17 October 2018

Mr G Rothwell
Princethorpe Junior School
Princethorpe Road
Weoley Castle
Birmingham
West Midlands
B29 5QB

Dear Mr Rothwell

**Special measures monitoring inspection of Princethorpe Junior School**

Following my visit to your school on 9–10 October 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 November 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 action plan is fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim 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

Jonathan Keay

Her Majesty’s Inspector
Annex

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

Take urgent action to increase the capacity of leaders to secure improvement in all areas by ensuring that:

- leaders refine their action plan to make sure that it is focused sharply on the key areas for improvement, with a rapid pace of change
- the expected outcomes are precise and measurable, and their impact is evaluated
- senior and middle leaders receive further training and support to enable them to support the headteacher in bringing about whole-school improvements
- the school’s curriculum is broad and balanced, meets statutory requirements and supports pupils’ learning and development
- leaders gather and monitor assessment information systematically, ensuring its accuracy, and use the information to inform future actions and interventions.

Improve the effectiveness of governors by ensuring that:

- they have a full complement of governors, possessing the necessary skills and capacity to bring about improvements to the school
- governors have an accurate picture of the school’s strengths, weaknesses and the subsequent actions needed to bring about improvements, so that they can hold leaders to account for these actions
- governors monitor the impact of the use of additional funding, including pupil premium and funding for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, and hold leaders to account for its use, making sure that it has a positive impact on pupils’ progress and attainment
- arrangements for managing teachers’ performance are in place and carried out in a timely way so that the quality of education for pupils improves
- the school’s website meets the requirements for the publication of statutory information.

Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils’ attainment and progress are improved by ensuring that:

- teachers use assessment information effectively to make sure that work is matched to pupils’ abilities
- teachers’ subject knowledge and practice in mathematics are effective across all year groups
- the teaching of mathematics develops pupils’ fluency and problem-solving
and reasoning skills

- pupils are given regular access to appropriate resources to develop and embed their mathematical understanding.

**Improve the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities by ensuring that:**

- individual needs are identified accurately so that support, provided by school and external partners, is planned, targeted and delivered effectively to meet those needs
- all staff receive training on how to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and are deployed effectively
- support for these pupils is monitored and evaluated in a systematic way.

**Improve pupils’ behaviour and attitudes to learning by ensuring that:**

- all staff take urgent action to reduce incidents of all types of bullying in the school, and support pupils more effectively to develop a greater understanding and tolerance of different faiths, cultures, beliefs and lifestyles
- leaders track behaviours in a coordinated way so that they can identify trends in low-level behaviours and intervene in a timely way
- low-level disruption is addressed swiftly, through consistent use of the school’s new behaviour policy
- lessons are better pitched to pupils’ abilities so that pupils are motivated and engaged in their learning, leading to better attendance and fewer exclusions
- pupils develop skills to become more confident and resilient learners.

An external review of governance should be undertaken 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 to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
Report on the first monitoring inspection on 9 October 2018 to 10 October 2018

Evidence

I met with you and your leadership team at the start of the inspection. I reviewed your actions plans and the local authority’s statement of action. I met with your business manager to review the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. I held a meeting with you and the senior learning mentor to explore the effectiveness of safeguarding.

I undertook observations of teaching in every classroom. These observations were undertaken jointly with you and your senior leaders. During observations we scrutinised work in pupils’ books. I also reviewed pupils’ books in separate meetings with leaders.

I met with the inclusion leader to review provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

I spoke to pupils during lessons observations and throughout the school day. I took account of your findings from pupil questionnaires. I reviewed your analysis of attendance, exclusions, and any incidents relating to bullying or behaviour.

I met with an adviser commissioned by the local authority and members of your new interim executive board (IEB).

Context

Since the last inspection, you have appointed a deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. The deputy headteacher joined the school in January 2018 and has a lead responsibility for pupils’ personal development, behaviour and welfare. The assistant headteacher took up post in September 2018 but joined the school as a class teacher in February 2018. The assistant headteacher has responsibility for leading English and the curriculum. You have also appointed two new class teachers.

The local authority’s commissioned school improvement service has worked with you to support the school in becoming an academy. A process has begun with a local multi-academy trust to sponsor Princethorpe Junior school.

