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21 April 2016

Mrs Sarah Nordstrom
Interim Headteacher
New Silksworth Infant School
Blind Lane
Sunderland
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Dear Mrs Nordstrom

Special measures monitoring inspection of New Silksworth Infant School

Following my visit with Oliver Flitcroft, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 19 and 20 April 2016, 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 February 2015. 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:

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 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 Sunderland.

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown
Lead Inspector

Annex

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

- Immediately review and improve the arrangements and procedures for the youngest children on entry to and exit from the nursery to ensure that all aspects of safeguarding are managed effectively.
- Urgently improve leadership and management, including governance, at all levels by:
 - updating the induction arrangements for staff to include child protection and safeguarding training
 - ensuring the school's evaluation of every aspect of its own work is accurate and includes precise checks on teaching, achievement, pupils' absence and behaviour
 - increasing the rigour with which school leaders analyse the information from these checks in order to ensure that action planning is well-focused with specific milestones by which to measure the progress of different classes and groups of pupils
 - making sure there is a clear line-of-sight which links teachers' performance management targets to pupils' attainment and progress together with the National Teachers' Standards
 - making sure that the school website is kept up to date and contains all statutory information, including the difference that pupil premium funding and primary physical education and sports funding are making to outcomes for pupils
 - providing governors with bespoke training in relation to the school's data so that they can hold the school to account for pupils' progress and the quality of teaching, in addition ensuring all staff receive effective support and training to improve and develop their skills.
- Urgently improve the standard of teaching in Key Stage 1 in order to raise pupils' attainment and quicken their progress in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils of all abilities, including the most able and disadvantaged pupils, can achieve, ensuring there is a constant focus on disadvantaged pupils so that the attainment gap between them and their peers closes rapidly
 - ensuring that assessment information about pupils' attainment and progress is accurate and is used to match activities to the abilities and needs of the pupils making sure that teachers' marking shows pupils how to make their work better and that pupils are given time to act upon that advice
 - regularly teaching the basic skill of handwriting so pupils develop a neat script by the end of Key Stage 1
 - ensuring that all teachers use a range of strategies effectively to manage

the behaviour of pupils in their classes.

- Urgently improve the quality of provision in the early years so that all children, regardless of their starting points, enter Year 1 with the necessary skills by:
 - ensuring that assessment information about children’s skills on entry to the early years is accurate and that regular assessments are undertaken so that progress can be measured
 - formulating and acting on a precise and comprehensive action plan for improving the provision in the indoor and outdoor nursery environments
 - making sure that children have interesting opportunities to explore, investigate and solve problems, both indoors and outdoors, so that they are able to reason and think for themselves.

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

An external review of the school’s use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management can be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 19-20 April 2016

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the interim headteacher, interim deputy headteacher and middle leaders. Inspectors met with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor, representatives from the local authority, a group of staff and a small group of pupils. Inspectors visited each classroom to observe teaching, including jointly with interim senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised the work in pupils' books, alongside leaders, to evaluate pupils' learning and progress over time. A wide range of documentation was evaluated, including the school's self-evaluation and school development plan, minutes of governing body meetings, an analysis of pupils' current attainment and progress, and the recent checks made on the quality of teaching. Safeguarding documents were also reviewed.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the substantive headteacher has left the school. The services of the interim headteacher, who was in her temporary role at the previous monitoring inspection, have been secured until at least the end of this academic year. An interim deputy headteacher has been seconded for two terms until the return of the substantive deputy headteacher in autumn 2016. A new teacher joined the school in January 2016 with responsibility for the leadership of mathematics. A teacher has returned to school following family leave. A new vice-chair of the governing body has been appointed.

An academy sponsor has been agreed for the school. A date has not yet been confirmed for the academy conversion.

Outcomes for pupils

The progress made by children in Nursery and Reception classes is improving. The current standard of work in children's books and the observations of learning in class indicate an improvement in the quality of children's learning since the previous inspection. Focused teaching is supporting children to develop the effective learning habits which are so important at this stage of their education. In Nursery, children show greater motivation to 'have a go' at experiences that are new to them and more children are prepared to keep trying when they find things tricky. In Reception classes, children show improved ability to sustain their concentration on tasks. However, leaders understand that there is still some way to go to address the legacy of previous underachievement and to ensure that children reach their full potential by the end of their Reception year in all areas of learning. This is particularly the case in reading, writing and mathematics.

