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Mrs Suneta Bagri
Wilkes Green Infant School (NC)
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Dear Mrs Bagri

Special measures monitoring inspection of Wilkes Green Infant School (NC)

Following my visit with Lindsay Nash, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 21–22 March 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in December 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school's improvement plan is 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 executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Hill

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels by ensuring that:
 - leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses
 - there are robust systems in place for monitoring and evaluating all aspects of the school's work
 - school leaders make effective use of the assessment information they have to monitor pupils' outcomes and to hold teachers to account
 - governors have a clear and realistic view of the school's performance and fully undertake all their statutory duties
 - the approaches the school uses to promote the importance of good attendance are understood and followed by parents.
- Improve outcomes achieved by pupils at the end of Year 2 by ensuring that:
 - pupils of all abilities are enabled to make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics
 - disadvantaged pupils receive the necessary support to help them achieve in line with other pupils nationally
 - pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive support that is closely matched to their needs.
- Improve the quality of teaching so it is at least good by ensuring that teachers:
 - have high expectations of all pupils, especially the most able and the most able disadvantaged, and set appropriately challenging tasks
 - provide better opportunities for pupils to develop their spoken communication skills
 - develop pupils' thinking skills so that they reflect more deeply on their learning
 - develop pupils' comprehension skills so that they have a better understanding of what they have read
 - plan and deliver activities that allow pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills to increasingly difficult problems.
- Improve the early years provision by developing the use of the outdoor classroom so that children are able to make independent choices and initiate their own learning.

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 second monitoring inspection on 21 March 2018 to 22 March 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes across the school. Several of these observations were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors examined a wide range of pupils' work and talked to pupils about their work. They met with members of the interim senior leadership team, including the interim headteacher. The lead inspector met with members of the interim executive board (IEB), including the chair, and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors scrutinised school documents. Inspectors listened to many pupils read and discussed their reading habits with them.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in November 2017, the staffing upheaval has continued. The contract of one of the interim headteachers ended and they left the school in December. An interim deputy headteacher was appointed in January 2018. A temporary assistant headteacher with responsibility for inclusion is covering the interim assistant headteacher who is currently absent from school. In addition, a new interim assistant headteacher has been appointed with overall responsibility for key stage 1. One member of the IEB resigned in December 2017; this person has not been replaced. There have also been several changes of teaching staff.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Immediately following the last monitoring inspection, leaders and members of the IEB took swift and decisive action to re-evaluate the school's current position and decide on the most pressing priorities to move the school forward. With the support of an external consultant, you rewrote the school improvement plan, then set in motion the necessary actions to address identified weaknesses. Undeterred by the almost continual changes of staffing, you have worked hard to maintain staff morale, and at the same time, set clear expectations for improvement.

Since the last monitoring inspection, the pace of change has been more rapid. You have, very recently, formed a new leadership team. All leaders are now tackling the school's main priorities with a greater sense of urgency and determination. There is a much sharper focus on improving the quality of teaching and raising pupils' achievement. However, leaders' efforts to bring about greater consistency to the quality of teaching have been hampered by the ongoing turbulence in staffing. This means that variation in the quality of teaching remains, with too much that is not yet good. Consequently, a significant number of pupils are not yet making sustained good progress.

Leaders now have greater clarity about what they need to focus on to improve the

school's performance. You monitor leaders' work rigorously and check to ensure that any new initiatives are implemented well before moving on to the next action. This ensures that the work of other leaders is making a positive difference to teachers' practice. Carefully planned professional development for teachers is well matched to the school's needs.

You have combined previous school development plans into one single document. The revised plan provides a comprehensive route map to help staff to navigate the school through its journey of improvement. The plan is realistic, focuses on the most important areas for improvement, and includes clear milestones linked to pupils' achievement. The plan is underpinned by appropriate subject action plans, although occasionally these plans indicate that subject leaders do not have a full grasp of all the barriers to achievement. For example, the reading action plan does not make reference to pupils' fluency, despite this being a key reason for their slower progress in reading.

The fragility in staffing continues to be one of the biggest barriers to school improvement. Despite this, you have pressed on and brought greater transparency to leaders' and teachers' roles and responsibilities. Leaders know what is expected of them and are working with perseverance to help staff develop their practice. Most teachers benefit from coaching and guidance from experienced colleagues to help them improve. This support is enabling staff to achieve success. Equally, leaders do not shy away from difficult conversations when teaching is not good enough. Staff value this constructive feedback and take responsibility for developing their own specific actions to address any shortcomings.

Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching are frequent and targeted according to identified priorities. Leaders have an increasingly perceptive view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Local authority representatives and other consultants help leaders verify their judgements about the quality of teaching through joint lesson observations. You make sure that teachers are left in no doubt about what is expected of them to enable pupils to achieve good outcomes. As a result of improved action planning, there is now a much more unified approach to addressing specific issues related to teaching.

Since the last monitoring inspection, there has been a change of leadership regarding special educational needs (SEN) because the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has been off work. The temporary SENCo has only been in post for five weeks, although she has wasted no time in checking and ensuring that provision for pupils with the highest level of need is more appropriate. However, this change in leadership has led to a lack of continuity in provision for pupils. Consequently, some pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities have not received the necessary support in order to make accelerated progress. Leaders are aware of this and have started to take action to ensure that all pupils receive the appropriate level of support to meet their needs.

Leaders have made further inroads into improving whole-school assessment systems to ensure greater accuracy in teachers' judgements. Leaders recognise that some of the assessments that teachers made earlier in the academic year were inaccurate, therefore making it difficult to make secure judgements about pupils' progress over time. However, more recently, teachers' assessments have been closely scrutinised, and moderation activities have helped to assure the quality of teachers' judgements.

