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Sharon Barnes
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Dear Mrs Barnes

Special measures monitoring inspection of Bird's Bush Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 16–17 May 2017, 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 that 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 that took place in September 2016.

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 action plan is fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Adam Hewett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in September 2016.

- Substantially increase the capacity that leaders and managers, including governors, have to improve pupils' learning, so improvements take place quickly, by making sure that:
 - leaders use accurate information about the school's performance more effectively to plan for improvement, so all gain a well-informed and secure understanding of how pupils are progressing
 - leaders focus rigorously on pupils' learning when they carry out monitoring activities, including when observing in the classroom
 - the curriculum meets the learning needs of groups of pupils such as disadvantaged pupils, the most able, boys and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - pupil premium funding supports disadvantaged pupils' learning more effectively, especially those who are most able
 - the leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective, and pupils' learning is carefully tracked
 - the governing body holds the school's leaders fully to account for the impact of the spending of pupil premium funding on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve teaching to more rapidly accelerate the progress and improve the attainment of all groups of pupils in key stage 2, particularly in mathematics and reading, by making sure that:
 - teachers use assessment well to match learning tasks more precisely to the pupils' needs so that pupils are appropriately challenged by their work
 - teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and how they will present their work
 - when teachers give feedback to pupils it helps pupils understand exactly what they need to do to improve their work
 - teachers provide more opportunities in a range of subjects for pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge and explain the reasoning behind how they solve mathematical problems.
- Make sure all teachers and other adults have the highest expectations of how pupils will behave in lessons and enforce these stringently.

An external review of governance should be undertaken 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 16 May 2017 to 17 May 2017

Evidence

I met with parents at the start of the day and spoke to pupils throughout the inspection. I observed learning in all the classes. The majority of observations were undertaken jointly with school leaders. During observations, I reviewed the quality of pupils' learning in books. I also scrutinised English and mathematics work in pupils' books with the subject leaders.

Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher to evaluate the school's actions towards the removal of special measures. I met with three members of the interim executive board (IEB), including the chair. I had meetings with the inclusion manager who oversees the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, the English and mathematics leaders and the leader of provision for disadvantaged pupils. I met with the local authority's commissioning manager and had a telephone conversation with a representative of the commissioned support, who has been working with the school.

I scrutinised a range of documentation including assessment information, the single central record, child protection files, minutes of governors' and IEB meetings, the most recent local authority review, the pupil premium review, the review of governance, the local authority's statement of action, the school improvement plans and evidence of leaders' monitoring and evaluation of the school's work.

Context

Since the previous inspection, one teacher has left the school. Currently, one class is being taught by a supply teacher. You have moved one teacher to cover the vacancy caused by the departure of the member of staff. At the end of this term, the assistant headteacher will be leaving to take up a promoted post in another school. You have started the recruitment process and aim to have a full staffing structure in place as soon as possible. You have changed the ways that teaching assistants are allocated within the school to better meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Following the last inspection, the chair of governors resigned and the vice-chair took up the role. Following the review of governance, the newly appointed chair and two other governors resigned. This led the remaining governors to request the local authority to establish an IEB. You have made changes to a number of leadership responsibilities. These include establishing separate and clearly defined responsibilities for disadvantaged pupils, for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and for behaviour management.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders took immediate action following the last inspection to address the issues identified in the report. They produced an interim improvement plan that has subsequently been revised and added to. While this plan contains detailed and considered actions to address each of the areas for improvement, it would be further strengthened by the inclusion of specific success criteria and more closely defined arrangements for monitoring and evaluation. This will allow leaders to accurately assess the impact of the actions they have taken.

Leaders have taken action to address inadequate and less-than-good teaching. They have identified areas of any individual teacher's practice that are not effective in promoting learning and have implemented support plans. Leaders have used a range of coaching and mentoring approaches that allow teachers to observe good teaching and to discuss how this can be implemented in their classrooms. Leaders have introduced a series of non-negotiable rules that stipulate the expectations of the standards of work that are required from all pupils and how teachers and other adults will provide feedback on learning to pupils. The headteacher has been clear that expectations from staff of what pupils can and should achieve have not been high enough in the past and these need to rise. Teachers and other staff share her commitment to bringing about the necessary improvements. Leaders recognise that, while their actions have had an impact on teaching and pupils' learning, there are still too many aspects of teaching that do not promote learning effectively.