The proportion of pupils in Years 1 and 2 making expected progress is improving. However, leaders have correctly identified that there are still inconsistencies in pupils' achievement in different classes and between subjects. This is particularly the case with writing and mathematics, where pupils, including the most able, are not always challenged to work at the appropriate level.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders have worked intensively to provide a more stable teaching team following the turbulence in staffing throughout 2015. Since the previous monitoring inspection, they have terminated all short-term agency staffing arrangements and this has improved the consistency of pupils' everyday experience.

Leaders have taken effective action to improve the quality of teaching across the early years. The activities planned for children excite their interest. As a result, children have better concentration skills and are persevering to complete their work. For example, during the inspection, a boy in a Reception class chose to spend an extended period writing independently in role as 'Jack' to apologise to the giant for his inappropriate behaviour. He sounded out each word meticulously, using his knowledge of letters and the sounds they represent, to try to write accurately, and took great pride in reading his letter to the inspector before sealing it in an envelope.

Staff have received training to understand the role of adults better in the early years classrooms. This has led to teachers and teaching assistants taking a much more focused role in guiding and supporting learning, rather than simply 'supervising' children's activities. As a result, children are making better progress. However, there are still occasions where adults do not make the most of opportunities to extend children's learning. For example, across the early years, during group activities to develop children's understanding of the world through exploring minibeasts, fruits and flowers, staff missed opportunities to improve children's language, writing and mathematical understanding.

Leaders have worked with the local authority to improve the accuracy of assessment. While occasional inconsistencies remain, teachers now have a clearer picture of the level that pupils are working at. However, in some classes, particularly across Years 1 and 2 in writing and mathematics, this information is not yet being used well enough to plan lessons that are set precisely at the right level for pupils' current stage of learning. As a consequence, not enough pupils are making the more rapid progress that is needed to address previous underachievement. This is most prevalent for those pupils working securely at the expected level and for the most-able pupils. Leaders understand that this is a key priority over the next term and the lead inspector will expect to see a demonstrable improvement in this at the next monitoring inspection.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, leaders have brokered training for staff which has improved their understanding of how pupils learn to form letters and develop their handwriting. Staff have worked together to review the school's policy and curriculum on this issue. In early years particularly, an increased focus on addressing incorrect letter formation is evident in children's work-books. However, despite these efforts, handwriting and presentation remain an issue for a number of pupils across the school. The chosen teaching approaches are not having a sufficiently rapid impact where children's letter formation is not yet correct. Pupils in Year 1 and 2 are not developing the expected neat handwriting script quickly enough. The school's curriculum to address these issues requires further consideration by leaders.

The local authority have provided training to middle leadership to help to improve the quality of teaching in mathematics. Staff are developing their understanding of a 'mastery' curriculum for mathematics. The quality of focused, adult-led mathematics teaching in Reception classes has improved and the level of challenge for children is better matched to their needs. However, teachers still have further work to do to ensure that opportunities for children to work independently to develop their mathematical understanding, both in classrooms and in the outdoor curriculum area, are sufficiently challenging. Similarly, in Years 1 and 2, pupils are too frequently given work that does not help them to develop their mathematical reasoning and which is pitched too low to allow them to make the progress of which they are capable. As a consequence, attainment and progress in mathematics are not yet improving rapidly enough in some classes.

Leaders have worked with staff to review the school's policy on marking and feedback. Teachers and support staff now have clarity about what is expected of them and all now comply with the policy. Leaders have identified that the next step is to focus their attention on the precision of this feedback to ensure that it is having the maximum impact on improving pupils' progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Since the previous monitoring inspection, leaders have reviewed the school's behaviour policy and provided training for all staff, including those who look after pupils at social times during the school day. This has led to the introduction of a new approach to reward appropriate behaviour and address poor behaviour. Governors have monitored the impact of this policy and have correctly identified that pupils' behaviour is now exemplary at playtimes, lunchtimes and during transition times around the school. Adults who supervise at lunchtime communicate their expectations to pupils clearly and show care and concern for the pupils in their charge.

In some classes in Years 1 and 2, pupils' attitudes to learning still require further improvement. Occasionally, some pupils' off-task talk results in a noisy classroom

environment where concentration to produce high quality work is difficult. Not all staff are taking a consistently 'zero-tolerance' approach to this issue yet. The school's system to record behaviour issues does not provide a sufficiently detailed log to ensure that leaders have a clear picture of pupils' behaviour for learning in the classroom.

