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Vicky Rezaie
Executive Headteacher
Waltham Holy Cross Junior School
Quendon Drive
Waltham Abbey
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Dear Mrs Rezaie

Special measures monitoring inspection of Waltham Holy Cross Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 29 April 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 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 on 9 January 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, the inspector met with the executive headteacher and other school leaders, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing body, representatives from Lilac Sky Schools and two representatives of the local authority. The inspector evaluated the local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan. The executive headteacher and the inspector visited classrooms together to observe teaching and learning, and a meeting was held with pupils. The inspector also met with two groups of teachers and looked at records of monitoring activities.

Context

Following the section 5 inspection in January 2014, the governing body was reconstituted and a strategic intervention board was set up to monitor the school's

progress. The headteacher left the school in February 2014. The local authority commissioned Lilac Sky Schools to lead and manage the school from 24 February 2014 until July 2014. A team of three Lilac Sky Schools leaders work at Waltham Holy Cross Junior School each week, including the executive headteacher.

The local authority is working with the governing body to consider the future status of the school, a resolution has been passed to consult on amalgamation with the linked infant school.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

New school leaders have secured the confidence of the staff team. Teachers are positive about the journey of improvement. The pace of change has been necessarily swift and there is a determination to make a difference quickly.

The school's action plans are guiding improvements in the quality of teaching. Leaders support and train eight teachers through a structured coaching programme. These teachers appreciate the positive feedback they receive on the things they do well and the practical help and advice to help them improve. Other teachers value the developmental observations of teaching that leaders regularly conduct. A small minority of teachers, who are new to their role, have not been supported well enough in the past. However, there are signs of recent improvements. Leaders have published minimum requirements for lessons. These include an expectation that all lessons will be adapted to cater for the needs and abilities of learners. Leaders check that these non-negotiable elements of teaching are in place but do not always evaluate the quality of this work.

Governors are ambitious for the school and, following a useful local authority review of governance, have received training to become more effective in their role. They are clear about how they would like the school to develop but are not yet holding leaders to account well enough. The strategic intervention board, which has representatives from the local authority and the governing body, is monitoring the progress of the school more carefully.

Key teachers have been identified as future school leaders and some have taken on interim leadership roles. The English and mathematics leaders have developed action plans to improve teaching and achievement in their subjects. Mathematics lessons now include more opportunities for pupils to apply their skills to real-life problems or to investigate numbers. Pupils regularly discuss their understanding with a partner, which helps to embed learning. Most pupils know their targets and how to improve their work to reach the next level of attainment. Classrooms are mainly stimulating learning environments, and pupils are usually enthusiastic and focused on their

work. The quality of marking has improved as a result of clear expectations. It is now more helpful to pupils, but not universally so in every classroom. New behaviour systems have been introduced and pupils appreciate the rewards and privileges they receive for good behaviour. They say that behaviour has improved recently, they feel safe and say that disruption is rare.

The school provides intensive support for Year 6 pupils to help as many of them as possible make up for lost time and reach the expected standards in English and mathematics before they leave the school.

The local authority began working with the school more closely before the inspection in January 2014. Following the departure of the previous headteacher, it acted swiftly to ensure the school is led and managed effectively. It monitors the school through regular local authority visits and through the work of the strategic intervention board. The local authority's statement of action is mainly appropriate and covers all of the areas for improvement from the section 5 inspection. However, some of the attainment targets are not ambitious enough; these are due to be reviewed imminently.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action 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 and the Director of Children's Services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Winter
Her Majesty's Inspector