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Mrs Helen Heap
Interim headteacher
Rounds Green Primary School
Brades Road
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West Midlands
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Dear Mrs Heap

Special measures monitoring inspection of Rounds Green Primary School

Following my visit with Michael Appleby, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 13–14 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 November 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 appoint two 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 Sandwell. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matt Meckin

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- As a matter of urgency, ensure that all aspects of safeguarding are effective by:
 - adhering closely to the school's safeguarding policy
 - assessing risks regularly and taking immediate action on potential or identified shortcomings
 - teaching pupils to keep safe from risks such as child exploitation and radicalisation.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - making sure that middle leaders effectively lead on their subjects or areas so that pupils achieve appropriately for their age
 - monitoring pupils' progress, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and taking action so that no pupil falls behind
 - ensuring that governors discharge their core statutory functions effectively.

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - securing the accuracy of teachers' assessments to gain a precise view of pupils' progress
 - ensuring that teachers plan lessons well, meet the needs of different pupils and check their understanding
 - providing opportunities for pupils to apply, develop and refine their reading, writing and mathematical skills.

- Improve personal development, behaviour and welfare, including pupils' attendance, by:
 - ensuring that pupils attend school regularly and arrive on time at the start of the school day
 - eradicating low-level disruption in lessons, so that pupils are not distracted and their learning is not interrupted
 - dealing with bullying concerns effectively and in a timely manner.

- Improve the provision in early years by:
 - ensuring that leaders have high expectations of what children should know and do so that children systematically develop the skills they need in preparation for their next stage of education
 - assessing all risks and taking the necessary action to ensure that children learn safely
 - planning complementary activities so that children do not interrupt others who need to listen carefully or work quietly
 - ensuring that resources effectively support children's learning and inspire their interest, for example by choosing appropriate books for reading sessions
 - ensuring that parents contribute to staff's knowledge about what children

know and can do and keeping parents informed so that they know how to support their children at home.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 13 March 2018 to 14 March 2018

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the interim headteacher, two governors, including the chair, and two representatives from the local authority. Inspectors spoke to a range of other leaders and staff, as well as speaking to pupils informally and formally. Inspectors also observed pupils' learning in a range of subjects across the whole school. During these observations, inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke to them about their learning. Pupils' behaviour was observed at social times, in lessons and as they moved around the school site.

Various documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plan, and your records that evaluate the quality of teaching. You shared with me the most recent assessments of pupils' attainment and progress. I also looked at the school's published information on the website, as well as minutes of governing body meetings and information about attendance, behaviour and safety.

Context

You continue to serve in the role of headteacher on an interim basis. Since the previous monitoring inspection, there have been several unforeseen and unavoidable staff absences. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is on maternity leave and an experienced interim SENCo has been appointed. Two other key leaders have had a period of absence. You have had to take on an additional responsibility of leading phonics. A new assistant headteacher has been appointed and will start in April 2018. This will bring further leadership capacity to the school. The national leader for governance (NLG) continues to chair the governing body.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Your determined and clear leadership is central to the continued improvement of the school. Since the previous monitoring inspection, you have faced considerable staffing disruptions, which has placed a strain on your capacity. However, you have remained positive and have clear plans to build the additional leadership support that is required.

Improvement plans have started to successfully address many of the key issues that were outlined in the previous inspection. Consequently, the quality of teaching has become more consistent, behaviour has improved and safeguarding is effective. However, as you have rightly identified, the improvement plan now needs to be adapted for the summer term. This will enable you to focus on the most important priorities that have evolved as the year has progressed. It will also enable the

improvement plans to incorporate the additional leadership capacity that you have secured. This precise approach will sharpen your focus, so that the remaining weaker teaching in the school is swiftly addressed.

Middle leadership has continued to strengthen. The mathematics leader checks the quality of work in pupils' books and supports staff with their planning. Her feedback to staff is precise and maths teaching is improving. The computing leader has mapped out the content of the computing curriculum, so that staff have a better understanding of the subject. The science leader has delivered a staff meeting to improve pupils' investigative skills. The impact of this is showing positively in pupils' books. The early years leader continues to have a strong and positive influence on improvements in Nursery and Reception.

