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Pat Walters
Headteacher
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West Midlands
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Dear Mrs Walters

Special measures monitoring inspection of King's Hill Primary School

Following my visit with Christine Malone, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Anne Wright, additional inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 June, 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 November 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 not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Walsall.

Yours sincerely

Morag Kophamel
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching to at least good so that pupils make good progress by making sure teachers:
 - match the level of work more closely to the pupils' ability
 - give high-quality feedback to pupils about their work and make sure they act upon this guidance
 - give clear direction to teaching assistants so they are used more effectively to support pupils' learning
 - challenge the more-able pupils, giving them more opportunities for extended writing and problem solving in mathematics in different subjects
 - teach phonics (the sounds letters make) for as long as pupils need it and make sure pupils learn correct grammar and punctuation.

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by making sure leaders:
 - address pupils' underperformance by frequently checking their attainment and progress towards challenging targets and swiftly acting to address any identified concerns
 - closely check the progress of different group of pupils, especially those supported by the pupil premium, and act to ensure they do not fall further behind
 - improve the way assessment data are used by all staff, so they have a better knowledge of pupils' attainment and use this in their lesson planning
 - frequently monitor the impact of small-group work on pupils' progress, and use this information to effectively deploy resources to accelerate pupils' progress
 - ensure governors have an accurate knowledge of the achievement of different groups of pupils in the school, a better understanding of the impact of different strategies, and hold leaders to account for improving the pupils' progress.

An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 June 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher and other senior leaders from the Holte group of schools who are providing support to King's Hill. Inspectors also met with the associate headteacher and talked to teachers, as well as pupils, and parents and carers. Discussions were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and with a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the previous executive headteacher has retired. The local authority has worked with governors to secure the support of the executive headteacher and other senior leaders from the Holte group of schools. At the time of this inspection, these leaders had been working with the school for four weeks. Governors have not yet been successful in recruiting a permanent replacement for the executive headteacher. Governors and the local authority intend that the executive headteacher from Holte will continue as executive headteacher of King's Hill Primary until a suitable permanent appointment is made.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Information about pupils' progress, evidence from lesson observations and a review of the work in pupils' books confirm that standards remain below those expected in reading, writing and mathematics for many pupils across the school. In some subjects and year groups, only a third of pupils have reached the standards expected for their age.

In some classes, pupils continue to make inadequate progress because of persistent weaknesses in teaching. For example, activities in lessons are sometimes too easy for more-able pupils while they are too difficult for pupils who need extra help. This prevents both groups from making enough progress.

At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, few pupils reach a good level of development, which means that many are not well prepared for Year 1.

The work in pupils' books shows that, as a result of more effective teaching, some pupils are becoming more able to produce extended pieces of writing with correct grammar and punctuation. However, this is not consistent, and in some classes, teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve.

In mathematics books, there are examples of older pupils responding with perseverance to challenging and interesting mathematics investigations and

problems. This allows pupils to demonstrate their skills in using and applying different calculation methods and develops their ability to think and work in logical steps. In other classes, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to develop these skills. This limits progress, particularly for more-able pupils.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has not improved rapidly enough. Although there are some examples of effective teaching, this is not enough to ensure that all pupils make at least expected progress. Many of the weaknesses in teaching identified during the inspection in November persist.

All teachers have accurate information about the prior attainment and progress of pupils in their class, but they do not all use this well enough to plan lessons which meet the needs of pupils of all abilities. As a consequence, teaching and the tasks set for pupils do not always build on what they already know, understand and can do.

In many lessons, teachers do not take opportunities to demonstrate or 'model' what they want pupils to do. This means that pupils are sometimes not clear about what is expected of them.

Some teachers' skills in teaching phonics (the sounds that letters make), grammar, punctuation and handwriting are underdeveloped. For example, some teachers pronounce letter sounds incorrectly and do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to practise writing the sounds they are learning. In several of the lessons observed by inspectors, more-able pupils did not learn anything because they already knew how to read and write the sounds being taught. However, there is some evidence of more effective teaching. For example, in one class of Year 1 and 2 pupils, the teacher carefully explained that the words 'there', 'their' and 'they're' have different meanings and are used in different ways. She gave examples of these homophones in different sentences and played a game to check the understanding of each pupil, picking up and correcting any misunderstandings. At the start of the lesson, pupils were using the words interchangeably, but by the end of the lesson, they were almost all able to correctly select the right word to complete a sentence.

Almost all of the work in pupils' books is marked. Some marking consists mainly of ticks and congratulatory phrases such as 'well done' or 'super work'. However, the most effective marking gives clear and precise guidance to pupils about what they have done well and what they need to improve. For example, in one class, pupils engage in a written dialogue with their teacher who asks them to make corrections, or writes examples to illustrate how their work could be even better. In this class, the teacher's marking is a valuable teaching tool which challenges pupils to reflect and improve. The school should take steps to ensure that this good practice is shared with other teachers.

