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Mrs Helen Pearson
Principal
Ryecroft Primary Academy
Kesteven Close
Holmewood
Bradford
West Yorkshire
BD4 0LS

Dear Mrs Pearson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ryecroft Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 6 and 7 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third 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.

Having considered all the evidence I recommend that the school does not seek at this time to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bradford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Philip Riozzi
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 safeguarding arrangements are effective by:
 - implementing systems for checking the suitability of staff to work in the school in line with Department for Education (DfE) requirements
 - implementing a robust monitoring system to guarantee that all required checks on staff are in place and the school's record of checks is complete and up to date
 - making sure that the school's safeguarding policies and procedures are up to date and all staff are knowledgeable about how to promote pupils' safety and welfare.
- Rapidly improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders and governors have an accurate and comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the school's performance
 - improvement plans are sharply focused on the school's key weaknesses and are regularly and robustly reviewed and updated
 - performance management is used to drive improvement in teaching, accelerate pupils' progress, especially for disadvantaged pupils, and hold teachers and leaders more rigorously to account
 - additional funding, including the pupil premium, is used effectively and the impact of this funding on outcomes for pupils is closely monitored by senior leaders
 - pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enhanced, especially their knowledge of the faiths and cultures of people living in modern Britain.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and increase the progress pupils make, especially disadvantaged pupils and the most able, by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have the strong subject knowledge needed to teach pupils well and assess their progress accurately
 - assessment information is used effectively by teachers to plan learning activities which are closely matched to pupils' interests and levels of ability.

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 pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may

be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 6 and 7 June 2018

Evidence

Meetings were held throughout the inspection with members of the senior leadership team. A meeting took place with the teaching staff. The inspector held telephone discussions with the chief executive officer of the Northern Education Trust (NET) and the chair of the interim executive board (IEB). He met with representatives of the trust. The inspector listened to what pupils had to say about the school's improvements and observed pupils at play. He also listened to the views of a few parents as they dropped their children off at school. Alongside senior leaders, he observed parts of lessons in most classes and examined pupils' workbooks. Documents were scrutinised, including pupils' assessment information, minutes of IEB meetings, behaviour records and leaders' records of the checks they make on the quality of teaching.

The inspector did not look closely at safeguarding matters during the inspection. This is because safeguarding has been consistently effective at previous monitoring inspections. Governors continue to keep a close eye on safeguarding and child protection arrangements.

The behaviour of pupils was not an area for improvement identified at the inspection in November 2016. However, the inspector identified this as an emerging issue at the first monitoring inspection that took place in July 2017. The behaviour of pupils continues to be an area requiring attention.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, the temporary vice-principal and an assistant principal have left. A new vice-principal, associate vice-principal and a key stage 1 leader have been appointed. These are permanent appointments. Three other teachers and a member of the administration team have left. A class teacher has been appointed.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership has continued to improve since the last inspection. The resilient and determined principal continues to provide solid, effective leadership in the most challenging of circumstances. The seeds of improvement identified at the last visit have taken root.

Staffing is more stable than at any time since the school was placed in special measures. The successful recruitment of two effective vice-principals to work with the principal and assistant principal has created a sturdy senior team. These two leaders have only been in post for several weeks but have hit the ground running. They are already having a positive influence. The staff have confidence in the senior

team. They are optimistic and committed to further improvement.

A few middle leaders are proving to be very effective. For example, the sports and physical education (PE) leader is having a substantial, positive effect on pupils' physical and emotional development. The member of staff who leads personal, social, health and citizenship (PSHC) education is making a positive difference. A few teachers have begun to take responsibility for leading improvement projects. Senior leaders are beginning to identify opportunities for teachers to gradually develop subject leadership responsibilities. This is helped by the greater stability in staffing. The principal continues to lead the development of early years because a suitable candidate has not yet been found for this role.

Senior leaders continue to be systematic and regular in the checks they make on the quality of teaching. The leaders are observant, insightful, and evaluative, and sharply focused on the specific impact of teaching on individual pupils' learning. Leaders have the highest expectations of adults. They give clear, simple and helpful feedback to teachers. Teachers are accepting responsibility for the quality and impact of their work. This constant and effective work is the main contributor to improvements in teaching. However, leaders recognise that they still need to secure greater consistency in the quality of teaching across the school.

Leaders know what pupils have not yet learned and identify precisely what pupils need to learn next. Leaders continue to be meticulous in tracking the progress of each pupil. They know where the strengths and weaknesses are in the achievement of groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, across the age range. Leaders recognise the need to sharpen their overview of the progress of the most able pupils. This includes those pupils who have not previously attained higher standards, but who have the potential to do so.

Leaders do not underestimate the enormity of the task ahead. It has taken a long time for the school to arrive at this position of strength. However, at the current accelerated rate of improvement, the school should be on track to be removed from special measures within the required timescale.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The improvements in teaching that had begun to take shape by the time of the last monitoring inspection have continued. The principal has reassigned some teachers to different year groups, where they are having success. Relationships between adults and pupils continue to strengthen. The improving teaching is having a marked effect on pupils' behaviour. There is a growing consistency in the quality of teaching.

