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Mrs Ruth Taylor
South Witham Community Primary School
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Dear Mrs Taylor

Special measures monitoring inspection of South Witham Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22 and 23 June 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 December 2015.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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 chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lincolnshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Di Mullan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve leadership and management at all levels by:
 - revising the school development plan to ensure that it includes clear actions to improve teaching with measurable success criteria to enable governors to hold leaders to account for their work
 - ensuring that governors check the impact of leaders' actions to improve pupils' achievements
 - training middle leaders to lead improvements in their subject areas to raise standards
 - monitoring more closely the information about the quality of teaching across the school, including in the early years, to provide staff with clear guidance about how to improve, and ensuring that this is followed up with regular feedback
 - providing staff with clear guidance about how to use assessment to move pupils' learning forward
 - making sure that the system for the appraisal of teachers is robust and the policy is followed in relation to rewarding teachers
 - allocating the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils more precisely to meet their needs
 - developing pupils' understanding of British values and knowledge of different faiths.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to raise standards by:
 - ensuring that teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to write at length to build up their stamina to write
 - increasing the focus on teaching English grammar, spelling and punctuation
 - making sure that there are enough inspiring opportunities for children to learn outdoors as well as indoors in the early years and promote children's physical development
 - increasing the opportunities for children to practise their letter formation and writing skills in the early years
 - checking more closely on pupils' understanding in lessons, particularly the most able pupils, to move their learning forward at the appropriate pace
 - giving more opportunities in key stage 1 for pupils to develop their mathematical calculation skills
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills
 - ensuring that the teaching of pupils with special educational needs enables them to make good progress from their starting points.

- Improve the behaviour of pupils by:
 - having clear expectations about the standard of behaviour in classrooms and consistently applying high standards to stop low-level disruption affecting learning
 - using external agencies more effectively to reduce the frequency of temporary exclusions
 - having higher expectations about the quality of pupils' presentation of their work.

External reviews of governance and the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 June 2016

Evidence

During my visit, I observed learning in seven lessons with you and we scrutinised a sample of pupils' books from every class. I observed pupils as they moved around school between lessons and on the playground at breaktime. I met with two representatives of the local authority, the chair of the governing body and five other governors. I also met with you, two groups of staff, a group of pupils, the leaders of English and mathematics, and the leaders with responsibility for the early years and for pupils who have special educational needs or disability. I spoke with several parents. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the local authority's statement of action, the school's rapid improvement plan, the reports that were written following the reviews of governance and pupil premium, and teachers' planning and documents relating to the school's assessment information.

Context

Since the previous inspection, three new parent governors have been appointed. The leader for early years has taken on greater responsibility for supporting you with monitoring the school's progress, and members of staff have been specifically deployed to provide support for pupils who will benefit from it.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Following the inspection in December 2015, you and the governors commissioned external reviews of governance and of pupil premium spending without delay. The reviews took place in February and March 2016 respectively. The board of governors wasted no time in appointing three new parent governors. New governors have been paired with more experienced governors who act as mentors. Governors have benefited from training to improve their monitoring skills and their understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Governors are now better able to hold leaders to account, for example through focused questioning, because they have had training, which is enabling them to understand pupils' progress data more clearly. Not complacent, however, governors are keen to improve their skills in monitoring further as they acknowledge that there is scope for them to hold leaders to account with even greater rigour.

Following the review of the pupil premium spending, you are monitoring the progress of these pupils more closely. You make sure that disadvantaged pupils receive interventions and additional teaching to help them make progress. There is scope to track more closely the allocation of this funding to ensure that all disadvantaged pupils receive the most benefit from the funding.

A recommendation in both the review of governance and the review of pupil premium spending was for an action plan to be drawn up so that leaders and governors could monitor progress tightly against clear criteria. You and the governors have not ensured that this has happened. Indeed, the writing of the plans has not yet begun. This means that, while you and governors are gathering information from your monitoring, the evaluation of improvements to governance and to pupil premium spending is not as focused as it could be.

Governors have started to undertake monitoring visits to school to consider the progress that leaders are making in relation to the school's rapid improvement plan. The 'Tier 3' group, consisting of the headteacher, the chair of the governing body and the education adviser from the local authority, who meet half termly, consider the progress the school is making. The newly formed governors' monitoring and evaluation group (MEG) meets to evaluate how this progress aligns with the milestones set out in the school's rapid improvement plan. They feed back information to the full governing body. The most recent evaluation completed by the MEG and the evaluation you and I made together both concluded that the school is not currently meeting enough of the milestones set out to be achieved by the end of May 2016. All actions have been started, but several are neither completed nor fully in place. For example, although work has been done to improve teachers' use of assessment, this is not being done consistently well to make sure pupils make the progress of which they are capable. Similarly, teachers are not consistently having high enough expectations of pupils.

