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Mr Mangal Singh
Wilkes Green Infant School (NC)
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Dear Mr Singh

Special measures monitoring inspection of Wilkes Green Infant School (NC)

Following my visit with James McNeillie, HMI, to your school on 13 and 14 November 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 December 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 may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the 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

Tim Hill
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels by ensuring that:
 - leaders have an accurate understanding of the school’s strengths and weaknesses
 - there are robust systems in place for monitoring and evaluating all aspects of the school’s work
 - school leaders make effective use of the assessment information they have to monitor pupils’ outcomes and to hold teachers to account
 - governors have a clear and realistic view of the school’s performance and fully undertake all their statutory duties
 - the approaches the school uses to promote the importance of good attendance are understood and followed by parents.
- Improve outcomes achieved by pupils at the end of Year 2 by ensuring that:
 - pupils of all abilities are enabled to make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics
 - disadvantaged pupils receive the necessary support to help them achieve in line with other pupils nationally
 - pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive support that is closely matched to their needs.
- Improve the quality of teaching so it is at least good by ensuring that teachers:
 - have high expectations of all pupils, especially the most able and the most able disadvantaged, and set appropriately challenging tasks
 - provide better opportunities for pupils to develop their spoken communication skills
 - develop pupils’ thinking skills so that they reflect more deeply on their learning
 - develop pupils’ comprehension skills so that they have a better understanding of what they have read
 - plan and deliver activities that allow pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills to increasingly difficult problems.
- Improve the early years provision by developing the use of the outdoor classroom so that children are able to make independent choices and initiate their own learning.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this

aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 13 November 2018 and 14 November 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher. They also met with other interim senior leaders, pupils, parents, members of the interim executive board (IEB), including the chair, and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes throughout the school and reviewed a range of pupils' work. Many inspection activities were conducted jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also heard pupils read and discussed their attitudes towards reading.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in March 2018, there have been further, significant changes in staffing. The previous interim headteacher left the school at the end of May 2018 and a new executive headteacher from Wilkes Green Junior School took up post at the start of June. Several teaching staff left the school at the end of the summer term, including two senior leaders, one of whom was the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). The school currently has two interim deputy headteachers and an assistant headteacher responsible for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Three members of the IEB resigned in the summer term, including the chair of the board. All three members have been replaced and a new chair has been appointed.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

In a short space of time, you have been extremely effective in identifying the key issues in the school. You have quickly galvanised the new senior leadership team and channelled everyone's energy to focus on core priorities. All leaders now have a clear understanding of the school's current strengths and weaknesses. They have quickly set in motion a wide range of initiatives and actions to address the school's most pressing issues. However, the current school improvement plan does not identify, with enough precision, some of the priorities that leaders have more recently recognised. You are aware of the enormity of the task ahead of you and show strong determination to succeed. Inspectors found evidence of where improvements are starting to be embedded.

Despite even more staffing upheaval and additional changes to systems and practices, staff have adapted very well to new ways of working. This is because you and other leaders support staff effectively, which has helped to improve staff morale further. There is a strong sense of teamwork. Staff show commitment, and all embrace the school improvement agenda. Your decision to strategically deploy Wilkes Green Junior School staff has enabled greater staff stability. New staff are quickly getting to grips with understanding and teaching the key stage 1 curriculum.

Leaders are rigorously monitoring teaching and learning. They agree a clear focus for, and undertake, monitoring activities that are closely linked to the school's priorities. Leaders use their findings to identify the right actions to develop teachers' practice. This approach is supporting improvements in teaching, enabling most pupils to make better gains in their learning than previously. Through careful evaluation, leaders have identified that the current curriculum is somewhat limited and does not offer pupils the depth of experience required to learn effectively and develop their knowledge and understanding. Leaders plan to focus on whole-school curriculum development in the spring and summer terms.

You recently surveyed staff to find out what they needed to enable them to increase their effectiveness. You have already started to use this information to plan training and individual support for teachers so they can develop their expertise and subject knowledge. You have capitalised on the skills of experienced key stage 1 staff to share good practice. For example, a senior leader led phonics training to enable teachers to grow in confidence when teaching early reading skills. This has proved successful and has made a positive difference to raising teachers' expectations, and is improving the quality of phonics teaching.

