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Emma Grace
Acting Headteacher
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Worcestershire
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Dear Miss Grace

Special measures monitoring inspection of Dines Green Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 27 to 28 February 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 February 2017.

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.

The school may continue to 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 Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sandy Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2017.

- As a matter of urgency, ensure that all aspects of safeguarding are effective by:
 - updating the safeguarding policy to ensure it reflects current government guidance and the school's own context
 - ensuring that all staff read and understand the school's safeguarding policy and procedures, and follow them closely
 - making sure all staff receive updated safeguarding training
 - identifying and training a member of staff to be the designated teacher for children who are looked after
 - ensuring that all procedures for recruiting staff follow government guidance, are robust and adhered to
 - making sure that statutory procedures for removing pupils from the school's register are followed
 - providing appropriate supervision at breaktimes and lunchtimes to keep pupils safe
 - regularly reviewing that checks made on all people working in the school are accurate
 - ensuring that strategies to improve rates of attendance are effective, especially for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - improvement plans identify clearly the main priorities to improve the school's performance and the outcomes which leaders expect to see following monitoring, evaluation and review
 - the impact of the use of the additional funding received to support disadvantaged pupils, including in the early years, is evaluated to check it is raising the attainment of these pupils
 - monitoring of teaching accurately identifies weaknesses and effective action is taken to improve the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics
 - performance appraisal processes are used robustly to ensure that teaching and learning are consistently good in reading, writing and mathematics
 - the curriculum is planned to provide pupils with opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge in a range of subjects.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by making sure teachers consistently:
 - have high expectations of what all pupils can achieve and how they should present their work
 - plan work to meet the needs of all groups of pupils, especially the most able and most able disadvantaged pupils, to enable them to make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics
 - provide opportunities for pupils to write at length, including across a range of subjects
 - plan opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in problem solving and reasoning
 - address misconceptions in spelling, punctuation and grammar
 - check that pupils understand the feedback they receive
 - set homework in line with the school's policy.

An external review of the school's use of the pupils premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 27 February 2018 to 28 February 2018

Evidence

During the inspection, I observed aspects of the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, other school staff, the chair and two other members of the governing body. I spoke to a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I spoke informally to parents as they visited the school and talked to pupils in lessons.

Context

The headteacher was absent from the end of March 2017. She resigned in December and has now left the school. A new headteacher has been appointed and is due to take up the post after Easter. There was no designated headteacher in the school for the first half of the summer term. The local authority appointed a national leader of education (NLE) as acting headteacher. She served between June and October 2017. The deputy headteacher has been the acting headteacher since January 2018. Four teachers have left the school and four new ones have joined. The governing body has been substantially restructured. It now has a new chair and vice-chair and four new members.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership has improved, but is still in transition. Uncertainty over leadership arrangements after the inspection led to substantial turbulence in the school and the community. Parents were, understandably, concerned about what was happening. On taking up the acting headship, the NLE quickly established a stable staffing structure. She put in place the processes and procedures necessary for the school to operate safely and for it to begin to improve. From that point, improvement has been steady. Nevertheless, the slow start means that there is still much to be done.

The culture of the school is much improved. Staff are more ambitious in what they expect pupils to achieve. Teachers understand that they are accountable for their pupils' progress. There is a sense of shared responsibility for improvement.

The previous inspection identified concerns about the effectiveness of arrangements for safeguarding. Leaders took these very seriously and acted immediately to rectify them. Procedures for recruiting and vetting staff now reflect current statutory guidance. The acting headteacher and chair of governors now check regularly that records of these checks are maintained properly. All staff are now trained to a suitable level in child protection and follow the school's procedures correctly.

The designated senior leader for safeguarding has revised the system for noting, recording and following up concerns about pupils' welfare. Her records are detailed and well organised. This ensures that information can be quickly passed to other relevant agencies if needed. There is now a designated teacher who oversees the provision for pupils who are looked after by the local authority.

During her time as acting headteacher, the NLE provided effective guidance to the deputy headteacher. As a result, the deputy headteacher has been able to successfully take on the role of acting headteacher and continue to drive improvement since the NLE left the school. The newly appointed headteacher will take up his post after the Easter holiday. It is essential that the momentum of improvement is sustained during the transition to his leadership. Leaders cannot afford to lose any time in securing better outcomes for pupils.

The deputy headteacher is well supported by a much-improved governing body. The current chair and another governor have relevant experience from working in educational settings. Other governors have appropriate skills. Governors are now much more challenging. They ask pertinent questions which hold leaders to account for the rate of improvement. There is now a shared understanding between governors and leaders of what is getting better and what needs to improve more quickly.

Leaders use the local authority's improvement plan well as the basis for drawing up short-term action plans. These plans help leaders to focus their time on the priorities for improvement. The plans include helpful measures by which leaders and governors can check the pace of improvement. However, some of these measures are focused too heavily on whether actions have been carried out, rather than checking if the actions have made enough difference to pupils' learning. As a result, some actions have not been as effective as leaders had hoped. For example, leaders provided teachers with renewed guidance about effective teaching of mathematics. This action has only been partially successful. A close look at pupils' books shows some, but not enough, improvement.

Leaders are beginning to use information about pupils' achievement more effectively. They analyse information from assessments to determine if pupils are doing as well as they should. For example, the acting headteacher has identified a number of pupils who are falling behind from their previous high attainment. She is developing plans to tackle this, but it is too early for these plans to have been implemented.

Similarly, leaders have built a more accurate picture of the quality of teaching. Leaders provide appropriate training and support for teachers. Teaching is improving as a result. However, the focus on driving up quality is fairly recent. Therefore, much remains to be done.

Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching include looking at the work in pupils' books. This helps leaders see if teachers are following the school's policies and agreed procedures. However, leaders have not made the most of their scrutiny of pupils' work. For example, leaders have not spotted indications in pupils' work that there are still notable weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics.

The school's curriculum is improving well. Subjects are now organised into more cohesive themes. Each theme is built around a high-quality text. This places the fundamental skill of reading at the heart of the curriculum. In addition, leaders have established a consistent and highly structured approach to teaching pupils how to read, understand and interpret texts. This is used in lessons in a wide variety of subjects. As a result, pupils are developing knowledge and skills in a broader range of subjects than was the case at the previous inspection. This is still inconsistent because some teachers are unsure how to achieve an appropriate balance between teaching subject content, such as history, and enabling pupils to apply basic reading, writing and mathematical skills.

Leaders' use of the pupil premium funding has been externally reviewed. As a result, leaders have a much sharper focus on measuring the impact that the money is having on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Some disadvantaged pupils are beginning to catch up with other pupils in the school. However, their progress is still a long way behind that of others nationally. Some are not catching up. They are falling further behind.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers now have higher expectations of what their pupils can achieve. As a result, teachers are trying to set more challenging work. This is beginning to make a difference. Some pupils are starting to make up lost ground and achieve what they are capable of. Nevertheless, this is not happening for all pupils. This is because the quality of teaching is not strong enough to ensure that pupils make consistently good progress.

Teachers now have a better understanding of the standards each pupil has attained in the past in reading, writing and mathematics. Consequently, teachers now have a more realistic view of what standards pupils should attain, given their starting points. This is helping teachers to set more appropriate work. However, teachers still struggle to pitch work closely enough to support pupils who need extra help or to move more-able pupils on quickly enough to harder work. This is one reason why pupils' progress remains inconsistent.

Pupils' books show that teachers sometimes miss indications that a pupil is finding the work too hard. As a result, misunderstandings persist. For example, one book seen during the inspection shows that the pupil cannot confidently recall which pairs of numbers make 10. This led to basic calculation errors when the pupil attempted more complex questions. The teacher had not spotted this, so had not tackled this

significant gap in the pupil's knowledge.

Teachers have worked hard to follow the guidance they have received on how to teach mathematics more effectively. Pupils' books show some improvement as a result. Pupils now attempt to apply their basic number knowledge to more complex mathematical challenges more frequently. However, fundamental weaknesses in the planning and delivery of the mathematics curriculum remain. Teachers do not teach basic skills sequentially. Therefore pupils do not build a secure understanding of how mathematics works. Gaps in their knowledge make it harder for pupils to succeed as they meet more difficult mathematical concepts.

A concerted focus on building pupils' comprehension skills in a structured, systematic way is leading to notably improved teaching of reading. As a result, pupils are beginning to apply reading skills to help them learn in a variety of subjects. This approach has also led to an increase in opportunities for pupils to write for a range of purposes in different lessons. Some pupils now write almost as well in history and geography lessons as they do in English. However, this is still a very mixed picture. This is because some teachers do not set tasks in some subjects that enable pupils to produce high-quality writing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Since the previous inspection, leaders have worked hard to promote pupils' personal development and to assure their welfare. Immediate attention was given to the shortcomings in safeguarding. These have now been rectified. In addition, leaders have established a more positive culture in the school. Pupils have a greater voice, for example through the newly established pupil parliament. Pupils show much greater pride in their work because they feel that their efforts are valued.

Most pupils behave well. Where reminders are needed, pupils usually respond immediately and politely. Staff feel better supported in managing the challenging behaviour occasionally displayed by a few pupils.

Regular attendance is now promoted strongly and is rewarded. As a result, absence has reduced. The attendance of frequently absent pupils is tracked closely. The school works closely with the families of these pupils to help them bring their children to school more regularly. This is working. Rates of attendance are improving for most of these pupils. The school uses the support of outside agencies to take action in the case of those parents who continue to choose to allow their children to stay off school without good reason.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders check pupils' progress and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics more closely now than at the time of the previous inspection. They are confident that the information they currently hold is accurate. This information

shows that some pupils are catching up from their past underachievement. However, this is not the case for all. Some are still as far behind where they should be as they were at the time of the previous inspection. Some continue to fall further behind.

Standards are improving in some year groups and not in others. Similarly, disadvantaged pupils are beginning to catch up with their classmates in some subjects in some classes. Nevertheless, they are still a long way behind other pupils nationally. Many are not gaining ground quickly enough.

The school's records of the progress made by individual pupils explain the variation in standards. In most classes, around half of the pupils are making the rapid progress they need to help them catch up to where they should be. In these classes, around half the pupils are either not making up for their prior underachievement or are making slow progress and losing even more ground. In some classes almost no pupils are catching up.

A new, highly structured approach to teaching phonics was introduced at the beginning of this term. Teachers have been well trained in using the programme. Initially, pupils made quick gains in learning letters and sounds. However, teachers are finding it hard to build on this early success. More recently, pupils' progress has stalled a little.

Pupils' books show that they are making better progress in history, geography and science than at the time of the previous inspection. The picture remains mixed in line with the variability in the quality of teaching that still exists across the school.

External support

Governors appreciate the support of the local authority in providing stable leadership from the NLE during the headteacher's absence. The NLE support was effective in improving the effectiveness of arrangements for safeguarding and in helping the deputy headteacher to establish a secure basis for improving the quality of teaching. Leaders are frustrated that some of the support they were expecting has not been delivered, or has only happened after they had repeatedly chased up the promise of help. Leaders say that this has limited their opportunity to provide the right quality and intensity of support for improving the quality of teaching and is one reason why weaknesses remain.