Leaders for English and mathematics have benefited from training to begin to be able to undertake their roles and responsibilities. They have both begun to have an impact on the quality of teaching and learning across the school. For example, work by the leader of English has resulted in clear guidance for staff on standards of presentation in books. We saw that this is having a positive effect. Most pupils' books are better presented than they were prior to your last inspection. However, leadership of these subjects is still in the early stages of development. The leaders agree that there is still much work to be done for them to be fully effective.

You are the leader with responsibility for pupils who have special educational needs or disability. You are effectively supported by a special educational needs manager. You recently commissioned a review of special educational needs, as you are keen to bring about improvements to this aspect of the school's work. The review has only just taken place, but you are both excited by the feedback and suggestions that you were provided with verbally. You have plans to put in place new systems for the start of the academic year to improve the provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability.

You are now assisted in monitoring the progress of the school's rapid action plan by the leader for early years. This represents a positive move as this means you are able to share the responsibility and workload.

You have implemented a clearer system for teachers' appraisal. You have developed an annual cycle for reviewing teachers' performance which involves review meetings with teachers three times a year. It is too early to comment on its impact.

Pupils are developing a better understanding of British values. They were able to describe to me clearly their understanding of democracy, for example. However, although we saw some evidence in books that pupils learn about different faiths and cultures, this is limited.

The school is still in the early stages of transition to academy status. Options have been considered, but at the time of my visit, nothing certain had been agreed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

You are undertaking observations of teaching and learning, sometimes formally and sometimes through informal 'drop-ins' to lessons. You have provided guidance for teachers to be able to improve their teaching, for example by using assessment effectively to match activities closely to the abilities of pupils and to move pupils' learning forward during lessons. However, in lessons we saw that this is not always happening. Too often, pupils are undertaking tasks that are too easy for them because the teacher is not recognising that they are capable of more. You are not routinely following up recommendations for improvements that you make to teachers by checking that the improvements are consistently being made. Consequently, improvements to teaching and learning are not being embedded.

You have not successfully developed a way of simply but cohesively tracking the actions that have been taken and rigorously following them up to make sure that they become fully embedded. As a result, some actions do not lead to long-term improvements, and monitoring that is undertaken is not reliably having an impact on future developments.

There has been a significant development of the outdoor area for children in the early years. The area has been extended and additional equipment has been provided so that opportunities for physical development have been enhanced. The children clearly love using this area to investigate and explore.

Children in the early years are now practising the correct formation of letters on a daily basis. Our scrutiny of pupils' books showed that pupils across the school are having more opportunities to write at length. Books also showed that there is an increasing focus on teaching the skills of grammar, punctuation and spelling.

Key stage 1 mathematics books showed that pupils are practising their calculations skills more regularly. Our observations in key stage 2 lessons showed that when pupils are afforded the opportunity to investigate problems and apply their reasoning skills in mathematics, they do so with enthusiasm. Pupils applied the skills they had learned well and were fully engaged in an activity that really made them

think. However, pupils' books from across the school show that the opportunities for them to develop their problem-solving skills are limited.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

While many pupils have positive attitudes to their learning, this is not consistently the case. In every class, we saw pupils who were not engaged in their learning. Pupils recognise that there have been improvements in behaviour since the last inspection. They say that the new rewards initiatives are motivating for pupils. They do say, however, that incidents of bad behaviour still occur.

Pupils are beginning to show more pride in their work. This is demonstrated in their books, which are now more neatly presented than they were in the autumn term.

You have welcomed the external advice you have received to enable you to offer effective support to those pupils who find it difficult to moderate their own behaviour. You have assigned staff to work with particular pupils who will benefit from additional support. Early signs show that this is beginning to bear fruit.

Lunchtime staff have benefited from training to organise games for pupils. You have provided play equipment, which pupils appreciate. During my visit, I spent time on the playground and saw pupils playing together sensibly.

Outcomes for pupils

Assessment information shows that 74% of children have achieved a good level of development this year in the early years. This represents a slight dip from last year's performance, but is still above the national average for 2015.

Assessment information also shows that 84% of pupils in Year 1 have achieved the expected standard in phonics this year. This is an increase from 2015 for the school and is above the national average for 2015.

You have a clearly understood system for tracking pupils' progress across key stages 1 and 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. This, along with the work we saw in pupils' books, shows that while pupils have made some progress from their starting points this year, this has not been rapid enough. The gap in attainment for all pupils is not narrowing and some pupils are not achieving the standards of which they are capable.

External support

The local authority and the school have brokered support and training for governors, leaders and staff since the previous inspection, for example to begin to be able to undertake their roles and responsibilities more effectively, to improve behaviour and to monitor the progress that is being made. Some of this support has

yet to fully bear fruit. The school continues to rely upon the support that the local authority provides.