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21 November 2014

Mr Paul Hill
Headteacher
The Isaac Newton Primary School
Dysart Road
Grantham
NG31 7DG

Dear Mr Hill

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Isaac Newton Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19–20 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 November 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 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 Interim Executive Board (Governing Body) and the Director of Children's Services for Lincolnshire County Council.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Spencer
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- For the Secretary of State use the following email address:
CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- The lead and team inspectors.

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by ensuring that:
 - teachers use accurate information about pupils' attainment and progress in planning lessons provide activities at the right level of difficulty to interest pupils and enable them to reach the standards they are capable of
 - pupils know their targets, particularly in Year 6, and take notice of teachers' marking to improve their work
 - teaching assistants provide effective support for pupils eligible for pupil premium funding, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs
 - children in the Reception classes are given more opportunities to be creative and to develop their communication skills in the outdoor area
 - lessons are well planned so that pupils are less likely to lose concentration and enthusiasm
 - the most successful aspects of teaching and assessment are shared more widely to ensure greater consistency across the school.
- Raise standards in writing and ensure that pupils develop the strong communication skills necessary for them to succeed in the next stage of their learning by:
 - giving pupils more opportunities to write at length across all subjects
 - ensuring that pupils rapidly improve their spelling, handwriting and the presentation of their work
 - providing additional training in the teaching of phonics for staff in Reception, to enable children to quickly develop their reading and writing skills.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that leaders and managers at all levels clearly understand their roles, responsibilities and accountabilities and are able to fulfil them
 - introducing a robust system to monitor the performance of teachers in accordance with the National Teachers' Standards
 - checking the quality of teaching and learning more closely to ensure that all staff meet the expected professional standards and are held to account for closing the gaps in pupils' achievement
 - improving the systems for tracking pupils' progress and rapidly identifying individuals and groups of pupils at risk of underachieving
 - monitoring the impact of pupil premium funding to ensure that it is used effectively to improve the rate of progress of eligible pupils
 - providing training for leaders and governors to enable them to improve their skills and accuracy in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school.
- Improve the effectiveness of governance by ensuring that governors gain an accurate and timely understanding of the performance of all groups of pupils, so they can rigorously challenge leaders to improve the standards achieved by pupils. 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 management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 19-20 November 2014

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work and met with the headteacher, other school leaders, and the Chief Executive Officer of the Multi-Academy Trust which the school is planned to join. Telephone conversations were held with the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), and a representative working on behalf of the local authority. A formal meeting was held with a group of pupils, and a number of informal discussions were also held with pupils, and with parents and carers. The inspector scrutinized the school's records of pupils' learning and progress, samples of pupils' work in books, and a range of other documentation, including the school's single central record of staff suitability checks.

Context

Arrangements for the school to join a Multi-Academy Trust, at the beginning of the Autumn term 2014, were delayed. The school now plans to join the Community Inclusive Trust, led by the Sandon School and Ambergate Sports College, on 1 December 2014.

Since the last monitoring visit, two teachers have left the school and two new teachers have been appointed. One of these is a newly qualified teacher.

Achievement of pupils at the school

School data, and work in pupils' books, show that many pupils continue to make better progress than they did previously in developing reading, writing and mathematics skills. However, the progress pupils make in mathematics lags behind their progress in reading, and in writing in particular. Pupils' progress also remains too variable between classes. For example, pupils' progress in Years 3 and 4, and in mathematics in Year 5, is not good enough. Pupils in Key Stage 2 lack skills with mental calculations in mathematics, and in applying their knowledge to solve mathematical problems. For example, older pupils are often not able to recall multiplication facts rapidly, or solve number problems including fractions confidently.

School leaders and teachers are using assessment more effectively to identify pupils who have fallen behind with learning, and also those who require additional support to reach the higher levels. There is evidence that many pupils who work in small targeted groups, including those supported through the pupil premium, and, separately, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, are making good gains in their learning. This means that they are closing the gaps between themselves and other pupils.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making better progress in developing their communication skills. This is because teachers are planning activities to focus on the development of children's speaking and listening skills more effectively, and staff are providing tailored small-group support for children who need it. More intensive support is also provided for pupils who speak English as an additional language. Pupils' outcomes in phonics (the sounds that letters make) are also improving rapidly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1. This is because staff have received effective training and are becoming increasingly skilled in teaching phonics and early reading skills.

