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3 July 2017

Miss Michelle Ginn  
Principal  
Blackthorn Primary School  
Waingrove  
Blackthorn  
Northampton  
Northamptonshire  
NN3 8EP

Dear Miss Ginn

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Blackthorn Primary School**

Following my visit with Ann Glynne-Jones, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 7 and 8 June 2017, 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in June 2016. 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The academy's improvement plan is not fit for purpose. The leadership team has used the detailed statement of action that was written following the inspection in June 2016 to plan improvements since the monitoring visit in February.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the advisory board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. 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 June 2016.**

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and rapidly accelerate outcomes for pupils, by:
  - ensuring that the teaching of spelling, grammar and punctuation is consistently effective in all classes and across a range of subjects
  - giving the most able pupils tasks that are appropriate to their ability, and using questioning effectively to challenge these pupils' understanding in class
  - ensuring that all teachers have consistently high expectations for pupils' behaviour and for what pupils are able to do
  - developing teaching strategies that capture pupils' imagination and inspire them to do their best, especially for boys
  - ensuring that teachers consistently apply the school's marking policy so that pupils receive effective feedback on their work.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, by:
  - ensuring that there is a consistently robust response to all safeguarding concerns
  - improving pupils' engagement in lessons so that low-level disruption continues to reduce.
- Improve leadership and management, by:
  - reviewing roles and responsibilities to ensure that the school increases its capacity to secure further improvement
  - ensuring that leaders with safeguarding responsibilities receive sufficient support to carry out their roles effectively
  - developing the skills of middle leaders so they are able to hold others to account for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the areas they lead
  - increasing opportunities for teachers to learn from the best practice within the school and the trust, in order to improve their practice
  - maintaining the current level of support from the trust and building relationships with effective leaders from other trust schools, so that new leaders are helped to develop the skills they need to carry out their roles effectively.
- Improve the early years, by:
  - ensuring that there are more opportunities for children to develop their imaginative skills
  - increasing opportunities for parents to engage with their child's learning.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 7 June 2017 and 8 June 2017**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors met with the principal, assistant principal, two directors of learning, the lead family support worker and the attendance officer. The lead inspector also met with a representative from The Education Fellowship Trust (TEFT), which is the trust that sponsors the school. Meetings were also held with two members of the academy advisory board, an executive principal from TEFT and three members of TEFT's education support team, and a specialist leader of education whom the principal has brokered to support teachers to improve their skills. Inspectors observed the learning taking place in every class. Some of these observations were undertaken with representatives from the school or TEFT. Inspectors spoke with parents as they brought their children to school in the morning, and visited the school's breakfast club. Inspectors spoke with pupils and five members of staff. Inspectors examined a range of documents provided by the school, including that relating to pupils' progress and to safeguarding. Inspectors scrutinised the work in pupils' books alongside the principal and the specialist leader of education.

### **Context**

In December 2016, the regional schools commissioner wrote to the members and trustees of TEFT with a termination warning notice concerning Blackthorn Primary Academy due to its poor performance. In March 2017, the Department for Education agreed to a request from the trust to terminate its funding agreement for all 12 of its schools. As a result, all of them, including Blackthorn, will be rebrokered by the regional schools commissioner. At the time of the visit, a new sponsor had not been confirmed and, therefore, TEFT remains in place as the sponsor until this matter is resolved.

Since the monitoring visit in February 2017, one teacher has left. One of the assistant principals has relinquished her leadership responsibility. One director of learning left her post in May. A new director of learning with responsibility for key stage 1 took up her post in April. An additional family support worker and a pastoral and behavioural support mentor have been appointed and took up their posts in February and April respectively. There has been some further turbulence in staffing due to illness and unforeseen circumstances. Four teachers have tendered their resignation and will leave the school at the end of this term. A vice-principal and an assistant principal have been appointed to start in September 2017.

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

Prior to the monitoring visit in February 2017, the principal had reviewed the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team. However, the continuing

turbulence in staffing, including in the leadership team, means that the principal has been unable to drive forward all of the improvements that are urgently required across the school. TEFT has failed to ensure that there is a strong leadership team in place. This lack of an effective, stable leadership team, along with turbulence in staffing, has hampered the progress of the school.

The principal is deeply committed to improving the quality of education for the pupils at the school. She continues to be the driving force behind any improvements that are being made.

The principal has improved some of the skills of the leadership team. The assistant principal has a greater understanding of how to fulfil her responsibilities. She has provided useful training for teachers in managing pupils' behaviour effectively. She has supported teachers to be able to plan learning for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. She has a better grasp on the progress that these pupils are making. However, she recognises that she needs to analyse the progress that pupils make in more detail, to ensure that appropriate interventions can be implemented more swiftly.

A new director of learning who has responsibility for key stage 1 was appointed in April 2017. It is too early to judge the impact of her work. The acting director of learning for Years 5 and 6 has resigned and will leave the school at the end of the summer term.

A statement of action was written following the inspection in June 2016. The school's improvement plan contained a large number of detailed actions which were being carried out, but these were not being sufficiently well evaluated. Since February, leaders have written brief action plans to enable them to address the aspects of the statement of action for which they are responsible. There is currently no up-to-date improvement plan for the whole school that the leaders can use to coordinate developments or to keep a close check on the progress that is being made across all of the areas that need improving. This means that actions are not being thoroughly evaluated and staff at all levels are not held rigorously to account.