The establishment of the IEB in February has greatly strengthened the effectiveness of leadership. The headteacher ensured that the external review of governance was carried out as quickly as possible after the last inspection. The review identified that the governing body did not have the depth of understanding to hold leaders to account and had not shown an awareness of the decline in outcomes for pupils that had taken place over recent years. Governors took the decision to step down from their roles and request that the local authority establish an IEB. The IEB took up its functions in February. The three members of the IEB have brought expertise and a wealth of experience to the governance of the school. They have held fortnightly meetings at which they ask searching and challenging questions of the headteacher and other leaders. They forensically interrogate the school's assessment information and are aware of how different groups of pupils are progressing and attaining. They undertake a wide range of monitoring activities and have rapidly gained a detailed and accurate understanding of the school's priorities and areas of weakness. They have a clear view of how the pupil premium funding is being used and its impact on disadvantaged pupils' outcomes. They recognise that the most able disadvantaged pupils are still not making sufficient progress. The members of the IEB are keen to strengthen further their effectiveness and are actively seeking additional members who will bring the same levels of challenge and support.

Leaders have revised assessment systems in school to enable more accurate tracking of pupils' outcomes. Leaders have increased the frequency of the pupils'

performance meetings that are held with all teachers to each half term. They now use the assessment information that is collected by teachers at these meetings to closely analyse outcomes and to identify any pupils who are not achieving well enough. There is still an overemphasis on looking at pupils' attainment and leaders are aware that they still need to improve the process of tracking pupils' progress. Teachers now use a wider range of assessment measures, including standardised tests, to help gain an accurate view of pupils' strengths and weaknesses in their learning.

Leaders have placed a greater focus in their monitoring and evaluation activities on identifying the impact that teaching is having on pupils' learning. They, together with members of the IEB, carry out a range of monitoring activities, including regular learning walks and scrutiny of pupils' work. Senior leaders provide feedback that accurately pinpoints aspects of teaching that are not effective. However, feedback to teachers still does not identify clearly, or as fully as possible, what must be undertaken to bring about the necessary improvements, nor the support the school will provide to enable this to happen. This slows the pace of improvement.

Leaders commissioned an external review of the use of pupil premium funding and this was carried out in October 2016. Leaders had already made changes to the use of funding following the inspection and have made further amendments following the input from the reviewer. The deputy headteacher has taken up responsibility for leadership of provision for disadvantaged pupils and has sharpened teachers' understanding of their roles and responsibilities for improving outcomes for these pupils. The funding is now much more closely aligned to the individual learning needs of disadvantaged pupils, rather than to the previous emphasis on social and emotional provision. The use and allocation of teaching assistants within school have been completely revised. Teaching assistants are now allocated, often for relatively short periods of time, to provide specific and evaluated interventions to disadvantaged pupils. While the school is monitoring the impact that these interventions are having, it is too early to say whether they are having a significant impact on diminishing differences between outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and other pupils.

The role of the inclusion leader has been redefined so that she can focus primarily on provision and outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Advice and assistance have been provided through the local authority's commissioned support and these have been beneficial in developing a clear and more effective system of tracking pupils' progress and planning action that is matched more accurately to individuals and their specific needs. The special needs leader now meets regularly with each class teacher to discuss the outcomes of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Decisions are then made on how to provide appropriate approaches and resources to further benefit their learning. Opportunities for the leader to monitor interventions and the quality of teaching are not yet sufficiently robust or frequent and this limits the depth and quality of the evaluation.

Leaders have taken some actions to more accurately match the curriculum to the needs of groups of pupils but recognise that this aspect of improvement needs to be addressed in greater depth for it to have sufficient and sustained impact. Leaders have made revisions to planning and provision in the Reception classes to provide a more appropriate range of activities that engage boys' interest and attention. They have also introduced a tracking system that allows teachers and other adults in the early years provision to more accurately monitor children's involvement, engagement and progress across the range of learning areas. However, leaders are aware that they need to carry out a detailed review of the curriculum to tailor it to the specific needs of groups of pupils, including the most able.

In its statement of action, the local authority identified timescales for the transition of the school to academy status. However, at present, no firm proposals are in place.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers are making better use of the revised assessment systems to plan activities that match pupils' abilities and interests. For example, during the inspection, pupils in a key stage 2 class were observed discussing in-depth issues related to apartheid raised in the book 'Journey to Jo'burg' and planning their own stories. The activity required the pupils to apply prior learning and to develop a style of writing that would engage the reader. While the level of challenge was appropriate for many of the learners, the most able pupils were constrained by the planning style that they were required to use. Leaders recognise that there is still work to do across the school to ensure that activities consistently challenge all pupils.

