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3 October 2013

Ms Mireille MacRaid
Acting Headteacher
Muriel Green Nursery School
Church Crescent
St Albans
AL3 5JB

Dear Ms MacRaid

Special measures monitoring inspection of Muriel Green Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 2 October 2013 with Chris Moodie HMI, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection, which took place in July 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, we held meetings with you, staff and a representative of the local authority. We evaluated the local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan. Governors were not available because this was a no-notice inspection to check on the safeguarding concerns raised at the section 5 inspection. A meeting with governors will take place later this term.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, the headteacher and the Chair of the Governing Body have left the school. A new substantive headteacher will start in January 2014. The local authority seconded you from its Early Years Improvement Service to take over as the acting headteacher on 1 September, following the immediate placement of a local authority officer for the day care provision. Two newly qualified teachers appointed prior to the section 5 inspection started in September.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The local authority responded rapidly to the findings of Ofsted's section 5 inspection, recognising and accepting all the issues outlined in the report. It dealt with the immediate leadership issues swiftly. Seconding you as acting headteacher to lead the school and the private day-care nursery is leading to significant improvements in both settings. This was a well-conceived strategy. You are providing very strong leadership.

The section 5 inspection uncovered a number of safeguarding weaknesses in the school. It found that the administration of medicines, risk assessments, the single central record, safe recruitment of staff and fire safety were all weak. Improving these aspects has been your priority. During the inspection, inspectors checked whether staff understood the new policies and procedures for safeguarding children's wellbeing. Staff told inspectors that they were implementing the new policies. They provided evidence of where they had taken effective action to remedy weaknesses; for example, in the administration of medicines. Inspectors found that safeguarding now meets statutory requirements.

You accompanied me around the nursery to look at the quality of teaching and assessment of children's learning needs. Our discussions with senior staff indicate that they are struggling to meet some elements of the nationally agreed Teachers' Standards, despite being on the upper pay scale for teachers. Staff are now implementing a key worker system to support children's individual learning needs, but senior staff lack clarity about the purpose of this. Consequently, assessments and record keeping are unsystematic. Expectations for children's achievement are too low. Senior staff are unfamiliar with holding staff to account for children's achievement, so are having little impact on improving the quality of teaching. You are implementing performance management arrangements, as set out in the school improvement plan and local authority action plan, but the targets in teachers' individual plans need to be tight, with small steps for improvement that are easily measurable and achievable within short time frames.

The local authority statement of action deals with all the areas for improvement from the section 5 inspection. It identifies realistic timescales and appropriate actions for improvement. You have successfully achieved one aspect of the plan, to address safeguarding concerns. The more complex plan around accountability and governance requires some additional detail in the success criteria. An external review of the governing body is due to happen in the very near future. The local authority has committed to act upon the findings of this review. I will check the impact of this review on my next visit to the school.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement 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 Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire and as below. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gill Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector