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30 May 2018

Nichola Connor  
Interim Executive Headteacher  
Howard Community Primary School  
Beard Road  
Bury St Edmunds  
Suffolk  
IP32 6SA

Dear Miss Connor

**Special measures monitoring inspection of Howard Community Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 15 and 16 May 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 2017.

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 school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

The local authority's statement of action was judged to be fit for purpose by Her Majesty's Inspectors soon after the inspection that took place in July 2017.

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

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in July 2017**

- Rapidly ensure that the local authority, the interim executive headteacher and governors work collectively to secure sustained capacity and improvements in leadership by:
  - clarifying leadership roles and accountabilities
  - establishing a line management system that holds leaders to account for their impact on raising standards
  - securing a fully functioning governing body with clear roles and responsibilities which has the capacity to fully address the urgent priorities in the school
  - embedding a consistent and balanced curriculum so that pupils receive high-quality opportunities both within and across year groups, including trips, visits, and enrichment and extra-curricular activities
  - planning and monitoring the impact of curriculum provision that develops pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding
  - ensuring that additional funding that the school receives raises the achievement and attendance of disadvantaged pupils
  - creating a thorough system for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, including high-quality training for staff
  - ensuring that new performance management systems hold staff rigorously to account for the achievement of pupils
  - reviewing the use of the sport premium so that leaders can assure its impact on pupils' enjoyment and achievement in sports and physical education
  - ensuring that the leader for special educational needs (SEN) has sufficient capacity to raise standards in the identification of and support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Ensure that leaders, governors and the local authority urgently address remaining safeguarding issues by:
  - making sure that there is a designated safeguarding leader on site who can lead and share the responsibility for supporting the most vulnerable pupils
  - being attentive to concerns that are reported by staff, so that they are actioned and referred on when appropriate
  - clarifying roles and responsibilities for the safeguarding of vulnerable pupils, such as children looked after, and pupils in alternative provision, so that these pupils are well monitored and cared for
  - reviewing the issues identified by the local authority in November 2016 and

being assured that all of these have been fully addressed

- ensuring that the curriculum provides pupils with thorough information about how to keep themselves safe and that this evolves as pupils get older.

■ Improve teaching, learning and assessment and raise achievement significantly by:

- providing staff with ongoing training about how to use the new assessment system more effectively to plan for pupils' learning over time and to meet specific pupils' needs and interests
- raising teachers' expectations about what pupils can achieve, notably the most able pupils, those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those who need to catch up and those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities
- ensuring that staff are confident to teach pupils the new national curriculum skills and content, so that standards rise rapidly, most notably in phonics and in reading, writing and mathematics in key stages 1 and 2.

■ Embed recent improvements in the early years by:

- improving the indoor and outdoor provision for children, including the celebration of their work and learning
- ensuring that there is clear monitoring of the early years pupil premium and that leaders measure the difference that it makes to disadvantaged children
- developing communication and assessment practices between the Nursery and Reception provision, so that there is greater consistency in teaching, learning, assessment and transition
- reviewing the curriculum so that children access a fully enriched provision, including trips, visits and visitors
- ensuring greater consistency between staff in the development of children's early language and phonics skills.

■ Strengthen pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:

- reducing the absence and persistent absence of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEN and/or disabilities
- identifying the right support and provision for pupils who exhibit significant difficulty in managing their own behaviour, so that incidents of extreme behaviour reduce
- further embedding teachers' use of the new behaviour systems, so that pupils are confident in staff's ability to deal with poor behaviour consistently and fairly
- significantly reducing the numbers of pupils who lose focus in their lessons or become distracted.

An external review of the use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken to

assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 15 to 16 May 2018**

### **Evidence**

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you and other senior and middle leaders, a group of pupils, two governors, a representative of the local authority and the executive principal of the Chilford Hundred Education Trust (CHET). I met with your home-school liaison officer who is also a designated lead for safeguarding. Together, you and I visited lessons to observe pupils at work. I observed pupils' conduct on arrival in school, spoke informally with parents and carers at the school gates and with pupils and staff at breaks and lunchtimes.

### **Context**

The school received a follow-up monitoring inspection of safeguarding in February 2018. This was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2010 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. During this inspection, safeguarding was judged to be effective.

Since then, the school has experienced another period of significant turbulence. Further changes in the school's leadership, in its status as it moves towards becoming an academy later this year, and some significant staff absence have all limited the progress made in resolving the issues raised in the previous section 5 inspection.

The school has had 13 different leaders in the past two years. The last interim headteacher left the school in April 2018. The deputy headteacher and two teachers are currently on long-term sickness absence. An academy sponsor, CHET, was confirmed in March 2018. Currently, the school remains under local authority control. CHET leaders and the local authority anticipate that the school will open as an academy in September 2018. Interviews for a substantive headteacher took place earlier this year. No appointment was made. The post will be advertised again later this year.

During this time, the local authority approached CHET and its teaching school, the Cambridge and Suffolk Schools Alliance (CASSA) to seek support for the leadership of the school. You were seconded to lead the school on an interim basis. Another experienced headteacher, who is also a national leader of education, was appointed as an associate headteacher on a part-time basis to bolster the school's leadership. Another experienced senior leader was appointed as an associate deputy headteacher to teach pupils in Year 6 and support you in leading improvements. Two further senior leaders from within the trust, both of whom are specialist leaders of education, were appointed on a part-time basis to strengthen the school's provision for vulnerable pupils, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Most pupils are White British; very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Almost half of them are eligible for the pupil premium. The proportion of pupils who

have SEN and/or disabilities has risen and is above average. The school roll has fallen; at this stage, fewer pupils than in 2017 have applied to join the school in September 2018.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

At the last monitoring inspection in February 2018, I expressed serious concerns about the rate of improvement being made because much of the school's work remained inadequate. My latest findings confirmed your own view, and that of the local authority, that the school's overall effectiveness is still inadequate. Almost one year after being placed in special measures, the school is no further forward. Most of the areas for improvement recommended at the last inspection remain unresolved.

You and your new team of senior leaders are all experienced and effective leaders. There are clear signs of recent improvement. You have rightly prioritised improving behaviour, identifying and meeting the needs of the school's most vulnerable learners, planning staff training and ensuring that pupils in Year 6 are ready for national tests this term. You have quickly gained a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the actions needed to secure rapid improvement. Improvement plans are in place. At this stage, it is far too early to gauge the impact of your work and that of your senior leaders.

Teachers value the additional one-to-one support and advice provided for them by you, your associate headteacher and your associate deputy headteacher. Training and support for teaching assistants have already begun. Your associate headteacher is leading training to help them support teachers in managing behaviour and in enabling pupils to make progress. This is beginning to lead to greater consistency in how additional adults are used in classrooms and in providing tailored support for individual pupils.

Significant gains have been made in increasing the school's capacity to identify and provide support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Your senior leaders have promptly strengthened procedures for identifying and recording pupils' needs. These pupils now have better support in place provided by a range of external agencies, including specialist help for their families.

In the past, leaders have been unable to embed all of the improvements needed in the early years setting that were recommended at the time of the previous inspection. Recently, some improvements have been made. The indoor and outdoor learning environments in Nursery and Reception classrooms have been enhanced further. However, both areas are not used fully to stimulate and engage children in learning. We noted a significant imbalance in activities to promote children's play and adult-led learning. We also found little evidence of joint planning and assessment among staff.

New governors have joined the school. They have maintained their liaison with the

local authority, CHET leaders and the community to determine the school's strategic direction. They do not, however, provide the school with a fully functioning governing body. Governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to resolve the weaknesses identified at the time of the previous inspection. They have not used the local authority's statement of action to monitor improvement or challenged the local authority to meet the targets and timescales it set for improving the school.

Governors have not ensured that additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils and funding to promote physical education and sport are used well enough. An external review of the use of the pupil premium, recommended at the time of the last inspection, has not taken place. Records of how this funding is spent and the impact it has had have not been fully maintained or published on the school's website.

Safeguarding arrangements remain firmly in place. The local authority's safeguarding audit has been completed to strengthen procedures further. Your staff monitor the attendance and welfare of the small minority of pupils who attend other, alternative provision or are currently on part-time timetables as part of their reintegration back into full-time learning.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains inadequate. Our joint observations of pupils at work in lessons revealed some fundamental weaknesses across most classes. It is clear that staff in all key stages have not received the high-quality ongoing training recommended in the previous inspection. Teaching is not planned well enough; management of behaviour is inconsistent and teachers do not check regularly that pupils are making enough progress.

You have promptly recognised that your staff urgently need significant professional development and training to build their confidence and develop common, consistent approaches throughout the school. Negotiations between governors, the local authority, CHET and CASSA have secured significant additional funding to enable you to implement an intensive training programme this term. It is unclear at this stage how this strategy will be monitored and evaluated to ensure that it leads swiftly to better-quality, consistent teaching.

Excellent facilities and resources in the early years setting are under-used. Until very recently, staff have not planned learning together. They do not apply agreed procedures to instil in children the right attitudes and behaviours from an early age. Expectations of children are not regularly reinforced. For example, staff do not always intervene when children run about, shout and scream or disengage from learning too easily.

