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Mrs Julia Taylor
Dormers Wells Junior School
Dormers Wells Lane
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Dear Mrs Taylor

Special measures monitoring inspection of Dormers Wells Junior School

Following my visit with Sarah Murphy-Dutton, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 18 July 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 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 2016.

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.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Wagstaff
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in December 2016

- Ensure that leaders provide a clear, strategic vision for the school based on expectations that all groups of pupils will achieve high standards and make good progress.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that most-able pupils are stretched and challenged
 - ensuring that teaching time is not wasted on tasks that lack purpose and cause pupils to lose attentiveness in class
 - checking on pupils' learning and adjusting the difficulty of tasks where necessary.
- Raise attainment and improve pupils' progress in mathematics and reading across the curriculum by:
 - making sure that pupils understand what they are learning in mathematics and strengthening their skills in reasoning
 - improving pupils' reading comprehension skills and developing their confidence.
- Increase the impact of leadership and governance at all levels and the pace of improvement by:
 - checking on teaching and learning with greater rigour to make sure that existing weaknesses are tackled successfully and swiftly
 - making sure that all pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum, including in Year 6
 - ensuring that the school has an accurate understanding of its own performance, and the school improvement plan has quantifiable and timely targets for the school's rapid improvement to good overall effectiveness.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 18 July 2017

Evidence

Inspectors reviewed learning taking place across the school through a series of learning walks alongside members of the senior leadership team. Learning in mathematics, English, science and personal, social, health and citizenship (PSHC) education. Inspectors held interviews with several senior and middle leaders. We also interviewed a group of recently appointed teachers. We heard 16 pupils read aloud individually, along with a discussion about their reading interests. We heard several others read as part of the learning walks around the school. Pupils were interviewed about their work. Inspectors reviewed school documentation along with the school's monitoring reports and assessment data. A range of pupils' work across subjects and books in English and mathematics were reviewed. Discussions took place with the chair of governors and with a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since the last inspection, there has been a review of governance at the school. This has led to some changes in the membership of the governing body and a more regular cycle of meetings. The staffing of the school has remained relatively stable. The governors and leadership are in discussions with external partners with respect to becoming an academy.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders have put together a well-constructed improvement plan. They are implementing it well. They have prioritised their focus for action following the inspection in December 2016. This has included restructuring a strategic vision with greater emphasis on promoting high achievement for all pupils. Leaders at all levels challenge underachievement and focus on the needs of all. Consequently, individual pupils are increasingly at the centre of professional discussion with teachers, and are a focus for monitoring. It ensures that leaders know pupils well. They have a good understanding of the progress pupils make and use this knowledge well to challenge and support teachers. Leaders are making greater connections between their monitoring, the analysis of data and reviewing the work in pupils' books. This is helping them gain a better picture of how well the school is doing. It is also helping middle leaders narrow actions with their teams to tackle inconsistencies and weaknesses that emerge.

Senior leaders have a clear understanding of what needs to be done. They work closely with middle leaders and teachers and have tackled, step by step, some of the more significant weaknesses that have been barriers to improvement. There is now a common purpose and a strategic vision for improvement that is shared by all.

A review of governance, following the inspection, has led to changes in the

membership of the governing body and in the cycle of governing body meetings. It has led to more regular meetings and a clearer level of challenge to ensure that governors have an accurate view on what needs to be done to improve. Good and accurate information on progress is now discussed by governors along with future actions as the school advances its approach towards becoming an academy.

Leaders have worked well with external partners. They have used the local authority and leadership from a local high school to refine and improve the rigour of their monitoring arrangements. This is working well to ensure that all leaders and teachers are focused on the key actions that will raise achievement and improve pupils' progress. Effective support for teachers in improving the teaching of mathematics has ensured a 'stepping up' in both subject knowledge and rigour. This is already seeing improvement in the progress made by pupils in mathematics. Leaders have similarly implemented a number of actions to improve pupils' reading comprehension. Reading lessons are planned in all classes with a focus on improving pupils' comprehension. Additional investment into reading resources has widened pupils' access to reading. Leaders know that more needs to be done to improve achievement in reading comprehension. Actions have yet to have any significant effect on improving overall achievement in reading.