The governing body was dissolved in the summer term and the local authority has established an IEB to oversee improvements and the effective implementation of development plans.
The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have ensured that action plans focus more sharply on the key areas identified at the last inspection. As a result, there has been a significant improvement in pupils’ behaviour and in the impact that teaching has on learning in the last 11 months. Leaders have rightly focused their initial work on addressing these areas.

The headteacher has recruited new leaders with a range of skills and expertise to bring greater capacity to the senior team. Leaders have worked with passion and drive. They have won the support of the staff and instilled a sense of positivity and ambition. However, leaders are frank about their position and recognise that there is some way to go until the school’s key issues are fully addressed. For example, developments in the curriculum, and in the wider provision for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, are at an earlier stage.

Parents and pupils with whom I spoke are proud of their school. They think that the school is improving. Staff share the enthusiasm and drive of leaders. They say that this is a happy school with a clear pathway and real warmth.

Whole-school development plans include appropriate milestones. Leaders know what they want to achieve and when. Despite these improvements, the plans to develop special needs provision are not as detailed. The inclusion leader has defined clearer actions for this aspect of provision over the next year. Her work over the last 11 months has been more focused on assessment systems and on meeting pupils’ needs. This now needs to be extended to take greater account of the anticipated impact of day-to-day support in class.

The school’s curriculum now meets statutory requirements. Leaders are using new schemes of work to ensure full coverage of the national curriculum. Delivery of the curriculum is centred on fostering pupils’ engagement. The school’s corridors and classrooms are already beginning to display and share the initial outcomes of the curriculum developments. Pupils’ work on display is of a high standard and celebrates the interest and enthusiasm that they have for their new learning. Pupils are currently immersed in their new Autumn term topics: Scrumdiddlyumptious, Blue Abyss, Stargazers and Darwin’s Delights. Pupils are keen to talk about their learning and want to find out more.

Leaders have introduced a new assessment system. Teachers now evidence developments in pupils’ learning using matrices. These matrices are then used to track pupils’ achievement. Though further moderation and staff training are required, the new assessment system is an important shift in practice. Over time, and with further development, information will provide a more reliable and valid picture of the impact that teaching has on learning compared to what was in place previously.
Governance has not been effective. A review was commissioned at the start of the year. The review identified that the governing body was too small, and that the level of challenge and support offered to leaders was not strong enough. The governing body was dissolved in the summer term and a new IEB has been established. However, throughout the course of the last 11 months, the school has been effectively supported by the local authority, commissioned partners, and other schools and alliances locally. External support has been well coordinated by leaders and the school’s adviser. This joint work has provided a high level of support and challenge.

The new IEB’s chair and vice-chair have an accurate view of the school’s strengths and areas for development. They are highly skilled professionals with expertise in governance, finance and early years. They are already working with leaders to further improve the school’s overall effectiveness. They are aware of the significant improvements in pupils’ behaviour and are focused on gaining greater consistency in the quality of teaching. The vice-chair has begun scrutinising the use of the budget, including the impact of additional funding. There is much more work to do in evaluating the use of pupil premium funding and funding for pupils with special educational needs SEN and/or disabilities. Evaluations have not been done effectively in the past.

Leaders have commissioned an external review of the school’s use of pupil premium funding. It is scheduled to take place in November 2018. Given the shortcomings identified in this aspect of provision, the review should have taken place at the earliest opportunity. This would have allowed leaders to make full use of any findings for the new academic/financial year. However, the school’s new strategy does meet requirements. The strategy clearly sets out the barriers that disadvantaged pupils face, the strategies that will be used to remove these barriers, the anticipated costs and the expected outcomes.

Arrangements are now in place for managing teachers’ performance. All staff are allocated to a senior leader and receive reviews of their work.

The school has commissioned a new website which is due to be published imminently. Leaders are aware that this must meet the requirements for the publication of statutory information.

