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Mrs Erica Barnett
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Barnett

Special measures monitoring inspection of Waltham Holy Cross Primary School

Following my visit with Nick Rudman, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 4–5 December 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 most 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 December 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 school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

The local authority's statement of action was judged fit for purpose by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors soon after the school's most recent section 5 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 Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Lucas
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - holding teachers more sharply to account for pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics
 - ensuring that the impact of the pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils is thoroughly evaluated and is used far more effectively
 - ensuring that middle leaders make a demonstrable difference in their areas of responsibility to demonstrate the impact of their work on the progress pupils make
 - making sure that the monitoring of teaching leads to consistent improvements
 - providing the governing body with more detailed information about the achievement of different groups of pupils so that governors are able to hold leaders fully to account for the impact of their actions
 - using assessment information more precisely to ensure that all pupils make good progress from their varying starting points.
- Accelerate pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - ensuring that teachers plan activities precisely to meet the needs of pupils across the school and across subjects
 - assessing pupils' learning accurately to check and improve the progress of different groups of pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and the most able.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good by ensuring that:
 - there are high expectations of what all pupils can achieve
 - learning is planned to suit the different abilities of pupils and provides opportunities for pupils, particularly the most able, to deepen their understanding
 - assessment information is used effectively to intervene and provide timely support for those who need to catch up, so that pupils make good progress.
- Improve the provision in the early years by:
 - ensuring that leaders evaluate and analyse assessment information so that activities meet children's needs
 - providing more meaningful and purposeful activities for children so that they sustain their focus and achieve well
 - providing more opportunities to develop basic skills in reading, writing and

mathematics both inside and outside the early years environment.

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 4–5 December 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, both deputy headteachers, eight subject leaders, the inclusion leader, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), a group of teachers and cover supervisors, the learning mentor and family support worker, two groups of pupils, the chair of the interim executive board (IEB), and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors, together with school leaders, scrutinised pupils' work and the school's assessment information.

Inspectors also spoke with pupils informally in lessons and at breaktime and lunchtime and considered opinions expressed in three letters from individual pupils. Inspectors took account of the views of parents spoken with on each day of the inspection and of the 162 recent responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also considered views expressed in 10 letters and emails from parents and grandparents received over the course of the inspection. Inspectors held phone discussions with one parent and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been several staffing changes at Waltham Holy Cross Primary School. A new key stage 1 mathematics leader has been appointed and there have been recent appointments to other subject leader posts. Leaders have ensured that the SENCo has more time to devote to her role. Six teachers have left the school and four have joined.

There has also been a review of, and changes to, the structure and personnel of governance. In May 2018, the IEB took over responsibility for governance. In September 2018, a new chair of the IEB was appointed, along with three new IEB members.

Leaders ensured that an external review of how they use pupil premium funding was carried out. There are plans in place for the school to join a multi-academy trust by the end of the academic year.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

While the quality of education is improving, inspection evidence supports leaders' view that, initially, school improvement was not as cohesive, swift or impactful as it needed to be. Under the skilful guidance of the experienced chair of the IEB, the committed senior leaders are more effective in bringing about the significant and rapid improvements required.

Since the previous inspection, there have been several changes to the structure and personnel of governance. The time and effort taken to manage these changes has contributed, in part, to the slower rate of school improvement. The current chair of the IEB has been described by leaders as 'providing a burst of energy' in the development of the school. She is providing strong leadership and helping leaders to get to grips with the further action that needs to be taken. The IEB has made it an ongoing priority to ensure that it is provided with more detailed information about the quality of education. For example, IEB members visit school to meet with leaders and assure themselves of the quality of provision.

Recent decisions made by the IEB have enabled school leaders to build on their earlier work and establish a sharper focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders are correctly beginning to adopt a more strategic approach to their work and are maintaining a clear focus on the progress pupils make. While there is a necessary acceleration in the pace of change, until recently, leaders have not effectively evaluated the impact of the many strategies they have put in place. This has limited their ability to prioritise the strategies that are the most effective to take forward.

Working closely with the IEB, leaders are amending and developing school action plans. Improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment rightly remains a priority for school leaders. Leaders agree that much work remains to be done to ensure that they achieve their ambition for the school to be judged at least good.

The headteacher, supported very well by her senior team, has, in a time of considerable change, continued to foster positive relationships with parents and carers. Most parents are wholeheartedly supportive of the work of the headteacher and her staff. Parents voiced their appreciation of the level of care and support offered to their children by staff. Several parents sought out inspectors to explain how their children had grown in confidence because of the work of adults at the school.

Teachers, including those new to the school, told inspectors how much they value the support and challenge leaders, including members of the IEB, provide. For example, teachers explained how leaders offer them one-to-one support in developing specific aspects of their teaching practice.

The effectiveness of subject leaders remains too variable. As a result of the training they have received, subject leaders in English and mathematics are better placed to carry out their roles. These leaders are making use of the ongoing support of the local authority to bring about improvements in their subject areas. Subject leaders in mathematics told inspectors how the recently amended challenge and support of the IEB is helping them to improve their practice. The impact of the strongest practice can be seen, for example, in the continued improvements in pupils' achievement in writing. It is too soon to evaluate the work of the enthusiastic

leaders of other subjects, some of whom are new to their posts. Leaders' use of the pupil premium, while improved, is not yet effective. The external review of how leaders use pupil premium funding took place in June 2018. Leaders have amended the range of strategies they use to ensure that disadvantaged pupils receive the support they need. The impact of this work is, at this stage, limited and its leadership not fully effective. Disadvantaged pupils' progress is still not as good as it should be. This is due, in part, to the fact that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains too uneven. The IEB remains unclear as to the impact of leaders' deployment of the funding to support disadvantaged pupils and is rightly acting to remedy this situation.

