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Kerry McEwan
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Dear Ms McEwan

Special measures monitoring inspection of Tower Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 June and 6 June 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 March 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 appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the Ivy Learning Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Susan Aykin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so it is consistently good and all groups of pupils make good progress especially in reading, writing and mathematics, by ensuring that teachers:
 - have good subject knowledge so that the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics are taught well
 - assess pupils' learning accurately so that it informs future learning
 - have high expectations of what all pupils can achieve to accelerate pupils' progress
 - set work that challenges pupils to make good progress and matches their needs and abilities, including the most able
 - have consistently high expectations of pupils' presentation of their work
 - consistently and effectively plan for and direct the work of teaching assistants
 - have consistently high expectations of pupils' behaviour so that low-level disruption does not interrupt learning.
- Urgently improve the impact of leaders at all levels by:
 - clarifying expectations of the school's policies on feedback, presentation and pupils' behaviour
 - having high expectations of what is required to ensure good teaching and good pupil outcomes
 - making sure that the curriculum is well taught across a wide range of subjects so that pupils are well prepared for their next stage of education
 - leadership of mathematics ensuring accurate monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching across the school
 - using information from monitoring and evaluation to ensure good subject knowledge and effective professional development.
- Urgently improve the impact of governors, by ensuring that:
 - leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's overall effectiveness
 - leaders' plans for improvement sharply focus actions on improving pupils' progress with precise measures for success linked to the quality of teaching
 - the headteacher is held to account for effective leadership structures, including teachers' performance management.
- Ensure that pupils attend regularly and on time to provide consistency and

continuity in their learning:

- Improve the early years by ensuring that:
 - teaching in the Reception Year is consistently good and adults have high expectations of what all children can achieve regardless of their varying starting points
 - children’s progress is good so that the proportion of children who achieve a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year increases
 - leaders implement focused plans for improvement of children’s outcomes for which all staff are held to account.

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 the 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 5 June 2018 to 6 June 2018

Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you and other senior and middle leaders, a group of pupils, one governor, a representative of the local authority, the executive headteacher of the school and the chief executive officer of the Ivy Learning Trust. Together, you and I visited lessons to observe pupils at work. I observed pupils' conduct at breaktime and lunchtime and spoke informally with parents and carers and with pupils and staff.

Context

This was the first monitoring visit since the school's section 5 inspection in March 2017. The school has experienced significant leadership and staffing turbulence from March 2017 until January 2018. The chair of governors has worked tirelessly for the school to join an academy trust to secure the urgent improvements required. Although the school is formally still under the control of the local authority, the authority agreed that the Ivy Learning Trust should lead improvements from January 2018 in preparation for the school formally opening as an academy in the Ivy Learning Trust in September 2018. The Ivy Learning Trust has successfully resolved some of the issues raised in the section 5 inspection report.

The school has had three part-time interim headteachers from March 2017 until January 2018. Since January 2018 when the local authority agreed to transfer leadership of the school to the Ivy Learning Trust, there has been a stable, full-time head of school and a part-time executive headteacher. Since January 2018, leaders have implemented changes to the staffing structure to raise standards. In addition to the current assistant headteacher, the school appointed an additional assistant headteacher in January 2018, who also leads mathematics. Due to falling pupil numbers, the school has decided to close the pre-school and merge the Nursery with the Reception class. The pre-school leader will continue her role as deputy safeguarding lead alongside a pastoral support role.

The local authority has provided support through governance and pupil premium reviews, early years support, teacher support, moderation of assessments and leadership support. The impact of the local authority's support is evident from March until September 2017. However, the local authority's support of the school from September 2017 until January 2018 did not have as much impact until it passed leadership of improvements to the Ivy Learning Trust.

Most pupils are White British; very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. More than half of pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities 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

You, your executive headteacher and your senior leaders are experienced and effective leaders. There are clear signs of improvement in the leadership of the school. You and your executive headteacher have accurately identified the issues that require urgent improvement and have acted quickly. You have rightly prioritised improving the consistency and effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment across the school alongside securing strong and stable leadership at all levels. You have worked hard to ensure that pupils' behaviour improves, and evidence gathered during the monitoring visit demonstrated that this is now well established in all classes. Since January 2018, the pace of improvement has gathered speed under your leadership as part of the Ivy Learning Trust. You and your executive headteacher have adapted the local authority's action plan to fit the emerging developments at the school. The school's improvement plan focuses clearly on the areas for improvement, with clear timelines and high expectations.

You have worked hard on embedding a school-wide feedback policy to ensure that pupils receive high-quality guidance on how to improve. You have led training and introduced frequent monitoring of the quality of guidance that pupils receive. You agree that the system has not yet fully embedded and that the policy requires some adaptations to ensure that it is sufficiently explicit for teachers to use consistently in their marking in every subject. You and your leaders have also introduced policies that promote high expectations of teaching and pupils' achievement at the school. Through frequent monitoring and reviews, you and your leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the improvements that are required.

