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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Cathy Godden
Headteacher
Orchard Meadow Primary School
Wesley Close
Blackbird Leys
Oxford
Oxfordshire
OX4 6BG

Dear Ms Godden

Special measures monitoring inspection of Orchard Meadow Primary School

Following my visit to your academy on 24–25 April 2018, 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 academy’s previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2016. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Dom Cook

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment, especially in Years 1 to 3, by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of the standards pupils can achieve, making effective use of assessment to set tasks that challenge pupils to make good progress from different starting points
 - stretching the most able pupils so that more exceed expectations for their age
 - ensuring that teachers' feedback helps pupils to understand how to improve their work
 - training and using teaching assistants effectively so that they have a positive impact on pupils' learning.
- Improve behaviour, welfare and personal development by:
 - using a consistent and effective approach to promoting good behaviour and self-discipline
 - ensuring that pupils attend school regularly, in particular reducing significantly the proportion of pupils that miss school frequently, especially disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities
 - keeping the impact of the nurture provision on improving the behaviour and well-being of targeted pupils under review
 - providing pupils with rich and varied opportunities that effectively promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare them for life in modern Britain.
- Improve pupils' achievement by:
 - setting targets that significantly raise everybody's expectations of the progress pupils can and should make
 - reviewing how effectively reading, including phonics, is taught
 - ensuring that pupils have sufficient opportunities to develop and apply their thinking and problem-solving and writing skills.
- Improve leadership at all levels by:
 - monitoring the quality of teaching and pupils' learning more rigorously and providing focused feedback, support and challenge to teachers
 - analysing outcomes for different groups of pupils, tracking their progress and taking prompt action to support those who are falling behind, particularly pupils who are disadvantaged and the most able

- developing the role of subject leaders to identify priorities and lead improvements
- providing a rich, relevant, broad and balanced curriculum.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 24 April 2018 to 25 April 2018

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and the subject leaders for English and mathematics, a group of other class teachers, representatives of the trust and members of the interim executive board. The inspector spoke with a group of pupils and listened to some of them read. A range of documents was considered, including information about pupils' progress and attainment, records of behaviour, the school's record of checks on staff, and recent pupil attendance information.

Context

Two new teachers have been appointed and taken up post since the last special measures monitoring visit in November 2017.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders continue to strive to improve standards at Orchard Meadow. Their determination is well focused on improving teaching and learning and they give careful thought to developing teachers' skills and recruiting the right people to bring about effective change. Leaders' subsequent actions are refined effectively and target the right areas for further improvement. Leaders are committed to ensuring that all pupils, including the most able, the disadvantaged, and those who are vulnerable or have SEN and/or disabilities, receive the support they need to achieve better.

Leadership is improving. Subject coordinators are developing a clear understanding of what is working well and what needs to improve further. For example, the mathematics coordinator has led useful work to improve teachers' ability to plan for, and strengthen, pupils' problem-solving and reasoning skills. The English coordinators have visited other schools judged to be 'good' by Ofsted and broadened their own knowledge of how to develop whole-school writing. Subject leaders need now to improve their ability to use pupil progress information to better analyse the effectiveness of teaching and learning throughout the school. This knowledge will help them to challenge teachers more robustly to improve overall outcomes for different groups of learners.

The newly appointed 'most-able pupil' leader has begun important work to improve outcomes for this group of pupils. Her work ensures that teachers are now more frequently challenging most-able pupils to complete more demanding activities that require them to think harder. This work must continue so that a greater proportion of most-able pupils achieve at the highest standards.

Leaders' work to improve the curriculum is proving effective. Pupils reported that learning in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics is now 'much more interesting'. For instance, they identified subjects such as history, geography and art as now 'much more fun'. This is because these subjects, and others, are more carefully planned to engage pupils' interest. Additionally, a wider range of extra-curricular learning, such as educational visits and residential trips, enriches learning at Orchard Meadow.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching is improving steadily. This is because effective ongoing staff appraisal and professional development are beginning to have a positive effect. Teachers' subject knowledge is strengthening, and they are more confident to seek out support from more experienced colleagues if they need advice or help. Teachers stated that opportunities to visit good schools to see 'best practice' helps improve their own teaching. This improvement must be sustained so that all teaching is as good as the best at Orchard Meadow.

The teaching of mathematics is improving. Pupils tackle more frequently activities that deepen their thinking and challenge them better from their different starting points. Teachers are becoming more adept at assessing what pupils know and use this information more precisely to inform their teaching. Work in exercise books demonstrates that pupils are practising a wider range of mathematical topics.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Improvements in pupils' attendance have been maintained. Most pupils attend regularly, including those who are disadvantaged, and absence rates are close to those seen nationally. Pupils understand the importance of coming to school and reported that 'missing out on education is really bad'. Leaders are rightly targeting a small number of families whose children repeatedly miss too much of their education. Rates of persistent absence need to fall further.

Support for vulnerable pupils continues to have a positive impact on their overall achievements. The 'Willows' classroom provides a nurturing and supportive environment that is tailored well to meet successfully pupils' academic and welfare needs. Pupils work particularly well in this calm environment. Under staff members' expert guidance, pupils demonstrate an eagerness to achieve well. As a result, most make good progress against their individual targets.

Behaviour continues to improve. Pupils reported that learning is now rarely disturbed by poor behaviour, and that bullying 'hardly ever happens'. They stated that teachers manage it well if it does occur. Importantly, pupils know that there are repercussions if they do not meet the higher expectations that staff now have of them. They said that most teachers are 'firm but fair'. School records demonstrate that incidents of poor behaviour, including those of a racist nature, are falling

steadily. This is because staff are more consistently applying the school's behaviour policy.

Outcomes for pupils

Most-able pupils are starting to achieve better. School information from recent assessments indicates that the majority of these pupils are meeting age-related expectations, and some are exceeding expectations, particularly in reading and mathematics. Leaders must ensure that pupils' overall achievements are sustained and that progress in writing is accelerated.

A greater proportion of pupils are achieving the expected standard in phonics. Improved teaching and better-planned learning are ensuring that current pupils are making much better progress than those in the past. Similarly, pupils are also beginning to read better. Some pupils are supported well to make more adventurous book choices and read classic books and authors for enjoyment.

Work in exercise books demonstrates that a growing proportion of pupils are achieving in line with expectations for their age, particularly in reading and mathematics. However, this is yet to be reflected in national assessments. Pupils' learning across the wider curriculum is also improving because activities are better matched to their needs. Pupils' achievement in art shows their clear pride in their work; for instance, Year 4's Roman clay 'curse tablets' were of a particularly good standard.

External support

The new chair of governors has recently taken up post. He knows the school well and understands clearly the challenges it faces. Frequent visits to the school and regular meetings with school leaders are enabling him, and other governors, to strengthen their skill in analysing pupil progress information. As a result, governors' evaluation of the school's effectiveness is becoming increasingly more accurate. Governors must continue to strengthen their ability to evaluate more critically leaders' work and rely less on information provided by the headteacher.