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18 March 2016

Mrs Lynne Law  
Interim executive headteacher  
The Grove Primary School  
Caledonia Road  
Wolverhampton  
WV2 1HZ

Dear Mrs Law

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of The Grove Primary School**

Following my visit with Paul Longden, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 8 and 9 March 2016, 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 school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in June 2015.

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.

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

The school's improvement plans are fit for purpose.

The school should not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Wolverhampton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Angela Westington

**Her Majesty's Inspector, Senior**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in June 2015.**

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that:
  - staff have realistic expectations of what pupils can do and use accurate assessment information when planning pupils' work so that it is matched well to what pupils already know
  - work is planned and set that is difficult enough, so that all groups of pupils make better progress
  - in-class support is improved for disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and pupils who speak English as an additional language
  - teachers and teaching assistants check pupils' learning throughout lessons and intervene so that all pupils are appropriately supported and learn effectively
  - the marking of pupils' work is always completed and gives useful advice on how pupils can improve their work
  - pupils' behaviour is managed effectively in lessons.
- Raise the level of pupils' achievement throughout the school by:
  - strengthening younger pupils' knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds they make)
  - ensuring that pupils build effectively on early reading skills to become competent readers through increased opportunities for them to read more widely
  - improving pupils' use of grammar, punctuation and spelling in their writing so they at least meet the standards expected for their ages
  - providing more opportunities for pupils to write at length in a range of styles and in different subjects
  - improving pupils' basic numeracy skills to improve accuracy in mathematics.
- Strengthen leadership and management at all levels so that there is a greater collective capacity to improve the effectiveness of the school by:
  - creating a school improvement plan based on rigorous checks of all aspects of the school's work and focused on the school's main weaknesses
  - ensuring that leaders at all levels, including governors, help check the school's progress towards achieving its improvement targets
  - implementing more robust checks on the work of all staff and setting challenging targets to improve their effectiveness
  - ensuring that all subjects and key areas of the school's work are led and managed well.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 8–9 March 2016.**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim executive headteacher, the head of school, two co-opted governors, a representative of the local authority, members of staff and pupils. One inspector spoke to parents before school on the first day of the inspection.

### **Context**

Since the section 5 inspection in June 2015, there have been significant staffing changes. A new temporary head of school was appointed from St Martin's Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). The substantive deputy headteacher resigned; the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and business manager resigned and new appointments have been made; seven teaching staff vacancies have been filled with three permanent staff and four long-term supply teachers; and new teaching assistants have been appointed.

There has been considerable refurbishment of the school premises including, among other works, a new staffroom, updating of the entrance hall and the start of a programme of work to improve the teaching areas for the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

The school is due to become an academy on 1 April 2016, at which point it will join the St Martin's MAT.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

This school is now in good hands. After years of weak leadership leading to unacceptably poor outcomes for pupils and low staff morale, The Grove Primary School finally has leaders at the helm who are able to steer a course to a more positive future. They have brought about a significant change in the ethos of the school.

In a relatively short space of time, the interim executive headteacher and head of school have made sufficient and significant changes to convince the previously demoralised staff that permanent improvement is possible. They have:

- improved the management of behaviour significantly so that pupils are ready and willing to behave, and learn, in lessons
- instigated a rigorous and robust programme of monitoring teaching, pupils' work and teachers' marking
- made explicit the non-negotiables that now govern classroom management
- initiated in-school development for senior and middle leaders to enable them to undertake their roles effectively
- strengthened the teaching of early reading in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1

- raised expectations of what pupils can, and should, achieve
- held teachers to account for the progress made by their pupils.

The interim executive headteacher and head of school have a very accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. They know where teaching is not as good as it needs to be and they move quickly to put in place support plans where necessary. They know too where teachers' subject knowledge is not good enough to challenge pupils' thinking and raise standards and have plans to tackle this. They have not been afraid to take difficult staffing decisions in order to secure better teaching and better school management. The school development plan covers all areas for improvement identified at the inspection in June 2015 and is updated termly; it shows that the school is making good progress in tackling the areas listed.

The inspection in June 2015 recommended an external review of governance and of the school's use of the pupil premium (additional government funding). Information on the use and impact of the pupil premium for the previous year was not available to the interim executive headteacher but she has pulled together the information for the year 2015/16 and has produced an appropriate plan for its use. The review of governance did not take place, as the decision was taken for the school to become an academy. Instead, the current governing body has been strengthened with the appointment of new, professional governors from the local authority. The head of school provides a very detailed monthly report for governors. Those interviewed appreciated the detail, clarity and openness of the reporting which they felt allowed them to challenge and pursue lines of enquiry. Governors now have a more accurate picture of the school and what needs to be done to raise standards quickly. The executive headteacher and head of school are ensuring that the governors, staff, pupils and parents are well prepared for the imminent transition to academy status.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

The report in June 2015 had very little positive to say about teaching, learning and assessment. Although there is still a long road to travel, the school is now moving in the right direction. The transformation is stark. This is now an orderly community; one in which pupils enter the school and classrooms quietly and sensibly and settle to work immediately because all teachers have an activity ready for them to tackle. The classroom non-negotiables are evident in practice: pupils are arranged in similar horseshoe formats and teaching follows similar routines, providing security for pupils. Most significantly, pupils' readiness to learn and work hard is vastly improved. During this inspection, inspectors observed no poor behaviour or time-wasting during lessons, in sharp contrast to the findings in June 2015. This improvement is the result of the new behaviour policy and the expectation of higher quality teaching.

The new, whole-school system for marking and assessment has led to better matching of work to pupils' needs and better identification of pupil groups in need of

specific help. As a result, the quality of teaching overall has improved since the inspection in June 2015. However, there remain pockets of teaching where, over time, pupils are not making rapid enough progress to make up for previous underachievement and to fill in the gaps in their knowledge. For example, an inspector observed pupils in parallel classes making quite different rates of progress over time in their understanding of mathematical concepts due to the level of the teachers' own subject knowledge and ability to identify immediately when, and why, a child had misunderstood a concept. The volume of work completed in some parallel classes is very different. The interim executive headteacher and head of school are aware of this. During observations of mathematics lessons, inspectors noted that pupils had very limited access to practical number equipment, for example Base 10 materials to reinforce number concepts or geo-strips to explore angles as amounts of turning. Discussion with teachers revealed that few had taken on board the possible need for all pupils, even the most able, to explore concepts and deepen their understanding through a wide range of materials, concrete and abstract, as a requirement of the new mathematics curriculum.

The teaching of reading is organised in a more consistent fashion but, in Key Stage 2 especially, there remains more to be done to increase the level of challenge, and range, of books that pupils read. Pupils in upper Key Stage 2 are not reading at the level at which they ought to be reading. Their reading is assessed through the school's own new teacher-assessment system. Individual teachers keep their own individual records too, some of which are very scant. The interim executive headteacher is considering the use of a commercial reading test to triangulate the teacher assessment and to provide a different form of management information.

Through the robust programme of regular monitoring, where teaching remains less than good, feedback and appropriate support are put in place. Specific support from the schools in the MAT has led to a significant improvement in the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

This aspect of the school's work is the most improved since June 2015. During this inspection, no poor behaviour was seen and no low-level disruption was observed in lessons. Pupils conduct themselves in an orderly fashion around the school. Inspectors found the pupils to be polite and engaging, keen to learn and proud of their achievements. For example, an inspector observed a Year 2 girl determined to complete her third mathematics test paper in the lesson wipe her brow and sigh with proud accomplishment as she finished it. She then immediately picked up her pen and board to start her spelling test. Increasingly, pupils are developing skills of perseverance and resilience. In what had previously been a challenging year group for behaviour, an inspector observed Year 4 pupils listening attentively and engaging responsively with 'Commando Joe', an external provider who works with classes to develop personal and social skills.

Incidents of recorded misbehaviour are much reduced.

Attendance is improving. On day one of this inspection, the attendance rate was 97.3% for compulsory age pupils. The year-on-year comparison also shows improvement. In the academic year 2014/15, the school's persistent absence rate of 14% was well above the national figure; the majority of these absentees were girls. This figure has reduced in the current academic year to 7% as a result of the more robust systems put in place by leaders and managed by the pastoral officer. The pastoral officer meets weekly with MAT leaders and the educational welfare officer to review cases and undertake joint home visits.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

In 2015, the school's results in all of the national assessments and tests – early years, Year 1 phonics, Year 2 and Year 6 assessments and tests – were significantly below the national figures on every measure. Evidence from this inspection confirms this picture.

Standards in reading, writing and mathematics remain below average for all groups of pupils across the school but they are rising. Rates of progress made by pupils are increasing too, but inconsistently and are still not rapid enough to eradicate the tail of underachievement in most groups of pupils and to plug the gaps in their knowledge and skills.

The greatest improvements are evident in pupils' outcomes in phonics and, to a lesser extent, in writing. Children in Nursery are further ahead in their acquisition of letter-sound knowledge than the previous cohort at this stage of the school year. Pupils in Reception and Key Stage 1 are acquiring good early reading skills.

Across the school, greater attention is now paid to pupils' writing. Children in the Nursery can write their first names and increasingly recognise that writing has meaning. In Key Stage 1, pupils write across a range of genres and are gaining the necessary skills to punctuate and spell their work. In Key Stage 2, most pupils write extended pieces of text, in a variety of styles, with an increasingly accurate use of punctuation and grammar. Lower-ability writers have gaps in their phonic and spelling knowledge which impede their progress. Across all stages, too little attention is paid to correct letter formation and handwriting, although the revised presentation policy is evident in how work is laid out in books.

In mathematics, inspectors observed pupils in Year 5 learning to use the correct technical vocabulary for angles: obtuse, acute, right angle and to use protractors and rulers correctly. They knew that a right angle measured 90 degrees and a straight line measured 180 degrees, but there were clear gaps in their knowledge from previous weak teaching. For example, pupils spoken to, even the most able, did not understand that angles measure amounts of turning so, although they could correctly work out the missing angles in their exercises, they did not understand what the abstract diagrams represented.

In one Year 2 class, too many pupils did not have a secure grasp of place value, so when faced with the sum  $24+68$ , they struggled to answer it. The majority resorted to counting on in jumps on a number line and, consequently, came to the wrong answer. In discussion with pupils, it became clear that they had no real grasp of the '2' and '6' being 10s and when this was explained they struggled to count on in 10s. In the same room, pupils had no concept of the commutativity of the sum  $9+5=14$  so could not see that they could make  $14-9=5$  or  $14-5=9$  from the same numbers. It was clear to the inspector that the children in this room rarely used mathematical resources to support their learning and to develop a range of mental arithmetic strategies. In contrast, in a parallel class, the pupils confidently tackled the same problems displaying their ease with a range of mental arithmetic strategies.

### **External support**

The local authority was responsible for brokering the support of St Martin's MAT. The support provided by the interim executive headteacher, head of school and staff of the MAT has been excellent. The impact of their work can be seen in the significant change that has been brought about since their involvement with the school.