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Mrs Rebecca Webb
Firs Hill Community Primary School
Orphanage Road
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S3 9AN

Dear Mrs Webb

Special measures monitoring inspection of Firs Hill Community Primary School

Following my visit with Julia Wright, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 26 and 27 April 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 October 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 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 chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sheffield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Lunn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in October 2015

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - taking robust action to make sure that pupils are safe
 - urgently securing the long-term leadership of the school
 - developing the skills of leaders so that they contribute effectively to school improvement and share responsibility more widely.

- Improve the personal development, behaviour and well-being of pupils by:
 - eradicating bullying, derogatory and prejudicial language and aggressive behaviour
 - eliminating low-level disruption in lessons
 - vigorously following up pupils' concerns, so that they are safe and feel safe
 - continuing the work that has already begun to overhaul the school's policy and approach to promoting good behaviour
 - consistently applying the recently adopted procedures to secure good behaviour, and checking robustly on their impact
 - continually reinforcing the school's values of respect and tolerance so that pupils are better prepared to contribute positively to life in modern Britain
 - ensuring that pupils have the skills and maturity to regulate their own behaviour.

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment to secure good or better rates of progress for all groups of pupils by making sure that all teachers:
 - demonstrate consistently high expectations of what pupils can and need to do
 - use assessment to match work accurately to the abilities of pupils and ensure that gaps in learning are eliminated
 - improve their subject knowledge so that they can plan the next steps in pupils' learning more carefully
 - use questioning effectively to deepen pupils' thinking
 - provide more opportunities for pupils to practise and internalise basic skills, knowledge and understanding before moving on to something new
 - provide regular opportunities for pupils to develop their reading, writing and mathematical skills in other subjects
 - provide helpful feedback so pupils know how to improve their work.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 26 and 27 April 2016

Evidence

The lead inspector scrutinised documents including: the local authority action plan; the school development plan; the external review of governance; the external review of pupil premium; and a range of other external audits and reports. Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the executive head of school, the chair of the governing body, the representative from Lead Sheffield, middle leaders, four newly qualified teachers and the pastoral team. Inspectors met with groups of pupils and informally with parents. Observations of pupils' learning were carried out by both inspectors alongside the executive headteacher and the executive head of school. Both inspectors focused primarily on the progress made in addressing the behaviour and safety of pupils at the school.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been substantial changes. A new executive leadership team from Tinsley Meadows took over formal leadership of the school from January 2016. There have been several other staffing changes. Lead Sheffield (the company representing the local authority) has appointed four new governors to strengthen the inadequate governing body and support the work being carried out by the chair of governors. The school received an academy order from the regional schools commissioner on 18 April 2016. At a strategy meeting on 27 April 2016, the current executive leadership team agreed to continue in position until the school becomes an academy.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders have prioritised safeguarding, safety and behaviour in their efforts to improve the school. They have put robust systems in place to ensure the safety of pupils at all times. A health and safety audit has led to immediate actions being taken to improve the safety of the site. Access is now strictly monitored, and all visitors are escorted around the premises. Leaders have drawn up clear lines of accountability to ensure that regular health and safety checks are carried out and reported back. Pupils are now in a much safer environment for learning.

Following on from the work of the previous executive headteacher, the executive leadership team has ensured that behaviour incidents are reducing. The new behaviour policy is being followed and rewards and sanctions are now used more consistently across the school. As a result, there has been a sharp decline in the number of incidents of poor behaviour, and although these have not been eradicated completely, incidents are being tracked and monitored regularly.

Leaders have introduced the current national curriculum and updated assessment procedures. Pupils enjoy a wide range of subjects, including a strong focus on religious education and personal and social development. This is helping pupils develop an understanding of other cultures and beliefs. Regular class assemblies are used to talk about any forms of prejudice and are helping pupils to improve their social skills. Teachers talk about how powerful these sessions are in dealing with any issues that arise throughout the day.

There are currently no formal systems in place where pupils can speak about any concerns they may have about behaviour. Leaders were surprised to hear some of the comments pupils made about how they perceive things, and this is because leaders do not have any procedures in place to listen to pupils.

Work to improve the attitudes of pupils is well under way. Regular reading sessions each morning are providing a calm and positive start to the day. Pupils enjoy these sessions and list reading as one of their favourite subjects. Leaders have also implemented changes to the way in which writing is taught to give more support to pupils who find it challenging. Both these changes are supporting a more positive attitude towards learning.

A review of governance was carried out in February 2016. However, only three governors attended. The review found that, with the exception of the chair of the governing body, the current governing body does not have the capability or the commitment to see the school through the current challenges. As a result, the chair of the governing body has secured four extra governors from the local authority. Two governors have resigned and those who regularly do not attend have been asked by the chair to resign their posts. An independent executive board was considered by the local authority, but was not put in place because the chair of the governing body is working hard to support the leaders and because of imminent academisation.

Since the review of pupil premium spending, there is now a clear action plan in place that sets out where the funding is being targeted and focuses on reducing the attainment gaps and accelerating rates of progress for this group. Staff now know the pupils in their class who need support, and interventions are in place. Because the assessment system is so new, there is little evidence of any impact at this time.

The executive leadership team has implemented many changes in the 13 weeks since it took over. Leaders have a clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses and are injecting a sense of urgency across the school. Their drive and determination are ensuring that pupils are safe and that teaching and learning are starting to improve. Rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning is providing accurate evidence of where strengths are emerging and where support is needed.

Performance management is now in place. Teachers and all support staff are being held fully accountable for their work. Leaders are checking the accuracy and validation of assessment information.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Pupils are now provided with regular opportunities to develop their reading, writing and mathematical skills. Teachers work together to plan work and are supported in this by teachers from the partner school. As a result, where teaching is strongest, expectations are increasing and the most-able pupils are being challenged

Assessment is now being used to inform teaching and to plan for next steps in learning. This is helping teachers to match work more closely to meet the needs of pupils. Support for different groups of pupils remains inconsistent, and refining the school's approach remains a work in progress. Feedback in books is beginning to help pupils to improve the quality of their work and although this is still in its early stages of development, improvements are evident. Pupils show a pride in their work, and presentation and handwriting have improved. Teachers' questioning skills are often not refined enough to extend pupils' thinking. Where teaching is stronger, teachers are confident and set high expectations. Consequently, pupils strive to meet them and show a sense of pride. However, on other occasions, teachers do not appear confident and appear to be 'going through the motions' without fully engaging pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' behaviour has improved since the last inspection. During playtimes and lunchtimes, the high level of supervision ensures that if any incidents occur, they are dealt with quickly. Pupils say that behaviour has improved, but that there are still times when some pupils do not behave well.

The creation of a nurture room for pupils who are at risk of exclusion has had a tremendous impact on those pupils who attend. These pupils are now showing more positive attitudes to learning because the curriculum has been adapted to meet their specific needs. Since the nurture room opened, there have been no exclusions at the school. Behaviours for learning are improving and pupils enjoy the praise and encouragement given by teachers. Pupils settle quickly to their work and worked best when teachers set clear expectations about what is required. On occasions, pupils talk over the teacher and do not listen fully to explanations.

Inspectors did not see any lessons disrupted by poor behaviour. Pupils worked hard and applied themselves to the tasks set.

External support

External support is being provided by staff from Tinsley Meadows. Teachers are being given opportunities to work alongside good and outstanding teachers to support them in improving their own work.