Middle leaders are not fully effective in their roles. They have benefited from some training to enable them to carry out their responsibilities. They are not currently undertaking this work with sufficient focus to make a difference to the quality of teaching and outcomes of pupils.

Some teachers have visited other schools to see good practice. They have moderated their assessments of pupils' work with teachers in other schools to ensure that they are accurate. However, since the last monitoring visit, the range of these opportunities has been limited.

The academy advisory board has three members. This is less than half the number it should have. TEFT has failed to ensure that the academy advisory board has a

full complement of members. This has limited the support and challenge that the board has been able to provide to school leaders.

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

The quality of teaching and learning is showing signs of improvement across the school. However, it remains far too variable, with too many elements of weak practice remaining in all key stages. Too often, teachers do not plan learning that builds closely enough on what pupils of all abilities can already do. They do not step in quickly in lessons to move pupils on to something more difficult when they are ready to do so. Some teachers do not make effective use of resources to help pupils understand the ideas that are being taught.

TEFT's education support team and a specialist leader of education brokered by the principal have supported individual teachers to improve their practice. The principal has provided teachers and teaching assistants with training and resources to promote high-quality teaching of grammar and punctuation. Observations in lessons and work in pupils' books show that grammar and punctuation are now being taught systematically. Teachers are encouraging pupils to use these important skills correctly in their writing during English lessons, but less so when pupils write in other subjects. The principal has made preparations in readiness to implement a similar approach to teaching spelling.

Since the monitoring visit in February, the principal has reinvigorated the school's marking policy. Pupils' books show that teachers are now implementing the policy much more consistently, providing clear information, which pupils use to improve their work.

The provision in the Nursery continues to be a strength of the school. The teacher plans opportunities for children to use their imagination when they are learning. Children remain on task for extended periods of time because the teacher makes learning fun for them. During the visit, the class theme of 'the seaside' was developed effectively as children were supported to design and write postcards. The teacher provides gentle encouragement for the children so that they are able to use their early writing skills to 'have a go' at writing for themselves.

The quality of provision in the Reception classes has not been developed since the last monitoring visit. Teachers sometimes plan learning that links well together, such as through the recent 'superheroes' topic, but they are not reliably providing exciting and creative learning opportunities to engage children's interests.

Teachers in the early years have provided several opportunities for parents to become involved in their children's learning. There has been a mixed degree of success. Sessions, such as 'book and biscuit', in the afternoons are proving to be quite popular. As there is currently no leader with responsibility for the early years, these initiatives and the provision in the Reception classes are not being checked

closely enough to ensure that long-term improvements are secured.

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

Immediately following the last monitoring visit, the principal set about improving standards of behaviour across the school, by raising the expectations that staff have of the pupils. She ensured that all staff were able to implement the school's behaviour policy. The assistant principal provided staff with useful training in behaviour management. During this monitoring visit, inspectors saw no incidents of low-level disruption in class. Pupils listen respectfully to adults and each other during lessons and in assembly. Almost all pupils conduct themselves well during playtimes and lunchtimes. Those pupils who find it difficult to regulate their own behaviour receive the support they need. Staff are on hand to deal appropriately with any misbehaviour. Pupils told inspectors that lessons are 'much calmer now'.

The principal has continued to ensure that safeguarding is of the highest priority. Staff speak knowledgeably about how to recognise signs of potential abuse and they know how to report any concerns that may arise. The principal has provided staff with further training on how to use correctly the school's safeguarding procedures that were introduced following the inspection in June 2016. This has ensured that safeguarding continues to be at the forefront of everyone's mind. The recent appointment of an additional family support worker has increased the leadership team's capacity to offer support to pupils and families. The principal leads weekly meetings with the senior safeguarding team to discuss current issues and to ensure that no important actions are missed.

Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school. They told inspectors that if any bullying does occur, it is dealt with effectively and quickly by the adults in school. Pupils told inspectors that they are taught how to keep themselves safe, for example when they use the internet.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Pupils' books show that they are making progress from their individual starting points. However, this progress remains too variable across year groups and subjects.

The school has used three different systems to assess and track pupils' achievement in as many years. Due to these repeated changes, some of the information that the school currently holds does not accurately reflect the progress that pupils are making. Leaders do not analyse the progress that groups of pupils make in sufficient detail to be able to provide suitable interventions swiftly enough to accelerate pupils' progress. Teachers are not able to use the assessment information that they hold to plan next steps in learning with accuracy. Standards of achievement remain too low.

## **External support**

A specialist leader of education, brokered by the principal, has continued to provide useful support to seven teachers to help them to improve the quality of their teaching.

TEFT has continued to provide support through its education support team. These individuals have helped to improve the quality of teaching.

TEFT has failed to ensure that the school has a sufficiently strong and effective leadership team. The trust has not supported the school to appoint additional members to the academy advisory board. The lack of a stable and effective leadership team over the past term has hampered the progress that the principal has been able to make.

### **Leaders should take urgent further action to:**

- write a school improvement plan, with clear milestones and success criteria, which enables them to hold staff to account and to evaluate closely the impact of the actions that are being taken.