Leaders have ensured that appropriate support is provided for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders maintain a good overview of the impact of this additional support and intervention. The difference is diminishing between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of others in the school. However, too many disadvantaged pupils are still not achieving as well as other pupils. Leaders recognise that more work needs to be done. They acknowledge the need to better identify most-able disadvantaged pupils and to support them to be able to work at greater depth.

By prioritising improvements in teaching along with achievement in mathematics and reading, actions to improve the breadth and balance of the curriculum have not received the same attention. Pupils receive a comprehensive curriculum in English, mathematics and science but provision in other subjects is still inconsistent. The 'blocking' of other subjects through the year leads to long gaps before pupils revisit some subjects. Learning objectives are not always focused on building on subject skills and prior learning. This leads to discontinuity in some subjects, particularly modern foreign languages, music and religious education. Pupils recognise that their experience in some subjects is inconsistent. Leaders are aware that a thorough curriculum review is required. They have been discussing curriculum changes with the local high school and their partner infant school. Now that other priorities are embedding, they recognise that this is the next stage of development for the school.

The governors are in discussions with a potential academy sponsor and these discussions are progressing well.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching was judged inadequate in the inspection of December 2016. Most-able pupils were not being challenged or stretched appropriately. Some tasks provided by teachers lacked purpose, leading to pupils losing interest and attentiveness. In some cases, pupils' learning was not being checked on to help adjust the difficulty of tasks to ensure that they matched pupils' needs and level of understanding.

Significant work has taken place to tackle these key areas. Leaders have embedded a set of 'non-negotiables' that they expect to see in every lesson and with every teacher. Regular monitoring takes place to check that these are embedded in lessons. Teachers are working more effectively in teams and with their leaders to ensure greater consistency across classes and to provide peer support. Effective mentoring and support are provided for teachers and are valued by them. This is working well and has successfully maintained staff morale while helping to improve the quality of teaching. Greater focus on reviewing the progress of individuals is ensuring that teachers have a good knowledge of the needs of each pupil in their class. Pupils' progress is improving as teachers better meet those needs and provide work that maintains pupils' focus on what they need to learn. Good training and support for the teaching of mathematics have ensured that teachers are knowledgeable and are improving their skills in planning challenge and stretch for pupils. Although more needs to be done, this is supporting improved rigour in the teaching of mathematics and has established a momentum for improvement.

Questioning is used well in some lessons to check pupils' understanding and to help pupils explain their thinking. Teachers use this well to understand what pupils have learned and to clarify misunderstandings. Lessons generally have clear learning objectives and this has ensured greater consistency in the focus on what is to be learned in lessons. Pupils understand this and often have reminders and criteria in their books to help them assess whether they have been successful. This is helping pupils become more responsible for checking their own work. It supports them in making the changes they need to in order to ensure that their targets are met. Sometimes, lower attaining pupils are not always clear about what the learning objectives mean. Objectives are not always sufficiently adapted to the needs of a small number of pupils in lessons.

Teaching is improving and this is evident through the improvements in progress made by pupils. However, although there are many examples of effective teaching, there are still inconsistencies that need further work to ensure appropriate challenge so that all pupils make good progress. Major weaknesses in teaching have been resolved and the school recognises that the next step is to improve consistency.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are attentive in lessons. They concentrate well and want to learn. Conduct in lessons is positive, with pupils settling quickly, listening carefully and applying themselves well to the work they are given. During the previous inspection, pupils were sometimes observed to be inattentive, particularly where given work that was insufficiently challenging. This has largely been resolved. Pupils are responding well to leaders' renewed vision, promoting high achievement for all and a greater focus on their learning in lessons. Teachers' knowledge of their pupils reflects positively in the way pupils respond to teachers. Pupils are focused on the objectives and learning points that they are given in lessons. Many are able to review their work against these learning points to know exactly what they have achieved, and what they still need to do. Pupils come to lessons well prepared and are keen to talk about their work. They are beginning to respond well to the increased opportunities to discuss ideas with a partner. In discussing and sorting everyday items into those that were essential or desirable to have, Year 5 pupils in one lesson confidently debated their choices with clear reasoning. However, some low-attaining pupils or those relatively new to learning English lack confidence and are a little hesitant where the focus for their discussion is not sufficiently clear or structured.

