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Mrs Tania Devereux
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Deveraux

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Sprites Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 29 January 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you and your deputy headteacher, middle leaders, a group of pupils, two members of the local governing body (including the chair), and a representative of the REAch2 Academy Trust. The trust's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the last inspection, seven teachers have left the school and six new teachers have been appointed. A new deputy headteacher joined the senior leadership team in September 2018. The number of pupils on the school roll has fallen slightly. In December 2018, trust leaders received a letter from the Department for Education warning them of its concerns and the risk of termination of its funding agreement.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You have acted decisively to challenge underperformance and make much-needed improvements to the quality of teaching. Those unable to meet your raised expectations have left the school. New staff have settled quickly. Together, they demonstrate a corporate willingness to improve their practice and support you in resolving the issues raised in the last inspection.

You and your team of leaders show a clear understanding of what the school does well, and the actions needed to improve it. The improvement plan and the statement of action focus suitably on tackling the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Changes made to the school day have increased the time for learning and enabled pupils to maintain their focus on learning. 'Non-negotiables' have been agreed with staff to raise expectations, improve provision and support pupils with their learning.

You have taken responsibility for improving behaviour. This is promoting a more positive culture and ethos. School is a calm, purposeful place to be. You have a revised policy and new procedures for managing behaviour. Pupils are increasingly aware of the raised expectations of them. Good support provided in the 'Thrive' unit has led to far fewer pupils being excluded from school this year. Pupils are responding well to new rewards introduced for good behaviour and attendance, including 'star of the week'. More enrichment activities, such as the recent residential visit for pupils in Year 6 and termly off-site visits for each class, are increasing pupils' learning and enjoyment of school.

Your increased monitoring of attendance and greater challenge to parents of pupils who are regularly absent from school are leading to some improvement. Overall attendance is marginally better than it was at the last inspection. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is slightly higher than it was at this stage last year. The proportion of pupils persistently absent from school is falling, but remains too high.

Your deputy headteacher has responsibility for improving teaching, learning and assessment. Through staff training and increased monitoring, he is holding staff more accountable for pupils' outcomes. His scrutiny of pupils at work in lessons is helping teachers to understand what they are doing well and the next steps they need to take to improve further. This is beginning to lead to greater consistency, particularly in the way teachers manage pupils' behaviour. However, teaching remains too variable and, at times, is not good enough.

Not all of your teachers are following the recently agreed 'non-negotiables'. Inspection findings and your own monitoring have identified that staff need to make much better use of the information they have about their pupils to plan different learning that stretches, enthuses and engages them. Expectations of pupils are higher, but this is not always evident in their books. The presentation of work

continues to be an area for significant improvement, particularly for boys. Feedback provided for pupils, in line with your agreed procedures, does not challenge them to complete all work or eradicate common errors.

Improved teaching and new procedures to assess how well pupils are doing are leading to steady gains in pupils' progress in both key stages. This is most noticeable in Year 6, where current assessments show that pupils are making better progress in reading and mathematics. However, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics of pupils in other classes, including those with SEND and disadvantaged pupils, remains well below the expected standards.

You are taking steps to improve pupils' basic skills. To strengthen early reading and writing in key stage 1, you have provided additional staff and further training in phonics teaching. Pupils are encouraged to read far more often with staff and at home with their parents. In key stage 2, spelling, punctuation and grammar are taught daily to fill gaps in pupils' knowledge. In mathematics, pupils are asked to apply what they have learned in lessons to solve mini-problems. These approaches are new and need more time to show that they will lead to sustained improvement.

Training for leaders of subjects and key stages is improving their leadership. For example, the leader of mathematics has provided training for teachers on making better use of resources to develop their teaching. Key-stage leaders are using their expertise during learning walks to identify what is working well and where staff need further support. This is generating better teamwork and sharing of ideas. Not all middle leaders show a firm grasp of using assessment data to analyse pupils' progress and plan additional support for those who need it.

A recent review has helped you to reorganise the work of your leader of SEND. She now has time to support staff in identifying individual pupils' needs and planning provision for them. This work is at an early stage of development. It is welcomed by teachers who appreciate the guidance and support she provides. You acknowledge that further steps are needed to ensure that teachers plan suitable learning for pupils with SEND, rather than expecting them to complete the same tasks as others.

The findings of a recent external review of how you use the pupil premium have helped you revise spending plans. Not all of the spending priorities are focused solely on disadvantaged pupils. Some of the funding is allocated to making improvements that will benefit all pupils, such as additional staffing costs to improve teaching. You, your governors and the trust recognise the importance of making timely checks to ensure that the pupil premium has a direct impact on improving the outcomes achieved by disadvantaged pupils this year.

The school's local governing body continues to provide you with effective support. Governors are fully supportive of your work to improve the school. Until recently, there has been some disagreement between governors and trust leaders. Governors felt that the trust was slow to respond to the school's need for urgent support following the last inspection. More support is being provided and relations are

improving. Reviews commissioned by the trust in November 2018 and, more recently, in January 2019 have provided you and your team with a clear steer for making further improvements. You value highly the training for teachers and for middle leaders provided by the trust.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body and the chief executive officer of the REAch2 Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector