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Mrs Jo Cornelius
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cornelius

Special measures monitoring inspection of High Crag Primary School

Following my visit with Fiona Dixon, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 1–2 December 2015, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2015.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.
The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers in Key Stages 1 and 2.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Bradford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Keeler
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2015

- Take urgent steps to improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 so that it is at least good, in order to quickly raise standards for all groups of pupils, so that they make good or better progress, by ensuring that:
 - all staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, including of the presentation of their work, particularly in writing
 - work set by teachers closely matches pupils' varying needs and abilities and challenges them to do better, particularly the most able
 - time in lessons is used effectively so that pupils are productive and this enables pupils to learn well
 - teachers' explanations of what pupils are to do and learn are concise and clear so that pupils know precisely what is expected of them
 - all staff adhere to the school's marking policy to help pupils improve their work and teachers' questioning skills are improved so that in all year groups they skilfully check pupils' understanding of what they are learning and challenge their thinking
 - teaching assistants receive clear guidance on how to support effectively groups of pupils, including the disadvantaged, the disabled and those with special educational needs
 - pupils are encouraged to take more responsibility for their learning in lessons so that their attitudes to learning and behaviour are good
 - staff manage pupils' behaviour effectively and always insist that pupils' behaviour improves should it slip
 - pupils have more opportunities to improve and extend their mathematical skills across a wide range of subjects
 - teachers correct quickly errors in pupils' grammar, spelling and punctuation in order to build pupils' confidence in writing
 - pupils' achievement in reading is further strengthened by providing clear guidance to parents to enable them to effectively support their children's reading at home.

- Rapidly improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, so there is a strong capacity to quickly improve the school's effectiveness by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and making sure that teaching is at least good
 - ensuring that all leaders have high ambitions for pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching
 - making sure that plans for school improvement are sharply focused, make clear how actions will improve teaching and achievement and include clear and measurable steps to enable leaders to check how well the school is improving

- developing subject leaders' monitoring skills so they are effective and rigorous in checking the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in their subjects
- improving the curriculum so that it enables pupils to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics and ensures they are well prepared for secondary school
- making sure that leaders and governors rigorously check that the actions taken to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils are effective so that these pupils make good progress and that the standards they achieve improve and are at least in line with other pupils nationally
- ensuring that governors hold all leaders to account much more effectively for the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement and that they develop thorough systems for checking the accuracy and validity of information they receive.

An external review of governance should be taken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 December 2015

Evidence

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

Context

The current headteacher took up her appointment in September 2015. Since the end of the summer term 2015, seven teachers and five support staff have left the school. Supply teachers covering the absence of permanent members of staff are currently teaching the two Year 3 classes. Six members of the governing body have resigned since the previous inspection. The school will become an academy with effect from 1 March 2016.

Outcomes for pupils

At the time of the previous inspection pupils were making inadequate progress throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards by the end of Year 6 were below those expected for pupils of this age. A legacy of weak teaching has resulted in gaps in pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in English and mathematics. This has inhibited progress and continues to present a challenge for school leaders. Visits to lessons, a scrutiny of work and an analysis of the school's progress information clearly indicate that pupils in each key stage, including early years, are currently making better progress than they were at the end of the summer term 2015. This applies to disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs where the gap in attainment between pupils nationally is showing signs of closing.

These 'green shoots' should not hide the fact that much remains to be done, especially with regard to the most-able pupils, if they are to attain national expectations in English and mathematics by the end of Years 2 and 6. Pupils' presentation has improved significantly and they now take more pride in their work. There is a drive to deepen pupils' understanding in mathematics and this is paying dividends. However, pupils are not making accelerated progress in their writing because they do not have sufficient opportunities to write at length.

There remains a variation in the rate of pupils' progress between, and within, year groups and this is directly linked to the quality of teaching. For example, good progress is particularly noticeable within Years 2 and 5 where teaching is strong.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

While there are still differences in the quality of teaching across the school, it has nevertheless improved markedly overall following the arrival of the current headteacher. This is why pupils are now making better progress. Expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving are rising and this is reflected in teachers' planning. These expectations have yet to be fully transferred into challenge for the most-able pupils and this is restricting their progress. Overall, the work set by teachers is more closely matched to pupils' learning needs than at the time of the previous inspection. This is because teachers are making better use of assessment to check the progress made by all groups of pupils. Some staff, but not all, are adept at picking up on pupils' misconceptions during lessons and taking swift action to address them, which enhances pupils' learning. The quality of support from teaching assistants is improving as they are more aware of what pupils are expected to learn. A significant feature observed in all lessons is that pupils are acutely aware of what they are doing, why they are doing it and what good learning looks like. This is effectively driving improvement. Pupils appreciate the comments made by teachers in their books because as one pupil said: 'they tell us what we have done well and how we can improve further'. Errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation are now identified and addressed.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils display more positive attitudes to their learning because teachers currently plan lessons that are interesting and engage them in their learning. Furthermore, pupils are expected to take more responsibility for their learning in lessons. As a result, pupils are more eager to talk about their work, listen attentively and respond positively to the teachers' questions. By demonstrating these attributes, pupils are making a greater contribution to their own progress. This is supported by pupils views gathered during the inspection: 'the school has improved this term, we are expected to be ready to learn all of the time'; 'we cannot get away with anything and lessons have more activities so we want to take part'. No low-level disruption was observed during the inspection. This is because teachers are getting better at ensuring that the work set in lessons is more closely aligned to pupils' abilities. It also reflects a more consistent application of the school's behaviour policy by all staff.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The recently appointed headteacher has a clear vision of what needs to be done to improve the school and has successfully communicated this to all staff. She has quickly evaluated the school's strengths and weaknesses and produced a plan designed to secure rapid improvement. Although it is still early days, improvements are beginning to be realised in relation to teaching and learning, pupils' progress and leadership at all levels.

Key features in the school's approaches to securing improvement include:

- involving all staff in the drive to secure improvement, thereby creating a stronger sense of team work
- zero tolerance by the headteacher and the governing body towards inadequate teaching
- using members of the senior leadership team to undertake teaching responsibilities in order to model good practice
- the introduction of more rigorous performance management that is underpinned by appropriate professional development
- holding teachers to account for the progress pupils are making
- raising teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving
- an increase in checking the quality of teaching by senior leaders
- strengthening the links with parents and carers so that they are better placed to support their children's learning
- developing the role of subject leaders so that they are able to improve and check the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.

Subject leaders for mathematics and English have recently been appointed and action plans containing strategies to raise achievement are now in place. However, these plans do not include a clear reference to the expected impact that the actions taken will have on pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding and therefore lack purpose.

A review of governance has taken place since the previous inspection. The recently appointed Chair of the Governing Body has ensured that all recommendations of the review have now been implemented. As a result, governors have access to accurate information relating to the work of the school. They have a good understanding of teaching and learning, pupils' achievement and the work of senior leaders and this is augmented by regular visits to school. The most significant improvement is the ability and willingness of the governors to challenge senior leaders. This is evident in the minutes of governing body meetings and the testimony of the headteacher and is helping to accelerate improvement.

A review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding has been undertaken. Action has been taken to ensure that such funding is used to directly support disadvantaged pupils. Governors are now clearer about the impact of pupil premium spending on pupils' progress, particularly in reading and writing.

The local authority has helped to facilitate the school's transition to academy status. Representatives from the sponsor, Wakefield City Academy Trust, have met with staff and governors and the new academy is on track to open in March 2016.

External support

Since the previous inspection the local authority has monitored the work of the school and arranged support in line with the school's improvement plan. Further support has been given by staff from St Edmund's Primary School, Bradford, and Tranmere Park Primary School, Leeds, in relation to teaching and learning. School leaders have appreciated all of the support as it has had a beneficial impact on pupils' progress.