Attendance was below average at the time of the last inspection but was improving. Actions continue to focus on those few families where persistent absence remains a concern. Effective relationships are maintained with parents and the broader community and contacts between school and home continue to promote improved attendance and punctuality. Although attendance is still below average, the difference with the national average is closing.

Outcomes for pupils

Provisional results of the 2017 national assessments for Year 6 pupils show significant improvement in the proportion of pupils meeting the national expectations in mathematics. The proportion of Year 6 pupils meeting national expectations in writing has similarly improved on the previous year's results. Although national assessments for Year 6 pupils in reading show improvement, the gains are not as significant as they are in mathematics. Reading achievement is still too low.

Learning walks and the review of pupils' books demonstrate that pupils write with a good knowledge of punctuation and grammar. They confidently refine and improve their work and write letters, stories and reports with a developing vocabulary and a knowledge of how to structure their writing. Writing tasks expand beyond English lessons and pupils write at length across different subjects, making predictions and writing science investigations. They also research and report in their history topics. This works well to expand opportunities for pupils to write across a range of themes and purposes beyond their English lessons. In mathematics, pupils are developing a good understanding of mathematical calculations. In lessons observed, many were able to explain their thinking and reasoning when applying their mathematics to

solving problems. Pupils that are most-able are challenged in their mathematical thinking in some lessons but this is inconsistent across classes and lessons. Some are capable of moving more rapidly into explaining their reasoning and applying their mathematical knowledge through solving problems. A clearer focus in English and mathematics lessons has ensured that pupils are making better progress over time. Pupils know what is expected of them and they respond well.

Many pupils read with interest and show positive attitudes towards reading. They have a good knowledge of phonics and read books accurately. Some show a wide range of reading interests, from Shakespeare and classical authors to current fiction. However, too many pupils lack confidence in using a range of strategies to check the meaning of key words and phrases they read. They sometimes read the words but do not understand the detail of what they have read. This goes unchecked and therefore limits their broader understanding. Although reading lessons are focusing on pupils reading and summarising what they have read, few pupils are applying the range of reading strategies they need to check their understanding when they are reading on their own.

Disadvantaged pupils are making appropriate progress. For many, progress is accelerating and they are closing the gap that exists with other pupils. However, this is inconsistent and not all are making the progress needed. There are still too many disadvantaged pupils not 'catching up' and who are still not achieving well enough. Leaders are aware, and tackling this is a priority for the school.

Leaders and governors know that their own tracking of pupils' progress shows improvement in some key areas. However, they know that more needs to be done.

External support

The local authority provides appropriate support. Involvement in a locally organised 'securing good' initiative has ensured regular external monitoring of the progress being made by senior leaders and governors. The local authority has termly meetings with senior leaders to provide external challenge and to review the evidence of progress and the impact of actions taking place. A linked school improvement officer provides more regular and focused support to senior leaders. This support is insightful and provides very clear advice and guidance with helpful next steps for action. Leaders find this very useful in helping them maintain the pace of improvement and refine their action planning and priorities. Leadership at a local high school has worked alongside leaders in reviewing provision and teaching. This has been helpful in tightening the focus of monitoring.

The local authority has brokered some visits to other schools to help leaders draw on the broader expertise available to model and support improvements in teaching.

While some of this has been useful, it has not yet developed into regular partnership. The school is keen to strengthen partnerships with schools successfully overcoming similar challenges to their own. However, without support, leaders are finding it difficult to identify and broker these links on their own.