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Maddie Cowley
Headteacher
Cherry Tree Primary School and Speech and Language Unit
Holt Drive
Mersea Road
Colchester
CO2 0BG

Dear Mrs Cowley

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cherry Tree Primary School and Speech and Language Unit

Following my visit to your school on 1 July 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 in March 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with both you and the executive headteacher, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated. We jointly observed teaching in all year groups except Year 2, who were visiting Colchester Castle Museum. We also scrutinised pupils' achievement data and I looked at teachers' marking of pupils' writing.

Context

Since the school was inspected the headteacher has left. The school has appointed an acting headteacher and an executive headteacher to provide day to day leadership and strategic management. The acting headteacher is seconded from her current post and works full time in the school while the executive headteacher works in the school for three days a week. A strategic intervention board continues to provide additional support and challenge to the school and the governing body.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The new school leadership has an increasing focus on pupils' achievement. As a result, there are early indications that pupils' progress is beginning to accelerate. Pupils are now doing better in reading and writing and much better in mathematics.

While the school's improvement planning is focused on the right areas for improvement and sets measurable targets for the quality of teaching it does not say by how much it expects attainment to rise, or how much progress pupils are expected to make. The lack of targets for pupils' achievement in the development plan makes it more difficult for governors to hold the school to account for pupils' progress and attainment.

The school's records of observations of teaching indicate an improving picture. While much is now judged to be good, records of lesson observations do not refer clearly enough to areas for improvement identified in earlier observations so that teachers do not know whether or not they are improving. There is not a sharp enough focus on the impact of teaching on pupils' progress. The school has taken rapid action to improve the quality of marking so that pupils are better informed about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.

While the number of sessions for which pupils are excluded has fallen significantly it remains too high and too many pupils are subject to fixed term exclusions. The inspection report comments on the boisterousness of pupils and says that not all have positive attitudes to learning. This continues to be the case, with a small minority misbehaving in school and on the playground. Attendance is variable across classes but improving rapidly.

The governing body is now better placed to hold the school to account. The improved levels of challenge and clearer understanding of achievement data reported at the time of the last inspection have continued, although responsibility for the school budget continues to reside with the strategic intervention board. The local authority has provided training in a number of areas, including the analysis of pupils'

progress and attainment. The external reviews of governance and of the use of pupil premium funding recommended in the inspection report have not yet been undertaken.

The local authority is providing useful additional support for the school. It has brokered the services of the acting and executive headteachers and informally paired the school with a similar, but outstanding, Essex school. Extra support is provided by the linked school advisor, who has rightly focused on improving the quality of teaching. There is generally good alignment between the school improvement plan and the support planned by the local authority but not all targets align as closely as they should.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

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

Yours sincerely

Robert Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector