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13 February 2014

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 to your school on 11 and 12 February 2014, 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 third 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 appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection in line with the arrangements for induction, deployment, support and monitoring discussed with the headteacher and local authority representatives.

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 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 that 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 third monitoring inspection on 11-12 February 2014

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met the headteacher, teachers with responsibility for leading literacy, numeracy and special educational needs, two teaching assistants, five parents, two governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, two representatives from the local authority and the deputy headteacher designate. Discussions were held with pupils during lessons and at social times. Five lessons were observed of which three were joint observations with the headteacher. Brief visits were made to guided reading sessions in both key stages. Two assemblies were observed, along with an 'early bird' session at the start of the school day for pupils to practise their mathematical skills. A selection of pupils' exercise books was scrutinised.

Context

The Year 3 teacher left the school in December 2013 to take up a post in another school. The Year 3 class is being taught by a temporary teacher. The seconded deputy headteacher, who was supporting the leadership of the school, has left to take up a headship. Another teacher has been seconded to the school to teach the class that comprises Year 5 and Year 6 pupils, and to undertake some leadership duties. A deputy headteacher has been appointed, who takes up her full-time post in April 2014. She is currently working in the school for one day per week. Arrangements are in place for the appointment of a family support worker.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Standards are rising across the school as teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve have increased. Teachers' assessments of pupils' work have been checked by local authority advisers and provide an accurate basis on which targets can be set and progress can be measured. Pupils' progress is comprehensively assessed on a half-termly basis and the school's monitoring indicates that a higher proportion of pupils is now making good or outstanding progress, across subjects and classes. Furthermore, gaps in achievement between pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and their peers are reducing. This is due to teachers making good use of assessment information when planning lessons, and the school arranging high quality booster and intervention sessions to support pupils, including those who are identified as underachieving. A wide range of extra-curricular clubs and classes boosts pupils' self-esteem and complements their learning in class. The progress of pupils with special educational needs has accelerated. The special educational needs co-ordinator, who joined the school in the autumn term, has lost no time in assessing these pupils' needs accurately and supporting staff to boost their achievement.

Pupils' literacy skills are improving in response to new strategies introduced by the school's leaders to improve guided reading and to help pupils to spell words in the context in which they are used. The school recognised that some pupils had insecure understanding of the relationships between letters and the sounds that they make (phonics) and investment has been made in a programme to support this aspect of learning. As a result, the reading skills of lower-attaining pupils are improving.

Children's mathematical development has improved due to the consistent use across classes of the school's calculation policy. Teachers are finding 'real-life' situations in which pupils can explore mathematical problems. They are increasingly adept at recognising when pupils have misconceptions and adapting their teaching plans accordingly. Parents welcome the increased emphasis on academic standards that is evident in the school and are pleased that this rigour is not at the expense of children's personal development and enjoyment of school.

Most-able pupils are doing better now in response to increased challenge, well-pitched tasks and insightful questioning by teachers. Raising the attainment of this group remains a priority of the school.

The quality of teaching

Improvements in the quality of teaching have been supported by training delivered by the numeracy and literacy subject leaders, together with the headteacher and local authority personnel.

The school's approach to the teaching of guided reading has been revised. Staff visited a good junior school in the county and adapted, trialled and evaluated the approaches used there to develop a programme that pupils enjoy. Guided reading sessions are frequent, intensive and taught to a good quality by teachers and teaching assistants. Pupils' comprehension of different text types is developed effectively during these sessions and their love of books is being nurtured.

The teaching of spelling is more effective, because teachers are now planning activities that help pupils to use and understand new vocabulary in context. Pupils often choose from their new banks of words in their extended writing. There is plenty of evidence of this writing being celebrated in displays around school that are often linked to the topics pupils have studied and places they have visited. The school's new curriculum has captivated pupils' interest. Teachers have made imaginative links between subjects to stimulate pupils' curiosity. In a highly effective literacy lesson, pupils read and wrote poetry on the theme of planets linked to their research on space, and learned stanzas by heart to present to their parents at a celebration assembly. They relished working together in groups and gave a lot of thought to how they should complete their task.

Much work has been done to improve the quality of pupils' writing and to develop their stamina to write at length. Extended writing sessions are thoughtfully linked to humanities topics. Years 3 and 4 pupils concentrated hard on finding just the right adjectives to describe their imagined experience of a Red Sea shipwreck. They were able to use information that they had learned during their Egyptian topic and present it in a dramatic story.

Throughout the school emphasis is placed on pupils' reflection on how they learn. In a successful mathematics lesson, pupils discussed the aspects of division that they found difficult and the teacher helped them to decide on resources that would enable them to understand more fully.