Leaders have received support to deal with all of the key issues identified at the last inspection. A significant area for development has been provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Systems and procedures are now in place to ensure that pupils’ individual needs are identified accurately. The inclusion leader has received effective support from external partners. As outlined above, there is scope for development plans of this aspect of the school’s provision to improve even further.
Staff have received training to improve the support that they offer pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Every pupil now has an individual plan that sets out how their learning will be supported. Teachers are given additional support to help them match activities to pupils’ identified needs. This strategy is already having a positive impact, but systems are quite new. In some lessons, activities do not adequately match pupils’ needs. Teachers will require further support as these new systems are embedded. Provision for this group of pupils remains a key area for improvement.

**Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Teachers have received substantial training and support since the last inspection. Support has been intensive and there has been much for teachers to take on board and work with. Teachers are committed to implementing all that has been put in place, and their practice is improving. They are keen to share their passion for teaching and want the very best for pupils. There are pockets of very strong practice across the school. Stronger teaching is characterised by well-thought-out activities, effective questioning and high expectations. However, there remains variability in the quality of teaching.

The teaching of mathematics is strongest. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and have access to appropriate resources. They are implementing the knowledge and skills that they have gained from training and support to ensure that pupils develop their mathematical fluency, problem-solving and reasoning skills. This was evident in lessons I observed during the inspection. For example, in a Year 4 lesson, pupils were presented with deliberate written method errors by their teacher. They were then asked to look for mistakes and find missing numbers. The activity had appropriate pace, everyone felt challenged, and pupils were readily applying the skills that they had been learning.

Some teaching does not support pupils to make strong progress. This is particularly the case in some aspects of reading and writing. Some of the objectives that pupils are presented with are unclear. In some lessons, time is not used effectively. For example, during the inspection, some pupils were asked to copy out sentences as opposed to focusing more sharply on the learning point.

Teachers have had limited opportunities to observe one another teach. As a result, they are not yet clear about their shared strengths and areas for development. Having met the whole of the teaching team, it is clear that staff are keen to support one another in their journey of improvement.

**Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

The staff have secured significant improvements in pupils’ behaviour. Instances of any low-level behaviour were rare during the inspection. Pupils report that behaviour at their school is much improved. Pupils raised no concerns about bullying.
A new positive approach to behaviour management was introduced following the last inspection. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour are carefully tracked by leaders. There have been very few instances that have resulted in staff arranging meetings with families to discuss any concerns about pupils’ behaviour in the last two terms.

Pupils are very well-mannered and want to please. They move around the school sensibly. Pupils are keen to earn rewards and to talk about their learning.

These substantial improvements are also as a result of changes to the curriculum. Pupils are engaged in what they are doing and look forward to finding out about what they will learn next. Pupils are learning about different faiths, cultures and beliefs. Attendance is improving and is monitored on a daily basis. Persistent absence has fallen but remains above national levels.

Fixed-term exclusions have reduced considerably. There have been no permanent exclusions since the last inspection.

Safeguarding is robust. The school’s pastoral team works closely with children and their families to make sure that everyone is safe. Pupils say that they can go to a learning mentor if they have any worries or concerns. Record-keeping is of a high standard. All staff take pupils’ safety and welfare very seriously.

As a result of high-quality pastoral support, an improved curriculum and better behaviour, pupils are growing in confidence and resilience.

**Outcomes for pupils**

Provisional key stage 2 results for 2018 indicate that outcomes remain low. Though there has been an improvement in progress scores in reading, scores in writing and mathematics have declined. The school’s internal data shows a variable picture of pupils’ achievement. This variability is also evident in pupils’ books. The needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are not yet being adequately met.

However, the overall quality of teaching has improved. It will take time for this stronger teaching to fully impact on pupils’ progress.

Pupils’ skills are now fully screened when they joint the school. Any gaps in pupils’ understanding, particularly in reading, are being quickly addressed. This effective practice must now be sustained.

**External support**

Senior and middle leaders have received extensive support from the local authority’s commissioned school improvement partner. This support has included working
alongside professionals in other settings. This training, combined with the drive of the headteacher and appointment of two strong leaders, has helped the school secure many key improvements.

**Priorities for further improvement:**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- further work is undertaken to develop and monitor the quality of day-to-day support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities
- there are wider opportunities for teachers to share the most effective practice in the school
- the IEB ensures that there is greater scrutiny of the impact of additional funding, and that the school's website meets statutory requirements.