The school has rightly placed significant effort and resource into improving pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills. However, this has meant that learning in some other subjects has slowed down. For example, pupils in Key Stage 2 are not developing investigative science skills well enough. This is because they are not given frequent enough opportunities to carry out practical science work.

The quality of teaching

Work in pupils' books, and observations of learning during the inspection, show that almost all teachers are teaching children to write effectively. Where this is not the case, teachers' expectations of the quality and amount of work that children produce are too low. Pupils' better progress in writing is underpinned by teachers placing a stronger emphasis on the development of pupils' speaking skills; particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Experienced teachers plan lessons carefully to support the development of pupils' speaking skills. However, in some classes, less experienced teachers do not do this well enough.

Teaching assistants often make a strong contribution to pupils' learning, particularly when working with intervention groups to help pupils who have fallen behind. However, this is not consistently the case. For example, in some lessons during the inspection, pupils' learning was slowed down by teaching assistants, as they distracted pupils from what teachers were saying.

Teachers are beginning to teach pupils to calculate numbers more effectively in mathematics. This is because teachers have agreed a system of 'mathematical methodology' to ensure that they teach methods of calculation consistently. This is quite a recent development, and staff have not yet shared their preferred methods of calculations with parents and carers.

Teachers are marking pupils' work in writing very effectively. They identify clear development points for pupils, which help them to improve the quality of their work. However, teachers' marking of pupils' work in mathematics makes less impact on pupils' progress, and on informing teachers' plans for future work. Mathematics lessons for whole class groups often focus too heavily on pupils with average attainment, and do not cater well enough for either lower, or higher, attaining

pupils. Leaders are currently supporting teachers to improve the quality of marking in mathematics.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils report that lessons are rarely interrupted by disruptive behaviour. This is because most teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour, and, as the quality of teaching continues to improve, pupils are becoming increasingly engaged in their learning. Pupils' improved attitudes to learning are reflected in their attendance, which is now above the national average, and continues to improve. On rare occasions, some pupils demonstrate poor attitudes to learning. For example by scribbling, or drawing graffiti, on the front of their wordbooks.

Pupils report that they feel safe in the school. They also demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils were able to talk in detail about how to stay safe when using the internet, and how to play safely on the playground to help avoid accidents. Pupils were observed playing calmly together at breaktimes and lunchtimes. The increased playground space they have, following the completion of long-term building work at the school, is making a strong contribution to this.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders and managers, at all levels, now clearly understand their roles. They have checked the work of the school in detail and, as a result, they have built up a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders understand that they need to use this knowledge to make a more active contribution to the strategic leadership of the school, and to accelerate improvements in the quality of teaching. For example, leaders need to devise action plans to show how they will ensure that their area of leadership makes a strong contribution to improving outcomes for pupils. The school's new systems to manage the performance of staff continue to be effective. However, key stage, and subject leaders need to become stronger in challenging staff to improve the quality of their work. For example, by developing more confidence to say when things are not good enough; identifying clear development points for staff to address the issues; and rigorously checking up to ensure that improvements are followed through. Leaders understand that there is also more work to do to share the features of the best teaching in the school, to support the development of all staff.

The headteacher, effectively supported by the deputy headteacher, continues to make a very strong contribution to the school's improvement. Staff describe him as being 'inspirational' to them. He is developing the confidence of leaders quickly, and is held in high regard by many parents and carers.

Leaders are providing effective support for newly qualified teachers. However, there are currently two newly qualified teachers working at the school, and leaders do not have the capacity to support additional newly qualified teachers at this time.

The IEB has worked effectively with the school to support plans for the establishment of a local governing body, which will replace the IEB when the school joins the Multi-Academy Trust.

External support

The school has received well-measured and appropriate external support since the last inspection. This has helped the school to prepare effectively for its transition to academy status. Consultants, working on behalf of the local authority, have supported staff to help ensure that their initial assessments of children joining the Early Years Foundation Stage are accurate. Effective support has also been received to help improve pupils' understanding of 'e-safety'. Representatives of the IEB have continued to challenge school leaders to improve, but have reduced the number of visits they have made to the school this term. This has created sufficient space for leaders to work more closely with senior leaders from the Multi-Academy Trust, to form plans for the school's future. Leaders from the Multi-Academy Trust have brokered links with partner schools recognised for their good practice, and have also conducted comprehensive reviews of the school's work.