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Vivienne Cranton
Executive headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cranton

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Fairfield Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19–20 July 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in January 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deana Holdaway
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to accelerate pupils' progress by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have the knowledge and skills to teach essential skills in reading, writing and mathematics well
 - teachers plan and teach logical sequences of lessons which take account of pupils' previous learning and develop pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in each subject
 - the tasks in each lesson meet the needs of all pupils, including the most able and those with disabilities and special educational needs
 - teachers' feedback, both written and verbal helps to move pupils on in their learning
 - all teachers use teaching assistants effectively so that they have a positive impact on pupils' progress in every lesson.

- Improve pupils' behaviour by:
 - ensuring that all pupils know how they are expected to behave in lessons in order to learn successfully and all staff consistently and positively reinforce this
 - minimising the use of physical intervention and exclusion by developing a broader range of strategies to support pupils with more complex and challenging behaviour and checking that all staff apply these strategies consistently
 - ensuring that staff on duty at lunchtime act as role models and teach good manners and social skills.

- Improve pupils' attendance by:
 - making clear to families the links between attendance and achievement
 - promoting and rewarding good attendance
 - eliminating the use of part-time timetables for pupils

- Improve the quality of teaching and provision in the Reception class so that it is at least good and ensure that children's safety is given the highest priority.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that leaders use their knowledge of strengths and weaknesses in teaching to prioritise training and support for teachers so that they all

- develop the skills that they need to be effective
- regularly producing a succinct analysis of the progress that different classes and groups are making in reading, writing and mathematics and ensuring that leaders and governors understand how this compares to achievement nationally
 - analysing information about behaviour incidents, exclusions, physical intervention and pupils' attendance so that patterns and trends are identified and variations for different groups are spotted so that appropriate action can be taken
 - ensuring that child protection concerns, and the actions taken by the school, are carefully documented and that staff follow the clear guidance in the school safeguarding policy about when referrals should be made to the local authority
 - ensuring that governors develop the necessary knowledge and skills to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities and provide appropriate challenge and support to school leaders.

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

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 19 to 20 July 2016

Evidence

HMI observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, headteacher designate, deputy headteacher, coordinator for special educational needs, and subject leaders. She also met a group of Year 5 pupils, the chair and another representative of the governing body and a representative from the local authority's commissioned service for school improvement.

Context

The school has experienced a significant turnover of staff since being placed in special measures in January 2015. All of the current leadership team are recent appointments and have been in post less than a year. Fairfield will convert to academy status in autumn this year. The school will join Hollymount Academy, which converted in June 2014. The current executive headteacher of both Hollymount and Fairfield will continue to oversee both academies. A new headteacher takes up her post in September. She has visited the school and worked with staff for a few days each week during the summer term. Three other new members of staff join the school in September.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive headteacher has maintained a sharp focus on the areas requiring improvement identified at the last full inspection in January 2015. She communicates clear expectations and provides substantial training and support to help staff bring about the necessary improvements.

The headteacher appointed for September has provided significant support this term in developing systems to track and record pupils' progress. Her rigorous analysis has identified those groups of pupils who are falling behind and those who are ready for additional challenge.

Leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching so that agreed strategies are consistently implemented and further training needs are quickly identified. Leaders, including governors, have an accurate understanding of how pupils' work compares with national age-related expectations. They know which year groups are working significantly below these standards.

Subject leaders have detailed knowledge of their areas of responsibility. Their expertise enables them to model teaching, to coach individuals and to provide support to staff. However, their success has been hampered by the continuous staff turnover or prolonged absence. Subject leaders have a clear understanding of

remaining areas of weakness. They have established detailed plans for further improvements from September.

Leaders and teachers have, understandably, focused on improving reading, writing and mathematics. However, pupils have not had the opportunity to develop their knowledge of other subjects in sufficient depth or breadth. The newly appointed curriculum coordinator is at an early stage of planning themed approaches to subjects. Staff are planning more opportunities for pupils to apply their skills in reading, writing and mathematics to a range of subjects.

Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have made too little progress over time from their different starting points. Until recently, their needs were not identified with sufficient accuracy and, therefore, their support was not consistently pertinent to their needs. The recently appointed coordinator for special educational needs monitored the effectiveness of pupils' support and identified how to improve it. Parents are now better informed about how to help their children at home and contribute to future reviews about the effectiveness of support in school.

The school is at an early stage of making distinctions between pupils who have occasional learning difficulties and those who have particular special needs. Specialist agencies are now more involved in supporting pupils who have specific learning needs such as speech and language difficulties. The register of pupils with special educational needs has not yet been subject to a significant review. As a result, the school's priorities regarding pupils' needs and provision are not clearly defined.

Governors are astute. They concentrate sharply on pupils' progress and how improvements can be accelerated. They challenge as appropriate, seek information for themselves and expect a suitable range of evidence to support reports. They have a detailed knowledge of the school and, while they are aware of improvements, they know current priorities, understand plans to improve and realise the difference the actions must make.

Staff know the checks and procedures outlined in the child protection and safeguarding policies. Records of concern and the action taken are thorough and pertinent to the individual pupil. All checks on staff, agency staff, volunteers and visitors are complete and detailed.

The school meets the requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Ongoing changes in staffing and a reliance on temporary or supply staff have delayed some improvements to teaching. As new staff arrived, leaders provided training so that everyone shared consistent expectations and knew the range of

approaches suitable for their age group. Teachers are more aware of what pupils should know and be able to do. Nevertheless, they remain too dependent on subject leaders' expertise and published schemes of work. In September, there will be another significant turnover of staff.

Subject leaders are adept at providing clear explanations, planning purposeful tasks and inspiring pupils' strong engagement in their learning. They use resources imaginatively to trigger pupils' deeper thinking or explore new ideas. Pupils increasingly explain their ideas or respond to questions using pertinent subject-related vocabulary. Subject leaders' expertise inspires the pupils they teach. For example, pupils confidently handle the mathematical equipment that helps them to physically see how methods work or what concepts mean in a practical way. They are able to try out different methods and appreciate various approaches to solving problems. Pupils persevere with tasks and check their calculations for accuracy.

Teaching is less effective when adults are unclear about the purpose of the lesson or what to expect of pupils. At such times, teachers do not move pupils' learning on quickly enough or anticipate their difficulties or misconceptions. Spelling and presentation remain weak in classes where these aspects have not been taught methodically or regularly. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 have frequent 'catch-up' sessions in phonics (letters and the sounds they make) because they were not taught these skills effectively in the past.

The early years classrooms and outdoor areas have improved so that writing, reading, number and construction areas are better defined. Teachers are at an early stage of planning more purposeful activities to secure children's development in all areas of learning. Teaching and learning in the past lacked sufficient focus or purpose. Until recently, planning was not informed by carefully tracked assessments and adults were too slow to respond to children's needs or potential. Adults' expectations of children's capabilities are rising but the learning intention underpinning activities is not consistently clear. As a consequence, planned activities sometimes fail to move learning on quickly enough.

Early years staff have visited parents of children coming to school in September. They have established good relationships and children's individual needs and preferences are understood. Teachers are planning adaptations to what the children will learn on entry to meet their different abilities more closely.

Teaching assistants have benefited from substantial training so they are better able to provide effective and targeted support for pupils. They explain clearly and ask pertinent questions to secure pupils' understanding. They are sensitive to pupils' needs and they are growing increasingly confident to intervene as they see fit. Some teaching assistants have benefited from specific training to help build their own area of expertise; for example, teaching phonics to small groups of pupils. Leaders intend to further extend the range of teaching assistant expertise in the near future.