The leadership capacity to drive improvements in teaching within phonics, English and key stage 2 is not sufficient. You and the governors have made a positive move to address this by appointing a new assistant headteacher, who will start in April. Furthermore, there are teachers emerging who are also capable of contributing to the leadership of these priority areas.

The SENCo is currently on maternity leave and initial interim arrangements to fill this post have proved challenging. However, you have now appointed an interim SENCo who has a strong background in supporting pupils who have complex needs. She has made a positive start to the role and has audited the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. This process has helped to ensure that the special needs register is more accurate. Provision for pupils who have speech and language barriers is effective. Leaders and staff are putting in place high-quality support in class and through additional support. However, you have identified that there is a need to increase the breadth of interventions, so that the range of SEN needs can be fully addressed.

The chair of the governing body provides very good support to you. Your working partnership is a key ingredient to overcoming some of the significant barriers that the school has faced. Other governors are also now coming to the fore. For example, one governor has worked with leaders to set out a clear strategy and system for evaluating behaviour incidents. The chair is working tirelessly to think about building further external capacity. He has put in an additional funding bid in order to broker school improvement support from a local teaching school.

A recent external follow-up review of pupil premium spending demonstrated that you are continually reflecting on your strategies for disadvantaged pupils. Some of the interventions in place are evaluated effectively at an individual pupil level. However, this information could be evaluated more effectively on a strategic level. For example, improvements in pupils' reading ages could be tracked at a group level. This would enable leaders to easily identify which strategies are having the most impact.

The arrangements for safeguarding have continued to improve. The safeguarding

lead and the family support worker contribute well to keeping pupils safe. The online system for logging and following up concerns shows that leaders are thorough in their procedures. Staff have received further training on the 'Prevent' duty, which has had a positive impact on their understanding. Older pupils have had some specific and age-appropriate sessions on the dangers of child sexual exploitation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching has continued to improve since the last monitoring inspection. Lessons are generally well organised and little learning time is wasted. In the strongest teaching, teachers use accurate subject knowledge to demonstrate good-quality examples of work to pupils. Teachers ask increasingly sophisticated questions, which enable pupils to think more deeply about their learning. Staff have received training to help them plan work that matches well to pupils' abilities. As a result, most of the work set for pupils does provide appropriate challenge. However, sometimes pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities do not receive the support that they need and the most able pupils are not challenged consistently.

You have successfully addressed some of the weaker teaching in the school, but there is more work to do. Pupils' progress slows because of the quality of teaching in some classrooms. Additional leadership capacity will enable you to put in place individualised support and professional development, so that the consistency of teaching continues to develop.

Pupils are enthused and motivated by a new approach to reading. A class book becomes the focal point for the teaching of reading and writing. Pupils speak knowledgeably about the different books they have read and the authors that they like. Using the book as a stimulus for their own writing is having a positive impact on the quality of their written work. One consistent feature of the teaching in English is the effective development of language. Pupils are regularly learning the meaning of unfamiliar words.

Teachers are providing more frequent opportunities to develop pupils' reading skills, such as retrieving facts from the text or summarising information. However, the quality of these sessions varies across the school. Some pupils are not being given consistent opportunities to develop some of the higher-level reading skills, such as inference. You acknowledge that sharing some of the existing best practice would help other staff to improve. The process for hearing pupils read on an individual basis need revisiting. It is not operated consistently. Systems need to be well organised so that weaker readers receive one-to-one reading more regularly.

Due to staffing absence, the leadership of phonics has been interrupted. Consequently, some of the planned training has not been able to take place. This needs to be addressed, so that the quality of phonics teaching is consistently high across key stage 1.