At my last visit, leaders had started to make changes to whole-school assessment systems. New leaders have made further changes and introduced some new ways to assess and record pupils' achievements. However, these systems are in the early stages of implementation and not yet embedded. Several new standardised assessments are planned with the aim of providing helpful information to check that pupils are making good progress over time. You are making sure that teachers' current assessments are carefully moderated to ensure better accuracy. Leaders are trying to make assessment as efficient and purposeful as possible. This is helping to reduce teachers' workload and enable them to concentrate on planning the right activities that lead to successful learning.

Leaders do not have an effective written plan in place to show how they will spend the pupil premium funding for this academic year. Leaders have not evaluated last year's funding, although they are aware that there were some large gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in some subjects at the end of key stage 1. Leaders use some of the funding to provide additional learning support and/or enrichment activities for pupils. However, at present, leaders are unable to explain convincingly how effective these approaches are in raising levels of achievement. Leaders plan to have a pupil premium strategy in place by the end of this month.

The effective leadership of provision for pupils with SEND has been hampered by changes in staffing. At the time of the last inspection, a new interim SENCo had just begun to address some of the weaknesses. Now the school has a new SENCo who has recently undertaken a range of monitoring activities to gain an understanding of the quality of provision. While the SENCo is working hard and is proactive in putting in place arrangements to meet the needs of pupils with SEND, there is still

considerable work to do before their needs are met consistently well.

Despite most members of the IEB having only joined the board in July 2018, they have a very secure understanding of the school's needs. Leaders provide the IEB with detailed information about the school's performance. They use this judiciously, in addition to visits to the school, to check the effectiveness of leaders' work. Consequently, the IEB is having a very direct and positive impact on navigating the school through its journey of improvement. Minutes of meetings indicate that the IEB is sharply focused on the learning experiences and well-being of pupils. The IEB holds leaders to account for the school's performance and focuses well on pupils' outcomes.

The large majority of parents and carers speak very positively about different aspects of the school's work. Parents agree that their children are happy in school and are well looked after by staff. They valued leaders' recent efforts to engage them more in their children's learning through events such as 'stay and play' and phonics workshops. Parents said that they felt less informed about staffing changes, although were pleased that there now appears to be much greater stability with the teaching staff.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There has been a marked improvement in the quality of teaching since the last monitoring inspection. This is because leaders have made their expectations about teaching explicit and provided the necessary support to teachers to help them improve their practice. Teachers are generally clearer about the learning outcomes they want pupils to achieve. However, sometimes there is a mismatch between the intended learning, the planned activity and the actual outcome pupils reach.

At the time of the last inspection, leaders were addressing weaknesses in teachers' subject knowledge and developing a consistent approach to teaching through a range of training opportunities. However, several teachers who had benefited from this training have since left the school. This has left leaders with the challenging task of 'starting from scratch' with a few new members of staff, particularly those teachers less familiar with key stage 1.

Typically, teachers structure their lessons carefully and provide clear instructions to pupils on how to achieve success. They monitor pupils' learning throughout the lesson, usually providing timely feedback to pupils if they make errors in their work. This is one of the strongest areas of their practice and is enabling pupils to make better progress. Teachers' support for pupils who speak English as an additional language is not consistently well thought out. Consequently, the needs of these pupils are often not being fully met.

Since the time of the last monitoring inspection, leaders have worked hard to rectify issues related to the teaching of reading. Teachers now ensure that reading books

for the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are well matched to their ability. Furthermore, teachers have placed greater emphasis on the direct teaching of reading comprehension skills. This is supporting pupils' achievement well. Pupils, including the most able pupils, do not have a rich knowledge of different authors. Too many pupils are not accessing a wide enough range of high-quality fiction, despite the school library containing a good stock of suitable books.

Very recently, leaders introduced a new mathematics scheme to help bring about more consistency in the acquisition and development of pupils' essential numeracy skills. Early indicators suggest that this new approach is helping pupils who have previously underachieved, to plug gaps in their mathematical understanding. Consequently, pupils are beginning to show greater confidence in their number work and demonstrate better recall of basic number facts. However, sometimes the most able pupils do not get enough opportunities to apply their mathematical skills.