Reading areas in classrooms are usually organised tidily but they fail to invite pupils' interest or inform them about different types of texts, books or authors' styles. Very few classrooms displayed non-fiction books associated with their topic to enable pupils to research or investigate. Leaders have exciting plans for September to engage pupils and inspire a love of reading.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The deputy headteacher has successfully reduced incidents of pupils' inappropriate behaviour. She has analysed the causes of occasional incidents and developed a range of methods for staff to support pupils' individual and specific needs. She has continued to provide significant support for individual staff and pupils.

The deputy headteacher works closely with two teaching assistants to develop pupils' social and emotional skills. As a result, pupils are increasingly able to manage their own behaviour, cope with anger and maintain concentration. Pupils who have experienced considerable difficulties in the past are developing in self-confidence, growing in self-esteem and now want to succeed. The deputy headteacher has successfully changed the culture of pupils' behaviour for the better but she is not complacent and diligently seeks ways to secure further improvements.

In lessons, pupils persevere with given tasks. They are reflective and willing to learn. Pupils readily help each other and their chatter is almost always related to the subject or task. Lunchtime staff say that pupils' behaviour is good. The pupils remember to say 'please' and 'thank you' and are keen to demonstrate good table manners. Pupils enjoy eating lunch with the senior leadership team as a reward for good behaviour.

In discussions, a group of Year 5 pupils said that teachers welcomed them and helped them to feel happy. They believe the school is safe because teachers look after them and sort out any arguments or occasional misbehaviour. Pupils are proud of their school. They appreciate the better range of school trips but would like more after-school clubs. They were pleased that subjects were getting harder.

Pupils know about the different types of bullying but they are unclear about the difference between occasional disagreements and more serious incidents of controlling or threatening behaviours. They know the dangers regarding the use of the internet or mobile telephones and they are aware of what not to disclose and indications of potential dangers.

Pupils are increasingly proud of their achievements and they enjoy showing their skills in events such as the 'Friday write'. Pupils wrote, 'I like Friday write because I like the surprise object', and 'We get to show off our great ideas'. A range of pupils' achievements are celebrated in corridor displays; for example: completing and handing in homework on time; trying hard to say number names in the correct order and count carefully; and always being positive and enthusiastic.

Attendance is improving and is now close to the national average. The deputy headteacher works closely with families to reduce cases of persistent absence. Pupils value the rewards for good attendance. On the first day of inspection, 79 pupils were taken to a climbing and activity centre as a reward for their good attendance that half term.

There have been no exclusions since the last monitoring inspection in March this year.

Outcomes for pupils

Despite improved rates of progress in a number of year groups, outcomes this year remain below provisional national figures. Many pupils began the school year with exceptionally low starting points. However, three year-groups are now working in line with or close to the standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders are very clear about where gaps remain and what must be done to further accelerate pupils' progress.

At the end of the Reception Year, just over half of the children achieved a good level of development. This outcome is an improvement on the previous two years but remains below the national average for 2015. Boys achieved less well than girls. The proportion of pupils achieving the Year 1 phonics check is below the provisional national average.

Standards at the end of key stages 1 and 2 remained below the national figures in all subjects. Only half of the Year 2 pupils met the standard expected for their age in writing and mathematics. However, almost two thirds of the Year 6 pupils met the standard expected for their age in writing.

Very few pupils exceeded the expectations for their age at the end of key stages 1 and 2. Leaders acknowledge that the identification of and provision for the most able pupils has not been a high enough priority in the past. Leaders have shared their expectation that all staff must be alert to identifying pupils' potential and providing suitable challenge.

The progress made by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been too slow in the past. From September, there are plans to support pupils' needs differently and with greater precision.

External support

The school improvement adviser knows the school in detail. The support provided by the local authority's commissioned services has included training for the whole school and coaching for individuals. Specialist support has rightly identified weaknesses, provided specific advice and checked on progress. The support has helped establish improvements in the school's priority areas, such as reinforcing sequential learning and building staff confidence.

Governors have access to a range of appropriate up-to-date training.

School leaders, the chair of the governing body and the school improvement adviser attend monthly local authority project board meetings to monitor the school's progress in detail. They share an appropriate focus on pupils' progress and attainment.