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24 January 2014

Mr Graeme Garthwaite
The Acting Headteacher
Cage Green Primary School
Cage Green Road
Tonbridge
TN10 4PT

Dear Mr Garthwaite

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cage Green Primary School

Following my visit with Lesley Cox, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 22 and 23 January 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2012. 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 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 Kent.

Yours sincerely

Jane Wotherspoon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2012

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good by:
 - making sure that lesson activities extend and challenge all pupils, especially those of higher ability
 - creating frequent opportunities for pupils to work independently, especially in applying their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects
 - making sure that teachers quickly identify pupils who are falling behind in their work so they can be given extra help to catch up
 - making sure that pupils know what they are expected to learn in lessons and are clear about whether they are reaching their targets.
- Ensure that all pupils make good progress in mathematics, reading and writing by:
 - providing training for teachers so they are effective in teaching these subjects
 - giving pupils regular opportunities to practise their mathematics skills
 - making regular checks about how quickly pupils are learning letters and sounds.
- Ensure that leaders and managers are effective in tackling the school's weaknesses by:
 - tracking pupils' progress so that those falling behind are identified quickly and given extra help to catch up
 - making self-evaluation rigorous and accurate.
- Ensure that governance is effective in driving improvement by:
 - providing training for governors so they can hold senior leaders and staff to account for the achievement of different groups of learners
 - making certain that governors play a full role in analysing the school's strengths and weaknesses and deciding on priorities for improvement.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 January 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other senior staff, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor, and a representative from the local authority. They spoke informally with staff and pupils during the course of the inspection. Almost all lesson observations were carried out jointly with senior and middle leaders.

Context

One teacher left at the end of the autumn term and was replaced at the start of the spring term. A teacher absent from the Phoenix Centre, due to long-term illness, is covered by an unqualified teacher at present. Numbers of pupils on roll continue to rise.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Test results were reported extensively at the last monitoring inspection. Since then, national figures have been released which show big gaps in the attainment and progress of pupils leaving Cage Green at the end of Year 6. This is especially the case for boys and pupils known to be entitled to free school meals.

The school's own information shows that the proportions of pupils making expected progress are rising gradually. Some pupils need to make more progress to catch up, especially boys. The gap in attainment for pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding and other pupils is too wide. However, since September, the progress of this group is more positive in Years 2, 4 and 6 in reading and writing. For all groups of pupils, progress in mathematics lags behind that in reading and writing and is a current focus for improvement.

In the Phoenix Centre, the attainment gap is widest for the older pupils. Pupils who have complex and diverse needs in Year 6 are unlikely to meet the targets set for them by the end of the year. Here, progress is better in mathematics than in reading and writing. Partly, this is a reflection of pupils' learning needs and partly it relates to the quality of teaching including teachers' expectations and the quality of marking and feedback to pupils. Gaps are not so wide for younger pupils because appropriate interventions have been in place more consistently.

In lessons, most pupils make some progress. But, their progress is not as fast as it needs to be where the pitch of activities is not quite right. The most able pupils, in particular, do not always show what they are capable of doing when the organisation and management of the lesson do not allow it. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils did not reach the higher level of work because they

spent too long practising what they already knew and could do. The quality of presentation over time in pupils' books, noted previously as improving, is not sustained consistently. Pupils are learning to write in different styles for different purposes. Although they are taught about different features of writing, they do not use such features regularly in their own work. They have too few opportunities to write at length across a range of subjects. The use of worksheets, for example in science, limits opportunities for longer pieces of writing and for pupils to explain what they know and understand. In the Reception Year, children are confident to explore their environment. Both boys and girls sustain a good level of concentration. They make good progress in developing their early reading and writing skills, for example, when writing a recipe for making porridge for the three bears.

The quality of teaching

Overall, the quality of teaching continues to improve. Weaknesses are not as widespread as in the past and more lessons have effective features, such as when teachers ask probing questions to challenge pupils. Partner talk is used well across the school to help pupils learn from each other and rehearse answers to questions. Pupils themselves have noticed the difference in what they are learning, although not all agree that they are challenged to do their best at all times. The use of visual timetables in all classes is a positive feature from the Phoenix Centre and helps pupils integrate into mainstream classes. Teachers' marking in pupils' English and mathematics books is systematic and helpful but not replicated consistently in other subjects, where examples of unmarked work were seen.