You have also worked effectively to embed high expectations regarding the presentation of pupils' work. Through monitoring of books, staff training and personalised support for planning, you have increased the pride with which pupils complete their work. Evidence gathered during the monitoring visit showed that most pupils complete their work with care and precision. The school's enhanced focus on handwriting has resulted in pupils writing with care and accuracy in their English and mathematics books.

You have also embedded a consistently effective focus on improving pupils' behaviour for learning. Staff are now aware of the high standards that you expect and, as a result, pupils' attitudes towards learning in the classroom have improved. Evidence gathered during the monitoring visit showed that most pupils are attentive, engaged and respond well to activities and tasks in lessons.

Since the section 5 inspection, the leadership of mathematics and English has improved. Both leaders receive strong support from you to enable them to drive improvements. Their action plans are detailed with a clear focus on improving teachers and teaching assistants' subject knowledge and ability to select the most

effective teaching approaches. As a result of your regular monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment, you have identified accurately the areas that require improvement. In collaboration with the Ivy Learning Trust, you have organised for staff to visit other academies to observe effective teaching. Since the last inspection, the local authority has also provided subject adviser support to improve leadership of the core subjects. You have also organised a comprehensive suite of training for all staff, including teaching assistants. As a result, evidence gathered during the monitoring visit demonstrated that the quality of teaching has improved in most classes and that pupils are making better progress.

You rightly acknowledge that the wider curriculum is currently not well embedded throughout the school. The curriculum is not broad and balanced, as many pupils do not have access to music, modern foreign languages or art at key stage 2. Teachers do not apply the school's feedback policy to their marking of subjects other than English and mathematics. Teacher guidance for writing in pupils' English books has improved and is effective. However, teachers do not provide the same precision of guidance for writing in other subject areas, such as religious studies, science or history. Pupils do not have many opportunities to read regularly for enjoyment or to develop their understanding of the ways in which meaning is conveyed in a range of texts.

Teachers spoke highly of the support and leadership you have shown since January 2018. They spoke of a renewed vigour to the improvements begun by the local authority. They value the one-to-one support for planning, support and guidance provided by you and your leaders. This is beginning to ensure that there is greater consistency in how teaching assistants are used in the classroom and in providing tailored support for pupils.

Provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities continues to be a strength of the school as identified in the section 5 inspection report. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive effective support designed to meet their needs. You have checked the skills and knowledge of teaching assistants regarding support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. As a result, you have an accurate understanding of the training needs of staff and have begun to provide personalised training.

Following the inspection report, an external review of the pupil premium expenditure was conducted by Hertfordshire for Learning (HfL). The report identified the urgent need to identify the barriers for disadvantaged pupils and to ensure that funding is used effectively to accelerate their progress and attainment. You have addressed this by establishing an effective pupil premium expenditure plan with clear timelines, costings and impact measures. However, you agree that the impact of the interventions needs to be monitored more closely and reviewed frequently, as it is too early to judge their effectiveness. As a result of your committed leadership, you and your leaders have established frequent pupil progress meetings, which enable you to identify pupils' progress more quickly and to provide additional support where required. As a result, pupil outcomes have

improved since January 2018, but they continue to be below the targets set by the local authority.

You and your leaders have taken decisive action to secure the improvements in the early years that were recommended in the inspection report. Some improvements have been made, although changes in staffing have restricted this progress. The indoor and outdoor learning environments have been improved. Leadership of early years has accurately identified the barriers to children's progress and has ensured that assessments are accurate and used to inform planning. Consequently, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development has improved. However, leaders also acknowledge that staff need to structure activities to develop children's language, early reading, writing and mathematics skills more effectively so that the children are better prepared for study in Year 1.

The chair of governors has been tenacious in driving improvements in the school. She has worked hard to help secure an academy sponsor, the Ivy Learning Trust, for the school. She has worked hard to recruit new governors after the section 5 inspection. An external review of governance was conducted in December 2017, which found a range of evidence to support improvements. A national leader of governance has provided additional support to strengthen the ways in which the governing body holds the school's leadership to account. Governors now have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Governors have received additional training from the local authority and the Ivy Learning Trust. As a consequence, governors pose challenge to school leaders and monitor closely the impact and timeliness of the improvement plan.

Governors have not monitored effectively the use of additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Although the head of school and executive headteacher have established a clear expenditure plan, governors are not fully involved in the monitoring of this plan. Additional funding to promote physical education and sport is well monitored, and governors have accurately evaluated the impact of this.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust. The local authority conducted an audit in July 2017 to strengthen procedures further. Your staff monitor the physical and emotional well-being of pupils well. Leaders of safeguarding are vigilant in ensuring that pupils are kept safe at all times both in school and beyond. Pupils stated that they are well cared for and that they can always speak to an adult if there is an issue.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the last inspection but continues to require improvement so that pupils make good progress in all subjects. Our joint observations of pupils in classes revealed that training in developing subject knowledge and monitoring of planning have resulted in improvements in some lessons. Management of behaviour has improved

significantly. Pupils enjoy their lessons and are attentive and focused in most classes.

