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27 November 2014

Vivienne Bunce  
Headteacher  
Stow Heath Primary School  
Hill Road  
Portobello  
Willenhall  
WV13 3TT

Dear Miss Bunce

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Stow Heath Primary School**

Following my visit with Carol Deakin, Additional Inspector, to your school on 12–13 November 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 December 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 any more 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 Wolverhampton.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Howie  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2013.**

- Improve teaching so pupils make better progress in reading, writing and mathematics by making sure that:
  - work is always matched to pupils' differing ability levels, so that it builds on what they already know and are able to do
  - the pace of all lessons is brisk enough to engage all pupils
  - teachers pick up and correct errors and misconceptions as they occur in lessons and in pupils' work
  - teachers use probing questions to extend and develop pupils' thinking
  - pupils develop the skills needed to become independent in their learning
  - teachers' marking in books tells pupils how to improve their work and gives them the opportunity to respond to the comments made.
  
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - increasing the frequency and rigour of checks made on teaching and learning and use the information about pupils' progress to hold teachers to account
  - setting higher and clearer expectations for individual teachers in their appraisal targets to make sure pupils make good rather than expected progress
  - refining the school's development plan so that it only focuses on the main priorities and has clear deadlines which show the impact of actions on pupils' achievement over time
  - making sure that the pupil premium is used more effectively so that the gaps in attainment and progress close between eligible pupils and the others in the school.
  - making sure governors carry out their own checks on the school's main areas for development
  - setting clear roles and responsibilities for newly appointed leaders and filling vacant leadership posts as quickly as possible.

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 third monitoring inspection on insert date of inspection**

### **Evidence**

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

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection in July 2014, seven teachers and two teaching assistants have left the school. An Early Years Foundation Stage leader, who is also an assistant headteacher, has been appointed along with four teachers, two of whom are newly qualified. The two assistant headteachers, who previously did not have a class teaching role, now have class teaching responsibilities.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

The achievement of pupils is improving. This is because the quality of teaching is getting better. At the end of Year 2 in 2014, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected level in reading and mathematics was in line with the national average. In writing, the proportion was below the national average. This represents an improvement on the previous year's results in all three subjects. Results at the end of Year 6 in 2014 also improved, but not as quickly as that seen in Year 2 and results remain below the national average. An increased number of pupils made the progress that is expected; however too few made faster progress. This prevented many of them from catching up with their counterparts in other schools. Too few pupils reach the higher levels at the end of Years 2 and 6.

The teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 showed that pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding achieved just as well, and in many cases better, than their classmates. At the end of Key Stage 2 however, eligible pupils were three terms behind their classmates in reading, writing and mathematics. Information the school has about the current Year 6 pupils shows that these gaps are closing.

Inspection evidence and the school's information about the pupils' progress show that pupils currently in Key Stage 1 continue to make at least expected progress. An increasing proportion of pupils are making good progress. In Key Stage 2, rates of progress, although improving, remain uneven. Pupils in Year 6 are not making enough progress in mathematics. In response to this, senior leaders have made changes to the organisation of staffing so that pupils who have not made sufficient gains in their learning receive additional support. The progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, while improving, is still too variable across the school.

Continuing to accelerate the progress of all pupils remains the highest priority for the school.

### **The quality of teaching**

Teachers and teaching assistants are ambitious for the school to improve and act upon the training and advice provided by the senior leaders. As a result, the quality of teaching continues to improve. In several of the lessons visited by inspectors there was a buzz of excitement about learning from the adults and the pupils.

All teachers are aware of the importance of keeping learning moving along briskly to enable pupils to make good progress. Some are more skilled at this than others. Where teaching is most effective, pupils are moved onto harder work as soon as they are ready and there is a sense of urgency about getting tasks completed in the time available. Pupils are asked probing questions to make them think carefully and explain their answers in detail. However, these strengths are not evident consistently across the school. Too often the most able pupils are not challenged enough and would make more progress if the work were harder.

As a result of effective training and coaching, teachers have developed a range of skills to improve pupils' concentration and keep learning moving along quickly. For example by using talking partners, 'magpie-ing ideas' and taking 'thoughts for a walk'. Inspection evidence shows that in some lessons these prove to be effective in motivating pupils and enhancing the learning. However, some teachers are not yet skilled enough in deciding which of these methods are effective for the pupils in their class.

Pupils' workbooks show that the amount of work pupils are expected to complete is increasing. The weekly 'Wow Writing' sessions are encouraging pupils to write longer pieces of work. This is helping pupils to make better progress. The daily spelling and grammar lessons are enabling pupils to write better sentences and teachers are more routinely correcting pupils' spoken English during lessons. However, pupils are not yet transferring these skills into their writing, most noticeably in their topic work. Mathematics books in some classes show that there are more opportunities for pupils to practise their skills to solve real-life problems. Presentation of work and expectations of pupils' handwriting are too variable between subjects and classes.