Safeguarding is given an appropriately high priority in all aspects of the school's work. Pupils feel safe in school. The school's procedures for checking the suitability of adults to work with children and recording these on a single central register comply with requirements.

Attendance is improving through relentless work with parents, including regular updates through the school's website and weekly reward assemblies. Pupils' attendance is broadly in line with the national average and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is reducing.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Governors are understandably frustrated that delays in the process of the school becoming an academy are preventing them from making a permanent appointment to the post of headteacher. However, they have worked closely with the local authority to secure a more stable leadership position for the school. While arrangements are still on an interim basis, the current temporary headteacher has committed to stay with the school at least until the end of the academic year and beyond, if necessary, until the school becomes an academy. This is providing security and consistency for staff and pupils.

The passion and determination shown by governors has continued unabated. They have shown tenacity in working with the Department for Education to agree an academy sponsor for the school that they feel is most appropriate, thus securing their future vision for New Silksworth Infants. Governors have recognised the need to invest more of their time in the school and have shown strong commitment to improving their knowledge and skills by establishing a series of half-day, weekend events to explore specific school issues, such as assessment. This has paid dividends in enabling them to hold leaders to account more robustly for the performance of the school. Minutes of the recent 'headteacher challenge' meetings show a number of governors asking extremely probing questions of senior leaders. The local authority rightly expresses increased confidence in the growing capability of the governing body.

Senior leaders and governors have worked together to improve the school development plan which was not previously fit for purpose. The plan now includes 'milestones' by which the effectiveness of the school's performance can be judged. The plan also covers an appropriate timescale to reflect the journey towards the removal of special measures and is fit for purpose. Governors have recognised,

however, that milestones relating to pupils' performance need to include a focus on pupils' progress, as well as attainment.

Middle leaders check the quality of teaching and learning on a weekly basis. These checks contribute to an individual coaching plan for each teacher, linked to the 'National Teachers' Standards', to support them to develop their professional practice. Teachers are held to account for their performance in half-termly review meetings. They feel well supported by leaders and feel confident to ask for help. While middle leaders are correctly identifying the aspects of teaching that need to be improved, at times the feedback given to staff is not precise enough to secure the rapid improvements that leaders seek. For example, feedback to a teacher to 'improve the consistency of challenge for higher attaining pupils' following a check on pupils' work-books was not supported by specific examples of where the challenge was not strong enough or examples of how the challenge could have been improved. The headteacher needs to take a more direct role in this aspect of the leadership of teaching to ensure that leaders' work is having the desired and necessary impact on the quality of teaching.

Following the previous monitoring inspection, senior leaders, with governors, reviewed their approach to tracking and evaluating the performance of pupils. Governors now find it easier to interpret the reports they receive. However, at times, there are misconceptions over whether reports on pupils' academic outcomes are focused on the actual current position, or the ambitious targets set by leaders for the end of the academic year. While the headteacher has absolute clarity over this, some leaders, including middle leaders, do not have a sufficiently accurate understanding of the progress and attainment of all groups of pupils in English and mathematics. At times, this limits the ability of leaders at all levels to check precisely the impact of their work. Leaders do not take enough time to evaluate strategically the difference that their actions are making to pupils' outcomes. For example, leaders have checked on the work that individual members of staff are doing to support disadvantaged pupils, but have not stepped back to consider whether the work is improving the performance of this group of vulnerable pupils quickly enough. This leadership issue will be a particular focus of the lead inspector at the next monitoring inspection.

External support

Following the judgement at the second monitoring inspection, the local authority has taken steps to ensure that the statement of action is now fit for purpose. The plan has appropriate 'milestones' against which the school's progress can be measured and covers the timescale that is likely to be required to remove it from special measures.

The local authority school improvement partner visits the school regularly and his support is appreciated by the headteacher. Senior officers within the local authority

check the work of the school and provide challenge to senior leaders. The local authority knows the school and has an accurate view of what is working well and what needs to improve.

Specific support from local authority officers to improve the quality of teachers' assessment of pupils' work and to improve the quality of teaching in the early years is bearing fruit. Local authority senior officers recognise that more needs to be done to broker support for middle leaders to develop their skills to improve the curriculum and the quality of teaching in writing and mathematics.