders to have a more effective impact on school improvement are underdeveloped at present. The headteacher acknowledges that, currently, subject leaders are not entirely confident in evaluating their areas of responsibility through checking pupils' work, analysing data and tracking pupils' progress.

Governance has become sharper edged. The governing body has been restructured and strengthened with new appointments. As a consequence, the actions of governors are demonstrating a clear understanding of the school's most pressing priorities and a resolve to challenge senior leaders and hold them to account. They have begun to develop their own systems for monitoring the work of the school such as scrutinising pupils' work and plans to promote the importance of governance more effectively through the school's website are in the pipeline.

The school is working towards the removal of special measures in the new year. Senior leaders are well aware that this will depend on the school's ability to demonstrate convincingly to inspectors, at the next monitoring visit, that it meets the needs of all learners and has the capacity for sustained improvement from leaders and managers at all levels, rather than an over-reliance on external support or on one or two individuals within the school.

External support

The local authority continues to provide an appropriate level of challenge to the school. On-going work through support and training is proving beneficial in building the confidence of staff and in improving provision. The time given to the school by local authority officers is reducing as the school's ability to manage and direct its own improvement has strengthened.

Priorities for further improvement

- Maintain the focus on improving the quality of teaching to accelerate pupils' progress further.
- Strengthen the skills of middle leaders to have a more effective impact on school improvement.
- Establish clear procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching to inform the performance and professional development of staff and ensure that observations of teaching identify more clearly the achievement of pupils and groups of pupils in lessons.