Teachers have not always had effective and accurate feedback on the quality of their work, and have not been given enough opportunities to develop their skills by working with good and outstanding teachers or through a planned and coherent programme of training and professional development. When inspectors gave feedback to teachers following lesson observations, many were keen to hear, and act on, the recommended areas for improvement, and expressed a determination to make the necessary changes quickly.

As a consequence of the increased support and challenge provided by senior leaders from Holte, some very recent improvements are apparent. For example, all classes from Year 1 to Year 6 now have guided reading sessions at the start of each school day. These sessions have been introduced very recently, but are already giving a higher priority to reading, and provide a calm and purposeful start to the day. Teachers and teaching assistants work with groups during these lessons, and are becoming more effective in teaching important reading skills, and in using questioning to check understanding.

Recent training for teachers and teaching assistants is also beginning to help teachers deploy teaching assistants more effectively. In some of the lessons observed, teaching assistants made a positive contribution to learning because they were well prepared, understood the purpose of the lesson and were clear about what pupils were expected to learn. However, in some lessons, the impact of teaching assistants was limited by the activity set by the teacher or by a lack of clarity about the teaching assistant's role.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

During the inspection, pupils moved around the school calmly and sensibly, demonstrating good manners and respect for adults and for each other. At playtimes, pupils played cooperatively with one another. Pupils who spoke to inspectors told them that behaviour is usually good. They said that they feel safe in school and any rare incidents of bullying or poor behaviour are dealt with well.

In most lessons, pupils behave well, listening to their teachers and making sensible contributions to lessons. However, in lessons where the teaching does not interest them, or is not at the right level for their ability, some pupils become inattentive, chatty and restless.

Attendance has improved each term since September. The school is now working more effectively with parents and carers, and pupils, to promote good attendance and follow up absences more rigorously.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

School leaders have not been effective in addressing weaknesses quickly enough. Some of the actions set out in the school leaders' written plans for improvement have not taken place. For example, the increased frequency of leaders' meetings with teachers to check on pupils' progress has not been sustained. As a result, these meetings have not been held regularly enough to quickly identify and address underachievement.

Leaders have checked that teachers' assessments are accurate, but have not ensured that all teachers know how to use this information effectively to plan lessons that build on what pupils already know, understand and can do.

Underperformance has not been challenged robustly enough. Where weaknesses in teaching have been identified, leaders have not provided sufficient challenge or support to help teachers develop their skills.

Staff have made considerable efforts to display pupils' work attractively and provide a welcoming and attractive learning environment. However, because of a deficit budget in recent years, some areas of the school building and many classroom resources are shabby. Basic teaching resources, including appropriate reading books for younger pupils, are in short supply.

Over the last four weeks, there have been some significant changes as a result of the work of leaders from Holte. These leaders have quickly raised expectations for pupils' achievement and have provided training for all staff and some individual support for teachers. Teachers have responded positively to these changes and to the increased level of challenge. They have welcomed the opportunity to visit Lozells Primary School to observe teaching and learning. This has already helped several members of staff to recognise some common features of good teaching and begin to apply this in their own lessons. This work is in its very early stages, but teachers say that they are more confident that the necessary improvements can and will be made.

One of the senior leaders from Holte has worked with the inclusion manager to introduce a tool which supports teachers and teaching assistants in identifying specific areas of need in literacy skills for pupils with special educational needs. This is helping leaders, teachers and teaching assistants to plan and deliver more effective additional support and interventions for pupils. However, further work is needed to ensure that the right measures are used to monitor the success of each intervention and evaluate the impact on pupils' progress.

Leaders from Holte have also carried out health and safety and safeguarding checks on the building and on access arrangements. A number of changes have been made as a result.

Governance remains ineffective. It is unacceptable that the external review of governance, which was recommended as a matter of urgency, has not taken place. The governing body minutes indicate that governors do not provide appropriate challenge to school leaders with regard to poor pupils' progress and continuing weaknesses in teaching. Governors understand the purpose of pupil premium funding and know how much the school receives, but do not know how this funding is being used to support pupils known to be eligible, or what impact it is having. Over the last few weeks, one of the school leaders from Holte has begun to provide governors with information and guidance to help them understand their role more clearly and begin to ask more effective questions. However, this work is in its very early stages. The external review of governance must be undertaken quickly so that governors fully appreciate the importance of their role in ensuring that special measures can be removed within the two-year timescale.

External support

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the local authority has focused its attention on securing support from the Holte group of schools and on supporting governors in their efforts to recruit a new executive headteacher. As a result, the local authority has not continued its previous work in developing the quality of teaching.

Priorities for further improvement

- Governors and the local authority must work together to secure appropriate arrangements for the long-term leadership of King's Hill.