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Mrs D Sharples
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Sharples

Special measures monitoring inspection of Leigh CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 10 and 11 January 2018, 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 July 2016.

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 improvement plan is not 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 director of education for the Diocese of Manchester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wigan. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hardman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by:
 - ensuring self-evaluation is accurate and draws on up-to-date information encompassing all aspects of the school's performance
 - working with all key stakeholders to agree a shared vision and ambition for the school which is clearly communicated to staff, parents and pupils
 - developing a well-informed strategic plan which sets the direction for the school and is frequently reviewed to make sure that the decline in performance is quickly reversed
 - making sure that the additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, as well as that intended to improve primary physical education and sport provision, is well used so that it improves outcomes for pupils
 - using performance management consistently and effectively to improve teaching and learning
 - putting in place a well-considered programme of training for staff at all levels that has a positive impact on teaching and learning
 - making sure all staff are up to date with their safeguarding training, and checking carefully that safeguarding systems and procedures are working well and take account of the views of pupils and their parents, so that arrangements for safeguarding are rigorous and robust
 - ensuring that attendance information is used well to challenge those families who are not ensuring that their child attends school regularly, paying particular attention to disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - making certain that transition arrangements, both between classes and schools, better meet pupils' needs
 - improving home-school partnerships by developing good systems of communication so that parents receive relevant information about what is happening in school and how well their children are doing, and acting on parental feedback
 - responding appropriately to parental concerns and complaints in a timely manner
 - making sure that all policies and procedures are fit for purpose, applied consistently by all staff and regularly reviewed

- keeping the school's website up to date and compliant with current government requirements
 - ensuring that the leadership and management structure is fit for purpose so that leaders have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, good support to help them to fulfil them and are held to account for their work
 - providing training and support for governors to enable the governing body to improve the effectiveness with which it fulfils its responsibilities.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment, so that all groups of pupils make much better progress from their different starting points, by:
- providing training and support for all teaching staff to improve their knowledge and skills so that they move pupils' learning on more quickly and plan learning which provides greater challenge for pupils of all abilities, making good use of time in lessons
 - frequently checking and evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and using this information to hold teachers to account, share good practice and target additional support as required
 - devising and teaching a curriculum which is broad and balanced, gives pupils plenty of opportunities to practise their reading, writing and mathematical skills, meets the needs of the pupils in the school, engages and enthuses pupils, prepares them well for life in modern Britain and is complemented by a wealth of well-considered enrichment and extra-curricular activities
 - developing an approach to assessment which is fully linked to the school's curriculum, gives pupils valuable feedback on what they need to do to improve their work, enables teachers to plan pupils' next steps in learning, gives middle and senior leaders up-to-date information about how well pupils are getting on, is used to set high expectations for what each pupil can achieve and provides regular updates to parents about how well their children are doing.

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 pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 January 2018

Evidence

I observed the school's work and scrutinised a wide range of documents. I met with the acting headteacher and a national leader of education, who was previously the executive headteacher from September 2016 until December 2017. I also met with a group of teachers and support staff, four subject leaders and the special educational needs coordinator. I met a representative from the local authority and a representative of the Diocese of Manchester. Discussions were held with three governors including the chair of the governing body. Discussions were also held with a group of eight pupils and with six parents. I spoke informally to pupils throughout the inspection. Alongside the acting headteacher, I conducted a scrutiny of pupils' work and completed visits to most classrooms.

Context

The school became subject to special measures in July 2016. The previous headteacher left his post in August 2016 and was not present at the last inspection. An executive headteacher was appointed to lead the school from September 2016, supported by the deputy headteacher. A staffing restructure was completed in December 2016 which established a new leadership structure. Seven teachers have left the school since the last inspection, including two senior leaders. A new vice chair of the governing body has been appointed alongside another governor. Two governors have left the governing body. A new monitoring committee was established which has representation from the local authority and the Manchester Diocese. From September 2016, the school began to operate as a primary school, having previously been a junior school. The school now has two classes in Reception and Year 1, which were not in place at the previous inspection.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have worked hard to bring the school community together and to regain the trust of staff and parents. Staff are aware of their responsibilities, work together well and are determined to secure the improvements needed. The parents spoken to all agree that the school is moving in the right direction.

Leaders have an accurate and realistic view of overall school effectiveness. Although leaders have ambitious plans for improvement, they realise that there is still a long way to go from a low starting point. The school improvement plan does not articulate the changing priorities of the school closely enough. Targets for improvement within the plan are unclear and are difficult to measure. It is also unclear how the planned actions will make a difference to pupils' outcomes. The impact of leaders' work is clear in some aspects of school, such as the much-improved behaviour of pupils. However, in other aspects, such as pupils' educational

outcomes, clear impact is yet to be seen.

Performance management of staff is now more thorough. Staff are held to account and are made aware of their strengths and areas for improvement. Underperformance of staff is dealt with swiftly and effectively. Staff access regular training and have opportunities to share the good practice of other teachers, either in this or other schools.

Leaders were quick to commission a review of governance. This helped to strengthen the impact of the governing body. Governors are placed on committees where their skills are best matched, allowing them to support and challenge more effectively. Minutes from governing body meetings show that governors have a firm understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and ask pertinent questions to challenge and support school leaders. Governors are committed, passionate and are determined to secure a successful future. They are frustrated by the delay in the school's move towards academy status.

Leaders have yet to schedule a review of the pupil premium. This is disappointing because outcomes for disadvantaged pupils remain weak. Leaders are minded that a review should take place without further delay.

Leaders have introduced a new curriculum. There is a focus on the development of pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills across the school. Teachers have a better understanding of pupils' needs because the new assessment system goes hand in hand with the curriculum. The development of the curriculum in subjects other than English and mathematics remains at an early stage.