The previous inspection raised concerns regarding the accuracy of assessments and the subsequent ways in which they were used to inform planning and teaching. Both you and the local authority have led monitoring of assessments to establish accuracy and to inform teachers' understanding. As a result, teachers' assessments are now more accurate, and you are monitoring the ways in which teachers use this information to inform their planning of lessons. However, teachers do not consistently use this information in their planning. As a result, the most able pupils do not always receive adequate challenge, and the lower prior-attaining pupils do not receive sufficient support to access tasks and activities.

The early years resources and facilities have improved. Despite the turbulence of staffing, adults provide improved support for children to develop their early reading and writing skills. The early years improvement plan accurately identifies the areas for improvement. The early years lead is well supported by you and your executive headteacher in monitoring the impact of improvements.

You have structured training in the teaching of writing, and improvements are evident in the ways in which pupils craft their writing to suit different genres. Similarly, the new mathematics leader has introduced training which has resulted in some improvements in teaching. However, the teaching of reading for enjoyment and the development of reading skills have not improved as much. Pupils do not read regularly for enjoyment and do not regularly study how authors use language to convey meaning in a range of texts.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

You and your leadership team have shared your vision of effective behaviour for learning to all staff. As a consequence, staff manage pupil behaviour well and there is very little low-level disruption. Pupils understand the rules of the classroom and engage well. They are courteous, kind and supportive of each other. Pupils told me how friendly the school is. Pupils also told me how much they enjoy coming to school.

Pupils told me that some bullying occurs but it is dealt with quickly by staff. You have accurately identified small pockets of misbehaviour at lunchtime but, through judicious use of staff, you have succeeded in resolving these issues. As a consequence, most pupils behave well both in and around the school.

Pupils are highly inclusive and welcoming. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are embraced by pupils into the school community and consequently flourish socially. Pupils demonstrate high levels of empathy and understanding of the different needs of other pupils. Relationships between adults and pupils are also strong. Pupils feel safe and well protected. I spoke to many pupils who unanimously

told me that there is an adult in the school that they feel they can talk to about any issue that concerns them.

You have revised the school behaviour policy to ensure that staff, pupils and parents are clear about the importance of positive rewards alongside the role of sanctions. You have also introduced a set of school values into the school through assemblies and lessons. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this.

Pupils are punctual to lessons and to school. However, attendance is still below the national average. The attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is lower than that of other pupils. You have identified the issues about attendance and have addressed this in your improvement plan. You have introduced a series of incentives to encourage attendance, but it is too early to judge its impact.

Outcomes for pupils

Changes in leadership since the previous inspection have slowed the pace of improvements in teaching, learning and assessment and curriculum planning. However, since the transfer of leadership from the local authority to the Ivy Learning Trust, improvements have gained momentum. Committed leadership has resulted in more urgent action to address the areas for improvement outlined in the previous inspection report. Your self-evaluation acknowledges that currently pupils continue to make insufficient progress and attainment across both key stages.

Targets set by the local authority for Year 6 pupils are unlikely to be met in writing and mathematics at the expected standard. However, Year 6 pupils are currently on track to meet the target set for both the expected and higher standards in reading. Procedures to assess how well pupils are doing are much more accurate. Both support from the local authority and the Ivy Learning Trust have helped to establish more accurate assessments. However, teachers are not consistently using this information to inform their planning to meet the needs of different pupils.

Although there are improvements on previous assessments, many pupils continue to underachieve. The forecast for children leaving Reception having achieved a good level of development has improved but it is still below the national average. Conversely, the proportion of pupils who will achieve in line with the national average in the phonics screening check has risen. Pupils now achieve in line with the national average.

External support

The local authority and leaders of the Ivy Learning Trust have worked collaboratively to provide the school with new leadership. The local authority provided resources and support to lead improvement effectively from March 2017 until September 2017. However, the impact of support from the local authority was not as evident from September 2017. In preparation for opening as an academy in

September 2018, the local authority transferred leadership of improvements to the Ivy Learning Trust from January 2018. As a result, leadership of the school has strengthened markedly and improvements have gathered pace. The local authority continues to provide support regarding moderation of assessments, which has helped staff to establish accurate assessments.

Most of the improvements listed in the local authority's statement of action are being met. This document has been adapted by the Ivy Learning Trust in agreement with the local authority to accelerate the pace of improvement. Governors routinely use this document to monitor the rate of improvements. Your self-evaluation document links clearly to the areas for improvement identified in the plan.