The quality of provision in the early years continues to be a strength of the school. The early years leader invests her time in developing staff, so that they have a clear understanding of the expectations. The most striking improvement has come in writing. Children are seeking opportunities to write and the quality of handwriting is excellent. Staff work purposefully and skilfully to meet children's needs. As a result, children enjoy learning through play and through focused sessions with adults. Leaders have rightly identified that an improvement in the quality of resources will help to enhance children's learning even further.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The vast majority of behaviour in lessons is positive. Pupils respond well to teachers' instructions and work hard. When teaching is weaker, some pupils become distracted because they are not challenged as well as they should be. You are now tracking behaviour incidents much more effectively. This tracking is used to identify pupils who require additional support to manage their behaviour. Incidents of poor behaviour have reduced during this academic year.

You have put in place new activities to support pupils' play at lunchtime. Pupils enjoy games organised by adults and several pupils commented that behaviour has improved. However, there are still some pupils whose behaviour at social times is unacceptable. There is still some work to do to ensure that staff on duty are supported to manage disruptive behaviour more effectively. While the new tracking system for behaviour incidents is much improved, it does need to decipher between incidents that happen at social times and those that occur during lessons. This will enable leaders to build a more precise understanding of the patterns of weaker behaviour at social times, for example when and why incidents are occurring.

Bullying incidents are very well monitored and followed up by leaders. Bullying is rare in the school. The chair of governors has instigated a new anti-bullying ambassadors programme. Older pupils in the school are going to be used to mentor and support other pupils.

Absence levels have risen during the current academic year. A significant outbreak of illness in the autumn term has partly contributed to this rise. Leaders have put in place some effective procedures for monitoring attendance. They work with the office staff and the family support worker to follow up concerns. External agencies are used productively to challenge families whose attendance falls below an acceptable level. However, sometimes leaders' systems rely too heavily on writing letters to parents, rather than meeting with certain families to discuss supportive measures to improve attendance. A more personal approach here will enable persistent absence to be managed more robustly.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' attainment in mathematics is gradually rising across most classes in the school. Pupils are applying their skills more regularly and using reasoning to explain their thinking in mathematics. However, there are still some classes where weaker teaching is not raising pupils' attainment in mathematics as successfully.

Attainment in reading is not rising as much as it is in mathematics. Several of the strategies, for example the use of whole-class texts, are relatively new and need time to be fully embedded. Other strategies, such as the teaching of comprehension skills and hearing weaker readers read on a one-to-one basis, need to continue to improve, so that more pupils achieve the expected standard for their age.

A significant proportion of the current Year 6 pupils had inconsistent teaching in an earlier part of key stage 2. Consequently, there are significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Despite these challenges, they are currently making good progress. Their attainment in mathematics is much higher than in previous years. Their attainment in English is not as strong and further work is required to ensure that more pupils achieve the expected standards by the end of the year. It is important to highlight that this cohort's key stage 1 assessments were over-inflated when these pupils were in Year 2. Therefore, it is highly likely that when the end of key stage 2 progress scores are published, they will be low.

In the early part of this academic year, the current Year 2 pupils were making strong progress and attainment was rising positively. However, a staffing disruption in this year group has slowed down the rate of progress for some pupils. You recognise this issue and are putting in additional support, so that pupils' progress accelerates in the summer term.

Children's progress in the early years is strong from their starting points. In Reception, a much higher proportion of children are on track to achieve a good level of development. This success is due to the high-quality teaching of phonics and writing. Children's writing skills have rapidly improved. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are given precise support and, as a result, are able to access learning and succeed.

External support

The support that is provided by the local authority's school improvement adviser (SIA) is effective. She works in close partnership with you and adapts support where necessary. For example, she has arranged support on improving individual teacher's practice, rather than more general subject development work. This work is having a positive impact. The SIA has also supported you with additional aspects of school improvement, such as evaluating the quality of teaching.

In collaboration with the local authority and a local teaching school, you have also

implemented several external support projects through the strategic school improvement fund. These projects have proved successful and have provided additional support to improve the quality of teaching in the early years and key stage 1. For example, during the inspection, a parent and pupil writing project was taking place. A high proportion of parents and carers attended and the event was a success.

The local authority has recently provided increased flexibility financially. This has enabled you to develop more leadership capacity as the year has progressed. However, some of the support to improve the condition of the building has been less effective. This has proved to be a distraction and you are working closely with the local authority to ensure that your time can be better spent on improving the quality of teaching.