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Duncan Cocker
Headteacher
Villiers Primary School
Prouds Lane
Bilston
WV14 6PR

Dear Mr Cocker

Special measures monitoring inspection of Villiers Primary School

Following my visit with Lynda Townsend and Alwyne Jolly, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 25–26 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 10 July 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 without further reference to Her Majesty's Inspector.

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 Wolverhampton.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Howie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Rapidly improve teaching so that none is inadequate and much more is good or better by ensuring that teachers:
 - are precise about what they want each group of pupils to learn and how they are going to check how successful they have been
 - make accurate use of information about what pupils already know and can do to plan work which challenges all groups of pupils and helps learning to move at a brisk pace
 - use time more efficiently in lessons so that pupils spend more time actively engaged in, and making decisions about their own learning
 - plan more lessons that excite pupils and engage their curiosity
 - use teaching assistants and other adults more effectively, so none of their time is wasted, and check that their support is helping pupils make better progress
 - use marking to inform pupils about how well they are doing against their targets and what they need to do to improve their work.

- Raise standards in reading and writing by:
 - ensuring that the teaching of phonics (letters and their sounds) is more closely matched to pupils' abilities and moves learning on more quickly
 - provide more opportunities for pupils to practise and develop the skills of writing at length in different subjects.

- Improve achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage by ensuring that teachers provide appropriate opportunities for children to explore and develop their own ideas.

- Improve leadership and management and increase the pace of school improvement by:
 - implementing more rigorous checks on the accuracy of assessments of attainment and progress made by teachers in all year groups
 - improving the accuracy of school self-evaluation by rigorously analysing all available information
 - implementing more rigorous checks on teaching that focus on how successful teaching is at moving learning on and how the teacher can improve their practice
 - improving the attendance of pupils, working with families to reduce the number of pupils who are absent for more than 15% of sessions.

- Improve governance by ensuring that members of the governing body:
 - are better informed about the school's performance
 - use the information to set more challenging targets for improvement
 - actively check that improvements that are detailed in development plans are having the intended effect on pupils' achievement and wellbeing
 - make regular checks on all welfare requirements for the Early Years Foundation

Stage.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management should be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 25–25 February 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. Four of the lesson observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher or other senior leaders. Inspectors met with the senior leaders, two representatives of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. In addition to this, inspectors spoke to a number of parents and carers, met with two groups of pupils, looked at pupils' work and heard pupils read. Inspectors had a telephone discussion with the headteacher from the school that is supporting Villiers Primary.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection, the deputy headteacher has relinquished her leadership responsibilities and is now the class teacher in the Nursery. The senior leadership team was restructured in January and there have been a number of changes in responsibilities within the team. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed and will take up her post in April. One teacher left the school in December. A teacher has very recently been appointed to provide additional support in Year 6. A new parent governor has been appointed. One teacher is currently absent on sick leave. As part of the local authority support arrangements, the headteacher from a local school (Northwood Park Primary) and her staff have continued to provide support for senior leaders and teachers.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement in reading has improved. Pupils are getting better at using their knowledge of letters and sounds (phonics) to read more difficult words. This is because the teaching of phonics has improved. It is more systematic and consistent, and this is enabling pupils to make good progress. Daily guided reading sessions have been introduced for older pupils and this is enabling them to more regularly practise their skills. Although some pupils remain below the level expected for their age, they are rapidly catching up.

Evidence in pupils' workbooks and the school's data about current Year 6 pupils show that the proportion of pupils on track to achieve the expected level in reading and writing is above that seen last year. In mathematics, the proportion of pupils on track is higher than last year but not yet as high as that seen in reading and writing.

A new system for tracking pupils' progress has been introduced. School leaders are now able to analyse information about pupils' progress in detail and they have a secure knowledge of how different groups of pupils are performing. The tracking system shows that pupils are making good progress in reading in almost all classes. Progress in mathematics and writing is much less consistent across the school. In most classes,

pupils make the progress that is expected of them but this is not enough to ensure that they reach at least the level expected for their age. The improved teaching observed during the inspection has not yet been consistent enough over a period of time to accelerate progress, and inadequate progress is still evident for some pupils in Years 2 and 3. Ensuring that all pupils make at least the progress that is expected is a key priority for the school.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved. All teachers are keen to improve their practice and have acted upon the advice they have been given by local authority advisers and colleagues from the support school. However, this improvement in teaching has been recent, and evidence from pupils' books confirms that there is still much to be done to ensure that it is leading to good progress in all classes.

Where teaching is good, lessons begin briskly and pupils know what they are expected to do. The consistent use of the phrase 'Today I will be better at...' has helped pupils to understand what they are learning about and to check whether they have achieved this. Increasingly, teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support pupils during the whole of the lesson, wasting little time. Where teaching requires improvement, pupils are not moved on quickly enough to more difficult activities as soon as they are ready. Sometimes these extra activities are not challenging enough.

Teachers mark pupils' English and mathematics books regularly, in line with the recently introduced policy. Teachers provide pupils with information about what they have done well and usually offer guidance on how to improve. This guidance is not yet precise enough and teachers do not ensure that pupils make the improvements that are suggested. This slows down the progress that pupils are able to make.