Middle leaders now have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Training is ongoing and has enabled these leaders to develop a better understanding of strengths and weaknesses within their subjects. However, most subject leaders do not have a clear oversight of how well pupils are doing across the school because monitoring is still completed by senior leaders in most cases.

The management of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities has developed well. Pupils' needs are better identified and met. Pupils are starting to receive the support they need to make stronger progress.

Parents report that communication is much improved. Any issues are dealt with and parents' frustration has eased. When the new leadership arrangements were introduced, many issues were raised by parents as they felt confident that they would be resolved. Records indicate that the number of reported issues raised by parents has reduced dramatically.

Leaders have overcome a number of barriers in their improvement journey. Changes to the school building, the addition of two new key stages and a staffing

restructure to name a few. There is a clear focus to improve the standard of teaching and learning which is starting to bear fruit.

There is a willingness from all stakeholders to progress the move towards academy status and a new future for the school. This has proved to be complicated; the delay has caused frustration and is a hindrance to progress.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders have worked hard to establish a consistent approach to teaching across the school. Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning on a regular basis and provide feedback to teachers. Teachers know what they do well and where they can improve. Teachers also benefit from regular training and from sharing good practice with teachers in this and other schools. There are early signs of success, such as in the standard of presentation in pupils' books. However, work in pupils' books over time shows that the progress made by pupils varies from class to class.

In the last academic year, there was a particular focus on the teaching of reading. Pupils have access to a better quality and range of texts. The revised curriculum for English also allows teachers to teach reading in a more focused way. As a result, a greater proportion of pupils achieved the expected standard in reading in 2017 at the end of key stage 2. The progress made by pupils from their starting points also improved. In classes across the school, pupils' progress in reading is strengthening.

Leaders have established a new system of assessment which enables teachers to know where pupils need additional support. Teachers' ongoing checks on pupils' learning identify pupils who have not understood and additional support is put in place. Pupils say that teachers provide good support when they are unsure. However, work in pupils' books shows that not all teachers routinely follow the agreed procedures for marking and feedback.

The most able pupils are not challenged to achieve as well as they can. Work in pupils' books shows that, all too often, they complete tasks which they can already do. Teachers' expectations of the most able pupils are not high enough.

The quality of teaching and learning in subjects other than English and mathematics is variable. Work in pupils' books shows that most pupils do not develop strong subject-specific skills, for example in history, geography and science. However, there is good practice within the school. This should now be shared widely so that all pupils make stronger progress in a wider range of subjects.

Teachers have a better understanding of the different groups of pupils within school, such as disadvantaged pupils. Leaders check the progress of disadvantaged groups and pupils do receive additional support. There are signs of impact in some classes where disadvantaged pupils make stronger progress but this varies from

class to class.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Safeguarding procedures are effective, thorough and are well understood. Leaders ensure that any incidents are meticulously recorded and they are quick to follow up on any concerns. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and know how to keep themselves safe. They say that they get along well together and if there are any problems, these are quickly resolved. Parents particularly like the new arrangements for dropping off and collecting their children. This is organised well to ensure that these busy times of the day pass smoothly and allow pupils to feel safe.

Much work has been completed to make best use of the limited outdoor space. Leaders have timetabled playtimes and lunchtimes so that pupils have time to let off steam. Staff have been trained to provide a wide range of activities which engage pupils during outdoor breaks. No incidents of poor behaviour were noted during the inspection. Around school, pupils are polite and well mannered, opening doors for adults and for each other. Records of behaviour-related incidents have reduced steadily over time.

Pupils' conduct within lessons is also positive. Pupils are keen to learn and apply themselves well to the tasks at hand. Pupils listen and collaborate well with their peers.

Leaders understand that pupils' attendance remains a key target for improvement. Pupils' attendance has declined since the last inspection. In addition, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school has increased.

Outcomes for pupils

By the time pupils left the school in 2016, their progress in reading, writing and mathematics was very low compared to the national average. There was a slight improvement in reading and mathematics in 2017 but progress in writing declined further.

Work in pupils' books and current assessment records show that, although there is an improving picture, challenges remain in some classes. For example, recent mathematics training has enabled teachers to present more challenge to pupils through problem-solving and reasoning activities. Pupils have increasing opportunities to complete such work but this remains inconsistent across year groups. The strongest practice is more evident in upper key stage 2.

Although the teaching of writing has been refreshed, the impact of changes is yet to bear fruit. Progress in pupils' books and assessment records indicate that writing remains a challenge. The proportion of current pupils who make the progress

expected of them still lags behind mathematics and reading.

The progress made by different groups of pupils is variable. The most able pupils do not make the progress they are capable of because they are not challenged appropriately in lessons. Similarly, disadvantaged pupils do not achieve as well as they could. This is because the strategy to accelerate progress is newly established. A review of the school's use of pupil premium funding should be commissioned as a matter of urgency. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are making stronger progress. This is the result of stronger leadership which focuses on effective identification of needs and a commitment to meeting the needs of these pupils.

External support

The local authority provides effective support. It was quick to commission interim leadership arrangements once the school became subject to special measures. The local authority oversaw the appointment of an executive headteacher who continues to support the school in her role of national leader of education. A representative of the local authority forms part of a monitoring committee to keep abreast of school improvement. The local authority also conducts monitoring visits to check on progress towards targets in the local authority's statement of action.

The local authority has been firm in its approach to secure a solution to the school's conversion to academy status. Despite a number of false dawns, a proposal is currently under review by the office of the regional schools commissioner. Hopefully, all parties can work swiftly to secure the future of the school.