Teachers' marking has improved since the last monitoring visit. This is because senior leaders have provided more specific guidance for staff. Where marking is most effective the advice is precise and pupils are given time to respond. As a result, pupils improve their work or extend their learning by applying skills in a new way.

Children continue to make good progress in the early years. Plans are in place to create a new outdoor area which will be enclosed and will enable pupils to learn outside more regularly. Newly purchased resources are broadening the range of activities that are

made available for children in the classrooms. However, workbooks do not yet contain enough evidence of the seven areas of learning. Parents do not contribute to these workbooks.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe at school and that the behaviour of pupils has improved as a result of a newly introduced system. They said that the instant rewards for achieving 'silver' and the medal for achieving 'gold', motivates them to behave as well as they can. Pupils reported that occasionally lessons are disrupted with 'silly' behaviour but adults do not let it go unchecked. Pupils said that bullying is rare and trust adults to deal with it if it happens. Although senior leaders keep records of poor behaviour they do not analyse them to look for patterns or trends.

Behaviour around school is positive. Corridors are calm and well-ordered and classrooms are generally purposeful and busy. Pupils get on well together and show respect for one another's differences. One pupil summed it up saying, 'It's good to be different – school would be boring if we were all the same'. In lessons, pupils work together well in pairs and groups. In the main they are attentive and keen to answer questions and learn new things. Occasionally pupils lose concentration when the work is too easy or if they are not clear about what they are learning to do.

The pupils who spoke to inspectors are proud of their school. They take pride in their appearance and like being at school. Pupils say that they enjoy nearly all of their lessons because they are actively involved in their learning and hardly ever feel bored. As a result, attendance remains above average.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The headteacher and senior leaders are a cohesive and committed team. They have a clear focus on moving the school out of special measures as quickly as possible. Staff say that senior leaders are supportive and listen to their ideas and concerns. As a result morale has improved.

Since the last monitoring inspection the school has significantly reduced the amount of support it receives from Manor Primary School. Senior leaders are demonstrating that they have the capacity to move the school forward under their own steam. The school improvement plan continues to be a helpful tool for driving improvement and is reviewed regularly. This is helping senior leaders and governors keep track on the improvements that are being made and identifying where further work is needed. The targets that have been set for the end-of-year tests and assessments are appropriately challenging. Similarly the targets set for individual teachers are demanding and focus on ensuring that pupils make good progress. Regular pupil progress meetings are held with teachers in order to ensure that the end of year targets will be met.

Senior leaders continue to make regular checks on the quality of teaching. They focus sharply on the areas for improvement. However, the quality of this monitoring is not consistently high. Teachers are not always provided with precise enough guidance about how to improve their practice. Checks made on the quality of work in pupils' books are not always detailed and forensic enough to pinpoint areas of strength and weakness.

Good practice is being shared more effectively within the school. For example, the two assistant headteachers who have class responsibilities, model good practice for other teachers to observe. Additionally, staff have benefited from observing a skilled teaching assistant deliver phonics teaching. This is helping to improve the quality of teaching.

The leadership skills of teachers with additional responsibilities are beginning to improve. This is because they have received training from senior leaders. Teachers new to the school are receiving appropriate support. As a result of a reorganisation of staff and visits to another school to observe good practice, teaching assistants are increasingly focused on ensuring pupils make good progress. Additionally, some teaching assistants have been provided with individual learning plans to support the improvement of their work. On occasion the effectiveness of teaching assistants is reduced because the teacher has not explained clearly enough to them what pupils are expected to learn and their role in bringing this about.

The progress of individual, groups and classes of pupils is tracked well. Senior leaders and governors have a good understanding of where additional support is needed in order to help pupils to make faster progress. The impact of the pupil premium funding is measured effectively. School tracking information shows that the spending of this funding is becoming increasingly effective and the gaps between these pupils and their classmates are closing.

The Chair of the Governing Body continues to provide strong and effective leadership. Governors have been given specific responsibilities and each committee has well defined responsibilities. Some governors are now more knowledgeable about the actions being taken to improve the school and the difference these actions are making to pupils' learning and the quality of teaching. They are finding out for themselves about improvements by looking at pupils' books, visiting classrooms and asking more questions during meetings.

### **External support**

Since the last monitoring visit, the local authority has restructured the support and challenge it provides for schools in special measures. An appropriate level of support is in place.