In all year groups, pupils are being provided with opportunities to produce longer pieces of writing more regularly. Inspectors observed an increase in the amount of work pupils were producing within lessons. However, pupils' progress in writing is not accelerating. This is because teachers' feedback to pupils is not precise enough to enable pupils to make improvements to their work. Teachers' expectations of pupils' writing in subjects such as history and geography are not as high as they are in English. This is preventing pupils from making as much progress as they could.

The teaching of phonics has improved across the school. Where teaching is most effective, adults ensure that pupils pronounce their sounds very precisely. Tasks are set at the right level for the pupils. Lessons are lively and move along at a good pace. As a result, the pupils make good progress. Placing pupils into ability groups has enabled the teaching of phonics to be more targeted to the needs of pupils. However, where teaching requires improvement, the more-able pupils within a group are not always sufficiently challenged and sometimes have to wait for their classmates to catch up

before they can move on. This prevents them from making as much progress as they could.

Teachers understand the principles of planning and delivering good-quality reading sessions but they do not always apply this knowledge effectively. Where teaching was most successful, pupils had books at the right level of difficulty and had challenging tasks to complete related to their reading. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils were answering questions about how a book made them feel and how the author had achieved this. The pupils in this group made good progress. However, in the same lesson, a group of pupils were designing a mask similar to the one they had read about in the previous lesson. This did not help them to make progress in their reading.

Improvements are evident in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Teachers' planning is more focused on what children should learn and assessment is more precise. The reorganisation of the furniture and equipment is enabling children to access and choose resources more independently and follow their own interests. Senior leaders and governors are aware that further improvements must be made to the outdoor area, particularly to allow more opportunities to promote children's physical development. Teachers in Reception classes are skilled at guiding learning forward through well-timed questions. Teaching assistants have not yet achieved the balance between observing and assessing children, and intervening in their activities to help them to find out new things.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour around the school continues to be good. The transition times when pupils are moving from one class to another are calm and pupils are sensible. They make their way purposefully to classrooms and arrive promptly. In a few lessons where teaching was less than good, a small number of pupils became distracted. However, they were quick to respond to reminders from adults about how to behave. Where teaching is most effective, pupils are not only well behaved and attentive but they are keen to contribute to the lesson and are enthusiastic to get started with their tasks. This level of excitement about learning is not consistent across the school.

Since the inspection in July, the attendance of pupils has improved. It is now above the national average. The number of pupils who are persistently absent has been reduced. This has, in part, been as a result of the range of rewards and incentives put in place for good attendance and the more rigorous procedures for following up absences.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leadership and management are improving. Senior leaders, staff and governors are determined to make the improvements that are necessary and are under no illusion about the scale of the task ahead. However, many of the improvements made since the last monitoring inspection have been reliant on the support of the local authority advisers, the headteacher from the support school and her staff. There is still some work

to be done before the leadership team are the driving force behind the improvements being made.

The school improvement plan has been revised and is now fit for purpose. The plan clearly states what actions need to be taken to improve the quality of teaching and help pupils to make better progress. The leader responsible for each action is identified and this is enabling the headteacher to hold senior leaders to account for improvements in their areas of responsibility. The timetable has been reorganised to maximise the amount of teaching time available and to ensure regular daily phonics and reading sessions happen in all classes. This is leading to good progress in reading for almost all pupils.

Improved systems have been introduced for assessing how well pupils are progressing and for regularly checking on the quality of teaching. As a result, school leaders have a more accurate picture of the school's weaknesses and, crucially, which groups of pupils need additional support in order to make good progress. The analysis of pupils' attainment is not yet as well developed as the analysis of progress.

Senior leaders are making increasingly regular checks on the quality of teaching. Their observations during lessons are accurate and, as a result of coaching from the support school, the feedback that teachers receive is precise and gives clear guidance on how to improve their practice. Consequently, the quality of teaching is improving and over half of the teaching observed during the inspection was good. More frequent checks made on pupils' books and on teachers' planning ensure that leaders have a clear view of the areas that need more improvement. However, leaders are not going back quickly enough to check if further improvements have been made.

An external review of governance has been completed and, while the report has yet to be received, the governors have responded quickly to the verbal recommendations. An audit of governors' skills and expertise has begun and some governors are visiting the school more regularly to find out about the improvements being made. Governors are also requesting additional information from the headteacher and are asking more challenging questions during meetings. The governing body have a much better understanding of pupils' progress than at the time of the last monitoring inspection. There is still work to be done to ensure that all governors are fully involved in the process of improvement and are as well informed as those that met with inspectors.

External support

The local authority has continued to provide effective support to the school. The impact of this is particularly noticeable in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The local authority's recent review of teaching and leadership in the school is accurate and correctly identifies where improvements need to be made.

The support of Northwood Park Primary School, which was brokered by the local authority, has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and on leadership.

Leaders and teachers have benefited from working alongside their counterparts from Northwood. Many of the improvements have been as a result of this support.