Pupils are showing their creativity and industriousness in completing individual homework assignments that they decide on for themselves, linked to their topics. Mosaics inspired by study of the Romans, a model of the Coliseum crafted out of cake icing and Egyptian sphinx models are among artefacts that pupils have relished making at home with their parents. They are keen to research ideas and find new ways of presenting them.

The quality of teachers' marking continues to improve. Pupils are given clear advice on how to improve their work and they make conscientious use of 'fix-it' time to act upon their teachers' comments. Scrutiny of their work books shows that, in many cases, they continue to apply their new learning, although in some cases errors in sentence structure and grammar persist, even though they might already have been noted by the teacher.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils continue to behave thoughtfully and co-operatively. They willingly work with their peers to share ideas and they remain on task when engaged in challenging work. Their pride in sharing and talking about their work is clearly evidenced during celebration assemblies. Pupils do not give up when their work is hard; the school develops their perseverance and resilience well. Pupils are encouraged to share mistakes and learn from them; this attitude underpins a positive approach to learning. The school's behaviour management system is consistently used across classes. Pupils work hard to be 'gold' and value the rewards they can earn.

Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities. They contribute to their wider society, for instance by designing fund-raising events that benefit both the school and local charities. The school's impressive range of extra-curricular activities is very well-attended.

The school's work to keep pupils safe continues to be a strength. Records relating to safeguarding are meticulously maintained. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves

safe. The school continues to work hard with external agencies to support children who are vulnerable.

Attendance has risen for all groups of pupils and is above the national average. Parents are supportive of the hard work of the school and recognise that their children's learning will be adversely affected by avoidable absence.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher continues to lead by example, meeting challenges with a positive spirit and determination to give pupils at Lowerhouse the best possible opportunities. She monitors all aspects of the school's performance rigorously and honestly, providing governors and staff with accurate and timely information. She has ensured that recent staffing changes have had minimal disruption to pupils' learning, including by undertaking some class teaching herself. Effective systems have been put in place to improve all aspects of the school's work. Although it has been necessary for these changes to be introduced at a pace, the headteacher's measured approach of researching, trialling and evaluating new initiatives prior to full implementation means that change has not been overwhelming and a sound bedrock has been established to underpin future development.

The school's leaders of literacy, numeracy and special educational needs fulfil their responsibilities confidently and have a sound grasp of the school's strengths and areas for development. Training from local authority staff and the headteacher has equipped them well to monitor teaching. The quality of teaching is assessed regularly and rigorously, and the outcomes of observations are considered alongside records of pupils' progress and the evidence of pupils' work in their books when informing the school's self-evaluation of how well it is performing. The views of teachers and teaching assistants are taken into account by the headteacher in determining training and development activity. The appointment of a permanent deputy headteacher is a considerable boost to the school's leadership team.

Relationships with parents are positive and the results of a recent questionnaire indicate that the changes brought about by the headteacher are well-regarded. Parents who spoke to the inspector commented that parent information sessions and master classes are valuable in helping them to support their children's learning. They feel well-informed about change and welcome the friendliness and approachability shown by all the staff at the school. Parents are encouraged to contribute their own skills to the school, for instance in leading Roman bread-baking sessions with pupils or providing input on healthy hearts. A parent-teachers' association is being formed: further evidence of the school being a vibrant hub of the community.

Governors are now asking the challenging questions that show their understanding of school improvement. They are proud of the school's achievements and recognise

that the new systems and approaches need to be embedded and securely reflected in raised attainment. The standards and effectiveness committee considers pupil performance in detail. The skills and expertise of individual governors are being used more positively by the school. Links have been established between governors and classes so that governors have an in-depth knowledge of the school's work.

External support

The local authority continues to provide well-considered support that is having a demonstrable impact on the quality of teaching and leadership of the school. The executive headteacher, who provided extensive support to the headteacher when she was new to her post, now, provides support as her mentor. The local authority provided rapid support during a time of staffing turbulence at the start of the spring term, but the intensity of support has reduced in recognition of her capacity to lead the school without a heavy reliance on external partners. Advisory support for the standards and effectiveness committee of the governing body has enabled the governors to ask more challenging questions of the headteacher and to hold leaders more fully to account for the performance of the school.

Advisers have moderated the headteacher's evaluations of teaching and worked with subject leaders for literacy and numeracy to develop their skills in monitoring and evaluating teaching and pupils' achievements. Consequently leadership systems within the school have rigour and reliability. The local authority has brokered links with good and outstanding schools that have enabled the headteacher to research effective practice and adapt it to Lowerhouse Junior School. The work of teaching and learning consultants has been valuable in developing individual teachers' skills.