Leaders, including the IEB, accurately judge that much work remains to be done to ensure that the quality of provision in early years is as good as it should be. The rate of improvement has been affected by instability in staffing. The current leader of the early years understands the scale of the task and has ambitious, credible plans which she is already enacting. Her very recent actions to improve the quality of provision within the early years are already having an impact. For example, the inside learning areas are well organised and are better supporting children's learning. However, considerable inconsistencies in the quality of provision remain.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Despite improvements, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains too uneven to enable pupils to make the consistently strong progress needed for them to quickly catch up.

Shortly after the previous inspection, leaders rightly put in place systems and processes which provided them with a more accurate understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Senior leaders now have a precise understanding of the progress pupils make from their starting points. Leaders use this information to hold teachers to account for the quality of education. Inspectors visited almost all classrooms with senior leaders and agreed with leaders' evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of practice overall. Evidence showed that the impact of leaders' work to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains too variable.

Leaders have focused considerable resources on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in upper key stages 1 and 2, and in English and mathematics. Inspectors saw evidence of strong teaching practice over time in some classes in upper key stage 2 and in upper key stage 1. However, leaders recognise that the quality of teaching in early years and in lower key stages 1 and 2 and across the wider curriculum remains too variable. This leaves Year 5 and 6 pupils with too much ground to make up in their learning. Hence, their progress across key stage 2 is not what it should be.

Senior leaders have made clear their high expectations as to how teachers should

use assessment to accelerate pupils' learning. Teachers' effectiveness in translating the strategies expected of them into practice varies. Where teachers implement the school's systems well, devise suitable learning activities and make well-judged amendments to learning, pupils make better progress. This practice is not as commonplace as leaders would like. Where practice is weaker, teachers do not implement their careful planning with the dexterity required for pupils to make enough progress.

While teachers are better informed about the strategies needed to bring the best out of most-able pupils, in some classes they are not employing these strategies as effectively as they should do. Where overall teaching practice is stronger over time these pupils do make better progress. Similarly, teachers' provision for disadvantaged pupils is not consistently strong enough. Leaders provided evidence that disadvantaged pupils are catching up, but this is not in the consistent, rapid manner that is required.

Evidence from work in pupils' books demonstrates that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in subjects other than English and mathematics is too variable. Where practice is strongest, pupils respond very well and acquire knowledge and skills in a logical way and, in turn, make better progress. However, this practice is not as widespread as it needs to be, and this is limiting pupils' progress across the curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inspection evidence supports parents' and pupils' views that leaders have successfully created a caring ethos in which very many pupils feel secure and happy in their learning and play. The school is a warm, welcoming one in which pupils typically behave well. Pupils speak highly of their teachers, teaching assistants and lunchtime staff. Inspectors observed pupils speaking confidently and happily with adults in the school.

Teachers establish clear routines which pupils respond to well in lessons. Pupils are typically keen to learn and are supportive of each other in doing so. On the occasions where pupils' attention drifts, this is due to the less well-structured learning they are undertaking. However, pupils respond well to teachers' directions and are quickly refocused on their learning.

Pupils mix easily and well at breaktimes and lunchtimes. They play with energy and enthusiasm, be it in small groups or when playing more organised games such as football.

Disadvantaged pupils' attendance is not as good as it should be and there is no clear strategy in place to bring about the rapid improvements necessary.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' progress across key stages and within subjects reflects the unevenness of current teaching and the legacy of weaker and disrupted teaching.

In 2018, by the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment rose and was broadly in line with school targets. Pupils' progress, while improved, was low in reading and mathematics. Pupils' progress in writing improved, as it had done in 2017 and was broadly in line with national averages. The progress disadvantaged pupils and most-able pupils made remained lower than it should have been. Too few pupils achieved the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined.

Inspectors and leaders sampled current pupils' work together, listened to pupils read and discussed evidence from the school's assessment information. This evidence confirmed that the progress pupils make across key stage 2 remains too irregular within subjects and year groups. As a result of leaders' actions, pupils in upper key stage 2 are now making better progress. However, pupils are not catching up to the extent which is needed.

By the end of key stage 1, the proportions of pupils achieving expected standards in each of reading, writing and mathematics fell in 2018. Leaders confirm that pupils did not make the progress of which they were capable. A scrutiny of pupils' work and leaders' detailed assessment information demonstrates that, while there are some improvements, pupils' progress remains too inconsistent.

In 2018, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check by the end of Year 1 improved and was in line with the national average. This reflects improvements made to the quality of teaching of phonics.

The proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year fell in 2018 and fewer children were judged to be exceeding expected levels across all areas.

External support

Leaders are establishing productive working relationships with other schools. Leaders provided inspectors with evidence of how work with other schools is helping them to confirm the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupil progress.

The local authority has provided appropriate support for senior and some subject leaders. Like school leaders, the local authority's support has focused on improving subject leadership in English and mathematics. The local authority has also provided the school with support to improve the quality of governance and has supported the development of the early years provision.

Leaders and managers should take further action to:

- Develop more effective approaches to raising disadvantaged pupils' attendance so it is at least in line with national averages.