Staff set up interesting, topical activities for children to engage in, but do not ensure that they remain focused on the task long enough to secure a good

understanding. It is unclear how they assess children's learning, other than through photographs, to help them plan the next stage of each child's learning.

The lack of a thorough grounding in reading and writing in the early years is clearly evident later in key stage 1 classes. Not all pupils in Years 1 and 2 can write well enough. Those who can write well are often unable to read what they have written phonetically to explain what they have done. Handwriting is not taught systematically in line with the school's own policy. Work is often poorly presented.

My scrutiny of pupils' mathematics books revealed some significant underachievement. Not all pupils possess the literacy skills to read mathematical problems. Learning is not well planned to provide sufficient challenge for the most able or ensure that less-able pupils understand what they have to do. Pupils' work, particularly that of boys, is minimal, untidy and often left unfinished.

Successive leaders have been unable to rectify these common weaknesses before pupils reach key stage 2. We noted significant gaps in pupils' literacy and numeracy, which are clearly evident in their books. Teachers' low expectations and poor-quality planning lead to slow progress being made. Too many pupils lose interest and disengage from learning. At times, staff do not tackle this well enough at an early stage to prevent a minority of pupils from disrupting the learning of others.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Over time, successive leaders have made little impact in embedding effective procedures to manage pupils' behaviour. Initial improvements made have promptly dissipated following their departure. Records show that, since September 2017, a small minority of pupils have missed too much learning due to their regular exclusion from school. The rate of exclusions is slowing, but remains high.

I found that currently, too many pupils wander out of lessons or refuse to cooperate fully with staff. At times, incidents that occur at breaks and lunchtimes are left unresolved and lead to some disengagement in lessons. Pupils who met with me said that they do not feel fully free from physical bullying. Managing this unacceptable behaviour is absorbing too much of your own and other leaders' time. You have promptly identified a small minority of pupils who have significant social and emotional needs who regularly misbehave, and you have asked senior leaders to coordinate additional support and provision for them.

Your revised policy and procedures for managing behaviour have been shared with pupils and staff. Pupils told me that they understand the consequences and feel it is a fair system. These procedures are very new and not yet fully established. Pupils feel that some teachers apply procedures well, but other staff do not. You have also altered arrangements at the start of the school day. This is leading to a more orderly start to lessons and to improved punctuality.

Attendance is slightly below average. Overall figures are affected by a very small

proportion of pupils who attend off-site provision or who are being reintegrated into learning. The attendance of pupils supported due to their SEN and/or disabilities is much lower than that of other pupils. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils, especially boys, is far too low. Pupil premium funding is having little impact on reducing the regular absence of these pupils.

## **Outcomes for pupils**

Constant changes in leadership since the previous inspection have led to long-standing weaknesses in the quality of teaching and curriculum planning and in the management of behaviour not being addressed. This has had a direct impact on pupils' learning and progress. Your self-evaluation acknowledges that, currently, pupils continue to make insufficient progress across all key stages.

No targets were set earlier this year for the proportion of Year 6 pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. Procedures to assess how well pupils are doing are not robust. We agreed that the assessment information provided by teachers is largely unreliable.

Assessments of the progress made by Year 6 pupils earlier this year were inaccurate. More recent assessments made by you and your associate deputy headteacher are much more realistic. He has helped to fill some gaps in the knowledge and understanding of Year 6 pupils and boost their confidence prior to their sitting national tests. However, your latest assessments show that the proportion of Year 6 pupils working at age-related expectations remains very low.

Underachievement is evident across all key stages. You forecast that the proportion of children leaving Reception this year having achieved a good level of development, and the proportion of pupils in Year 1 attaining well in the national phonics test, will be very low.

## **External support**

The local authority and CHET leaders have worked much more collaboratively to provide the school with new leadership. They both recognise the importance of making full use of the time available leading up to the school's opening as an academy later this year, and are sharply focused on providing you with the resources and support needed to lead improvement. National leaders, specialist leaders in education and consultants have been identified to implement the school's staff development and training programme.

Nonetheless, constant changes in leadership since the previous inspection and a lack of thorough monitoring have led to most of the improvements listed in the local authority's statement of action not being met. This document has little relevance to the work of current leaders. It is not used routinely by governors or by the local authority to monitor the rate of improvements made. At this stage, your self-evaluation and action plan provide a more useful tool for securing improvement.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Articulate clearly in a single, manageable document the actions agreed between you, the local authority and CHET leaders to secure rapid improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment this year.
- State clearly how this new strategy will be monitored and evaluated to ensure that it leads swiftly to better-quality, consistent teaching.
- Undertake an external review of pupil premium funding and governance to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.