There is evidence that teachers' expectations of pupils' presentation of their work have improved. Pupils generally take pride in their work and strive to improve handwriting, spelling and the way that they set their work out. This supports pupils in making better progress in writing and mathematics. Pupils are provided with a range of opportunities to use their reading and writing skills in other subjects, such as history and science. However, teachers still do not consistently take account of what pupils can already do and, as a result, there are still too many pupils who do not make rapid and sustained progress.

The mathematics leader has provided ongoing support to develop teachers' understanding of how to plan and teach activities that allow pupils to use reasoning in problem-solving in mathematics. This has begun to have a positive impact but is still not embedded in teaching practice across all classes. Where it is most successful, teachers ensure that pupils are required to use their mathematical skills and knowledge to consider problems that require a good depth of thinking. An example of this was seen in a key stage 2 mathematics lesson, where pupils had to consider the problem of whether an angle could be both acute and obtuse and provide reasons for their answer. Pupils showed a good understanding of the mathematical concept and provided compelling justification in their responses.

While there is some limited evidence that pupils use their mathematical skills and knowledge in other subjects, leaders are aware that the progress on this priority has not been as strong as it needs to be. They are working with external consultants and other schools to identify how this aspect of learning can be implemented consistently across the school.

Teachers have acted upon the need to provide feedback that informs pupils clearly about how they can improve their work. They provide verbal and written comments that focus on the next steps in learning. However, there are still occasions when teachers do not identify and correct common errors and this allows mistakes to be repeated.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are generally well behaved and show a positive attitude towards their learning. They show consideration towards each other and adults. They listen attentively when other people are speaking and show respect for views that differ from their own.

Leaders have revised and updated the school's behaviour policy and have ensured that expectations of how pupils should behave are explicit and understood by all members of the school community. Pupils understand that there are sanctions in place if they do misbehave but that they will also be acknowledged and rewarded for good and socially responsible behaviour.

Leaders' introduction of 'Learning Champions' awards has had a positive impact on pupils' behaviour. Pupils develop a good understanding of, and adherence to, the school-specific values of 'Confidence, Honesty, Ambition, Motivation, Pride, Independence, Organisation, Never giving up and Safety'. They recognise that their actions can have a negative impact on others. Pupils say that the very large majority of pupils are well behaved and that there is virtually no bullying in school. They are confident that adults will deal with any incidents of bullying quickly and effectively. The number of incidents of inappropriate behaviour has decreased steadily over the course of the year.

A very small minority of pupils still, at times, demonstrate challenging and unacceptable behaviour. This is generally managed appropriately and effectively by most staff but there is still some inconsistency, which results in a few pupils being off-task during lessons.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and are appreciative of the opportunities that they are offered at Bird's Bush Primary School.

The family support worker is effective in working with parents and their children. There is a high priority on ensuring that pupils attend regularly and on time. As a result, attendance continues to be above the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

School assessment information indicates that the majority of pupils are achieving better outcomes in writing and mathematics this year. Effective teaching of phonics helps to ensure that children in the Reception classes and in key stage 1 develop good skills in early reading and reach standards that compare well with the national average. Comprehension skills are improving for pupils across the school but it is too early to evaluate the impact that this will have on pupils' outcomes by the time they leave school in Year 6.

Pupils' opportunities for extended writing are well established and, consequently, the majority of pupils are confident in applying their skills in independent work. Evidence seen in pupils' books indicates that the majority of pupils are working at standards that are appropriate for their ages. However, there are still too few pupils working at greater depth.

Pupils' depth of understanding in mathematics is improving but the lack of consistently good teaching slows progress for some pupils. Pupils across the school are becoming generally more confident and competent in computational activities such as multiplication and division.

While school assessment information indicates that more pupils will be working at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics this year, this is still not the case for the most able disadvantaged pupils. Although leaders have put in place firm foundations to improve outcomes for these pupils, the impact is not yet fully apparent.

Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are receiving support that is more closely aligned to their needs. There is some evidence that this is having a positive impact on their learning. School assessment information indicates that gaps are starting to diminish.

External support

Leaders, teachers and other staff have benefited from the support commissioned and brokered by the local authority. Consultants have worked with school leaders to carry out reviews of many areas of the school's work, including early years provision and behaviour, and have identified where and how improvements can be made. The local authority is aware of the need to further strengthen the positive impact of the IEB by appointing more members who display the same expertise and commitment. A national leader of education is working alongside the headteacher to provide advice and support on specific aspects of leadership.