Teachers now show a better understanding of the needs of lower attaining pupils and usually modify learning tasks well to cater for their needs. For instance, a carefully structured approach to the teaching of writing is giving pupils more confidence to write independently. Most teaching assistants make good use of their time to support these pupils effectively. However, the provision for pupils with SEND remains too variable and is not yet consistently good. This is because teachers do not always adapt their teaching sufficiently well or fully utilise in-class support to meet the specific needs of pupils with SEND.

In early years, building alterations have significantly enhanced the learning environment for children. Permanent partitions between the Reception classrooms have noticeably helped to reduce noise levels. Classrooms are tidier and better organised, with easy access to resources for children. This has resulted in the creation of an environment much more conducive to learning. Leaders sought advice from a consultant and have already acted upon some of their recommendations. However, disappointingly, the initial improvements staff had begun to make to the early years outdoor area, identified at the last monitoring inspection, have not been maintained. This is mainly, although not solely, due to changes in staffing. Teachers have not given sufficient consideration to the planning of the outdoor area in order to develop children's learning and enable them to make choices. Resources are not versatile enough, and therefore children cannot change, modify or control their environment with ease. This is holding back children's learning and development.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are happy, and they feel safe and enjoy coming to school. The responses from the school's recent questionnaire for parents supports this view. Staff develop warm, nurturing relationships with pupils. Pupils treat adults and other pupils with respect. Pupils are kind to each other, and work collaboratively and play sensibly during less structured times.

Pupils' behaviour has improved further since the last inspection. There are fewer instances of low-level disruption and more pupils remain on task and engage well with their learning. Most pupils demonstrate an enthusiastic response to teachers' questions and show pride in their work. Some inconsistencies in the quality of handwriting and presentation remain, although these are both gradually improving.

Senior leaders are notified of the few instances of poor behaviour and take quick action to deter pupils from repeating the behaviour. While leaders record the more serious behaviour incidents, they do not systematically analyse overall behaviour incidences – including low-level disruption – to identify patterns or trends. This means that leaders are not as successful as they could be in preventing minor behaviours from escalating.

Leaders continue to focus on raising pupils' attendance. It is improving and is better than this time last year. Overall attendance is now broadly in line with the national average figure. However, disadvantaged pupils' attendance is lower than that of other pupils, although the gap is reducing. Leaders are continuing to engage with parents to encourage good attendance. They challenge them by pointing out the importance of their child attending regularly, but also provide support in equal measure.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders' improvements to the quality of teaching are beginning to have a more positive impact on pupils' outcomes over time. Compared with the previous year, the proportions of pupils in 2018 attaining the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1 increased. However, the proportions remain below national averages across all three subjects. In addition, there are some wide variations between certain groups. For example, boys are achieving noticeably less well in reading when compared with girls.

Leaders know that the current Year 2 pupils still have a lot of catching up to do, especially in writing and mathematics. Work in pupils' books shows that teachers are becoming more successful in addressing gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. The current progress of pupils, as indicated through their work and the school's own assessments, shows that most are making better progress than in the past. However, some inconsistencies remain where teachers' expectations vary. This is particularly the case with the most able pupils where work set is often not challenging enough. For example, in the wider curriculum, topic work rarely requires pupils to think deeply or grapple with a task or question. This prevents them from making the best possible progress.

Despite a marginal improvement compared with the 2017 results, the proportion of Year 1 pupils passing the phonics screening check in 2018 remained much lower than the national average. Encouragingly, current Year 1 pupils are making more

rapid progress in developing their phonics skills as a result of better teaching.

External support

External support provided on behalf of the local authority has been well targeted to help the school continue to improve. The 'priority partner' has helped to rationalise support, ensuring that leaders are not overwhelmed with too much guidance. Generally, the amount of support the school receives is reducing.

Leaders took the decision to temporarily put on hold support from Colmore Teaching School Alliance while they ascertained the school's precise needs. More recently, leaders have agreed a plan with Colmore that is fit for purpose and closely matched to the school's improvement priorities. During the summer term, you commissioned advice from an early years consultant. Leaders acted quickly on the recommendations and began to make changes to early years practice. This is having a positive effect on the indoor provision for children.