Since the last monitoring inspection, the IEB is checking leaders' progress against actions on the school improvement plan more robustly. As a result, members have a much clearer picture about the rate of improvement. The IEB has shared tasks more equally among members, which has enabled them to achieve more. The half-termly visits by one member, a serving headteacher, provide the IEB with a valuable insight into the school's performance. You welcome this additional external view and the accompanying advice offered. The IEB is now asking more demanding questions of leaders to hold them to account for the school's overall progress.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Since the monitoring inspection, leaders, members of the IEB and those providing external support have been better coordinated in their efforts to improve the quality of teaching. Leaders have put in place carefully planned training in order to address weaknesses in teachers' subject knowledge. However, due to staffing changes, some of these improvements have not been sustained. It still remains the case that teachers do not always think clearly enough about the teaching approach. This leads to a mismatch between the planned activity and intended learning outcome, which slows pupils' progress. However, despite some setbacks largely related to staff changes, leaders' actions are beginning to lead to some improvements in the quality of teaching.

Teachers' expectations of pupils are increasing because they are more knowledgeable about the national curriculum and age-related expectations. However, there is still further work to do to ensure that all teachers' expectations are consistently high. In mathematics, for example, some teachers generally expect more of pupils in developing their reasoning skills than others. These teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their potential and attain higher standards. Other teachers do not do this so well, which leaves some of the most able pupils with not enough challenge.

Leaders have taken action to raise the profile of reading across the school. They have added new resources to the school library, and staff are encouraging pupils to read for pleasure. Teachers expect pupils to change their books more frequently and reading records are now completed more regularly. However, teachers do not check with enough rigour on the appropriateness of books for those pupils who are 'free readers'. Inspectors found that some of the most able pupils who were classed as 'free readers' had reading books which were too difficult. In addition, teaching is

not yet sufficiently well targeted to ensure that pupils' comprehension skills develop effectively. As a result, too many pupils fail to make the progress in reading of which they are capable.

Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are making better progress in their early reading skills because the teaching of phonics has improved. Teachers ensure that they teach specific sounds with a greater sense of pace. However, the reading scheme does not support pupils' phonetic development as well as it might do, because it is not matched exactly to the order in which the sounds are taught. This presents a particular barrier to progress for the lower-attaining pupils. This factor, combined with historic underachievement, means that too many pupils are unable to read with sufficient fluency. This is holding back their progress in reading.

The early years leader has worked in tandem with an early years consultant to review and reorganise the Reception classrooms. This has enabled teachers to monitor the learning and progress of their own classes more accurately and use this information to plan more effectively. Teachers have worked hard to enhance the outdoor provision. Inspectors observed children engrossed in an outdoor creative activity designing a racing car. Children skilfully and safely used saws, hammers and nails to construct vehicles from wood. Leaders' work is enabling staff to create an environment where learning is more purposeful and engaging.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The large majority of pupils behave well. Occasionally, pupils lose focus when they are not being challenged or the teacher's explanation is inappropriately long. However, most pupils follow the school's rules, treat each other with respect and work well together. Leaders log instances of misbehaviour, although information about incidents, including alleged bullying, are not routinely analysed to identify any patterns. Leaders acknowledge that their analysis could be tighter and are beginning to improve their systems in relation to this.

Leaders have taken steps to group pupils for some subjects according to their ability. However, this has put a strain on space and the use of rooms. Consequently, a few pupils are adversely affected by the conditions in which they work. For example, a few work in small cramped rooms with little natural daylight. This is not conducive to effective learning.

Attendance is gradually improving, although it remains below the national average. There is still a relatively large gap between the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and that of others. Staff are proactive in tackling attendance issues and their work is having a positive impact on raising the attendance of an increasing number of pupils. Regular communications between home and school emphasise the importance of pupils attending regularly, and therefore parents and carers are left in no doubt about the school's expectations. Leaders' recent focus on punctuality is paying dividends: fewer pupils are arriving late to school.

Outcomes for pupils

Due to frequent staff changes and inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, the progress of current pupils is not consistently strong. The proportions of pupils in Year 2 currently on track to attain the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics are low, indicating that pupils will not be well equipped for the next stage of their education. At present, progress in reading for pupils in key stage 1 is not improving quickly enough. However, pupils are making faster progress in the development of their phonics skills. They apply these with growing confidence to their reading, especially in Year 1.

Pupils' current work shows that while more pupils are beginning to make accelerated gains in mathematics, others lag behind. Too often, and particularly in Year 1, there is a lack of challenge, with pupils not moving on quickly enough to harder work or applying their skills more broadly. This prevents them from making good progress. However, recently, pupils have been given more opportunities to demonstrate their reasoning skills, particularly in Year 2. This is helping them to solve mathematical problems with greater confidence. A few teachers do not have consistently high expectations about pupils' recording, which results in untidy work.

At the previous monitoring inspection, pupils were making better progress with their writing. However, this has not been sustained across all classes due to staff changes. Where teaching is more successful, teachers give prompt feedback, combined with effective demonstration of what the child needs to do to improve their writing. Pupils' development of handwriting varies widely across Year 2, with too many pupils who have not yet developed a neat, well-formed style. Pupils' vocabulary development is also inconsistent and depends on which class teacher they have for English.

External support

Since the time of the last monitoring inspection, external support provided on behalf of the local authority has been much more consistent and tightly aligned with school improvement priorities. The 'round table review' process, which has been introduced, has really challenged the headteacher. The Colmore Teaching Alliance has played an important part in supporting the development of teaching and learning. Staff very much value this support and are starting to put into practice their new skills and knowledge.