The majority of teachers are making increasingly effective use of assessment information. This means that the activities that teachers plan are well matched to pupils' learning needs. Teachers are largely adept at checking pupils' learning during

lessons and adapting teaching to the individual needs of pupils. Some particularly effective questioning by teachers is getting pupils thinking more deeply. The pace of lessons and variety of activities are better maintaining the involvement and commitment of pupils. A minority of teaching is weaker. This is mainly because less effective use is made of assessment information in a few classes. This results in tasks that are sometimes too hard for the pupils.

Improvements in provision in early years has been rapid since the last monitoring inspection. The leadership by the principal, external support from the trust, and adjustments to staffing have all played a part. Provision in Nursery, especially, has blossomed. Adults have become skilful and creative in the arrangement of resources to better challenge children. The quality of interactions between adults and children as they play, explore and investigate, has improved. This is resulting in strongly engaged children, who are making more rapid progress towards the early learning goals.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour has improved substantially since the last monitoring inspection. This is because of the more stable staffing situation, improving teaching, and the more consistent application of the reviewed behaviour policy. Pupils value the rewards they receive and know that all adults will carry out the agreed sanctions if they step out of line.

The inspector noticed a tangible shift in the attitudes of pupils compared with the previous inspection. Many pupils exhibit good manners, holding doors open for each other and saying 'please' and 'thank you'. Two pupils greeted and shook hands with the inspector. Adults are much more alert as they supervise pupils, showing them how to conduct themselves. They praise and reward pupils often when they demonstrate the right behaviours.

Regardless of much stronger teaching, a minority of older pupils are not working as hard as they might; they have yet to develop hard-working habits. However, they respect their teachers, who are managing behaviour more effectively, and they obey adults' instructions.

Pupils say that incidents of bullying are much less common and that adults deal with incidents effectively. All pupils who were asked were able to name adults in whom they feel confident to confide any worries they may have. Pupils report that it is not unusual to hear racist and homophobic language, but that this is much less frequent than it was.

The assistant principal is monitoring incidents of poor behaviour meticulously. She is using this information effectively to identify, and better support, individual pupils. The assistant principal knows the pupils exceptionally well. Improved management of behaviour has resulted in a substantial reduction in the number of incidents of

poor behaviour over time.

Leaders have managed to get on top of the inappropriate behaviour of the minority of those pupils who tend to misbehave. These pupils are largely engaging much more positively in their lessons and are being more cooperative. The number of fixed-term exclusions has risen but is not excessive. The principal has conducted exclusions strictly in accordance with the regulations. Records are detailed and thorough. Leaders expect to see a reduction in exclusions over time as the behaviour of individuals continues to improve.

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is much improved. Assemblies have included such themes as tolerance, the Muslim festival of Eid, the Christian festival of Pentecost and World Refugee Day. Through the school council, pupils have begun to learn about how they can make their views heard and how democracy works. Through the PSHC education curriculum, pupils learn about decision making and the rule of law. Among other learning, Year 6 pupils recently learned about 9/11, Year 1 pupils have visited the local church, Year 2 pupils have learned about Martin Luther King and Year 3 pupils have visited the Bradford Grand Mosque. This is all contributing to pupils' growing understanding about aspects of diversity in modern Britain. Almost all the pupils the inspector spoke with showed open-minded and respectful attitudes to different ways of living.

Leaders recognise the need to more methodically plan opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across the curriculum. While pupils receive religious education lessons, pupils say that these lessons do not always take place regularly. Pupils could recall few facts about major world faiths. Additionally, pupils cannot recall any learning in school about gender issues; what they know, they say they have learned outside school.

Outcomes for pupils

The quality of teaching in the core subjects of English and mathematics is resulting in better progress for most pupils over the last several months. However, current inconsistencies in the quality of some of the teaching still hampers the progress of some pupils. New approaches to teaching reading, writing and numeracy have yet to be embedded. For example, in mathematics, although pupils are developing greater fluency in calculating, there are too few opportunities in most classes to develop reasoning and problem-solving skills. Progress is not entirely consistent between year groups and subjects and for key groups of pupils.

Despite good progress for most pupils within the current year, too many pupils are not making up sufficient ground that was lost because of earlier, weaker teaching. Attainment remains low for many, including those pupils who are disadvantaged.

External support

The support that NET brokered with another local trust at the end of the autumn term has ended. NET has redoubled its efforts and has provided a package of support that is having a growing impact on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. School leaders are making effective use of the challenge and support in reading, writing and mathematics and in early years. As a result, teachers' subject knowledge continues to improve. The principal, in addition, has brokered additional support from other external professionals that is also having a positive impact.

Partnership working with other trust schools in Yorkshire and Lancashire is beginning to have a positive impact as the schools share effective practice. The principal has been instrumental in helping to shape the trust's emerging primary school strategy. Trust leaders rightly have confidence in the principal.

A robust and helpful pupil premium review, brokered by the trust, has helped the senior leaders to further refine systems and processes for meeting the needs of all pupils, and especially those who are disadvantaged.

The IEB continues to challenge leaders appropriately. The chair knows the school well and understands where improvements are needed. The work of the IEB is mostly accomplished by the chair and one other individual, who also works very hard. Board members recognise the importance of appointing new members who are not directly employed by the school. They are actively seeking out suitably experienced candidates.

The chief executive officer of NET regularly holds leaders to account for pupils' achievement, placing the actions and impact of school leaders under a bright spotlight.