The pitch of the work to meet pupils' needs is not always secure, especially in mathematics, and it is this factor that holds back pupils' progress. At times, extension tasks are 'more of the same', but sometimes activities for the most able pupils are too difficult. This is because teachers try to challenge them with more difficult work before being sure that the pupils have grasped the concept they are practising. Here, the pitch of tasks was better for pupils of lower or middle ability.

In lessons where writing is the focus, teachers often provide helpful support and structures so that pupils work on their own to apply what they have learnt. The strong focus on improving pupils' vocabulary is beginning to pay dividends in the content of their writing. The use of subject specific vocabulary to reinforce key terms is reflected in the displays and 'working walls' that are a consistent feature of classrooms. Reading sessions observed did not always conform to the school's agreed practice. Again, pitch was an issue and/or the lesson focused too much on the structure of the writing at the expense of opportunities for pupils to actually read. However, following criticism at the previous monitoring inspection, the book areas in classrooms have been improved to raise the profile of reading.

In the Reception Year, teachers provide a wide range of learning opportunities from which children choose and balance these with activities that all are expected to try.

Opportunities for children to explore the environment and the world around them are especially well organised. Careful thought is given to ensure that activities complement each other and are based around a theme so that children learn in an holistic way. Opportunities for storytelling and role play are many and varied.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' attitudes to learning in lessons are generally good. Between lessons, movement around the school is calm and managed well. High levels of respect, consideration and care for each other stem from the positive relationships that are forged from an early age. Such an environment enables pupils from the Phoenix Centre to integrate successfully. Incidents of misbehaviour are logged but not analysed to check any trends over time. There have been no exclusions from school for over a year.

Older pupils say that school is 'stricter and fairer' than in the past. While they know that they will get found out if they do wrong, they are listened to and feel they learn from their mistakes. Pupils feel positive about the rewards for good behaviour and respond to the incentives to behave well. Although pupils speak well of the new play equipment outside, the organisation of the playground and the state of the surface lead to a high number of bumps, scrapes and knocks recorded in the medical log.

Attendance has improved overall, and for almost all groups of pupils and all but one class, when compared with the same period last year. Systems for monitoring the attendance of different groups of pupils have improved since the previous monitoring inspection.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The school's improvement plan is updated continually. Regular checks on the impact of actions help to identify the next steps for the school to take. Systems for checking the school's work are increasingly thorough and based on a range of information from observing lessons, looking at pupils' work in their books and analysing the information on pupils' current attainment and their progress over time. Subject action plans are aligned to the main improvement plan so that there is a common sense of purpose and a systematic approach to planning improvements. Nonetheless, action has focused mainly on improving English and mathematics at the expense of the wider curriculum.

The roles of leaders of learning are developing well. Training for observing lessons and for feeding back to their colleagues has been effective. Their growing confidence was exemplified during the joint observations conducted with HMI. Analysis of strengths and weaknesses in the teaching observed jointly was spot on. The management of the Phoenix Centre is strong. The clear vision for how the centre works alongside the mainstream school is helping staff to share best practice.

Systems for analysing the information about pupils' attainment and progress continue to improve. Although much is held and analysed by senior leaders, importantly, class teachers are beginning to understand this information too. Regular meetings about pupils' progress are leading staff to identify those who might benefit from programmes of support to help them catch up. However, the management and monitoring of the quality and impact of such intervention programmes are not secure. A dislocation between who leads the interventions, which pupils have which interventions, and how the work is followed up in class undermines the potential impact of this work.

The skills of governors are developing rapidly following attendance at a range of training events. Members are clear about what remains to be done to improve. They are aware of need to measure the impact of their actions and know there is more to do in this regard. They ask awkward and challenging questions about the performance of pupils. More focus is necessary to evaluate the impact of the pupil premium funding on pupils' progress. Since the previous monitoring inspection, many policies have been updated and it is essential that the rolling programme of review is adhered to.

Parents who respond to the Ofsted survey (Parent View) are increasingly positive about the school. Events such as the curriculum evening on mathematics enable staff to explain to parents how the school teaches certain skills. The role of the family liaison officer is having a positive impact on supporting the links between different agencies and parents who may benefit from specific support. This work has a positive impact on attendance rates. Nonetheless, there is more to do to engage some groups of parents in the life of the school and in their child's learning.

External support

The high level of universal support from the local authority has been reduced overall. Support is now targeted as requested by the school's leaders in response to identified need. It includes much joint work to moderate and validate the leadership team's judgements on the quality of teaching and the progress pupils are making. Local authority officers continue to lead regular meetings to challenge the school's leaders, including governors, about the impact of their actions. Collaboration with local schools has provided many opportunities for staff to share good practice.