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Ms Sara Albon
Drybrook Primary School
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Dear Ms Albon

Special measures monitoring inspection of Drybrook Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 and 13 February 2019, 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 April 2018.

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 not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Gloucestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2018.

- Urgently improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that leaders develop precisely targeted plans which focus on rapidly improving teaching and raising pupils' achievement
 - improving the accuracy of assessment so that leaders are better able to set challenging targets for pupils' learning
 - embedding robust monitoring systems which enable leaders to swiftly identify when teaching needs to improve, so that pupils make stronger progress
 - developing more effective use of additional funding so that disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities consistently achieve well
 - developing a broad, rich curriculum that enables pupils to develop secure knowledge and skills in a wide range of subjects
 - providing subject leaders with targeted support and training so that they can accurately monitor the effectiveness of teaching and support teachers to improve
 - ensuring that governors receive appropriate training to be able to evaluate the work of the school and hold leaders to account
 - further developing leaders' communication with parents and carers by ensuring that the website is regularly updated.
- Rapidly improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - providing teachers with high-quality and precisely targeted professional development to improve their subject knowledge, so that pupils are consistently taught appropriate skills
 - developing the precision of assessment so that teachers plan work for all pupils that takes account of their starting points and challenges them to achieve well
 - ensuring that targeted interventions for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities help them to catch up
 - improving teachers' intervention in learning, so that they can accurately assess pupils' progress and move their learning on
 - routinely providing pupils with a range of opportunities to practise and apply cross-curricular literacy and numeracy skills.
- Improve personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - continuing to improve pupils' attendance, including that of those who have SEN and/or disabilities, and reduce persistent absence

- ensuring that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education as a result of teaching which consistently helps pupils to achieve what they are capable of.
- Improve teaching and provision in the early years by ensuring that:
 - leaders develop precise action plans that are rigorously evaluated, so that they can accurately check the effectiveness of their actions
 - teaching builds on recent improvements, so that all children, including disadvantaged children, achieve well and are fully prepared to make the transition into Year 1
 - leaders create a stimulating learning environment, so that children are routinely provided with a wide range of exciting opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of learning.

It is recommended that the school undertakes an external review of the use of pupil premium funding to determine how this aspect of the school may be improved.

It is also recommended that the school undertakes an external review of governance to determine how this aspect of the school may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 February 2019

Evidence

The inspector visited lessons jointly with senior leaders to observe pupils' learning and behaviour. He scrutinised documents, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, governing body minutes, local authority reports and external reviews. He also considered information pertaining to pupils' progress and attendance and to the monitoring of teaching. The inspector scrutinised pupils' work. He met with senior leaders, staff and pupils. The inspector also spoke with governors and a representative of the local authority.

Context

The process to find a suitable multi-academy trust (MAT) to sponsor the school is currently underway. Since the previous inspection, one teacher has left the school. There have been no staffing appointments.

New classrooms for early years children and key stage 1 pupils are currently being built. They are due to be completed after the February half-term holiday.

The headteacher will leave the school at Easter. Governors are currently working with the local authority to find an interim replacement.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders are succeeding in making improvements to the quality of teaching. They are focused on the day-to-day business of the school and improving pupils' classroom experience, despite potential distractions. For example, the process to find a suitable MAT to sponsor the school is taking a long time. This has created a sense of uncertainty about the school's future among the school community. Leaders are also contending with a new build on the school site that is nearing completion. Despite these issues, leaders are focused on improving teaching and ensuring that pupils make more progress.

Self-evaluation documents show that leaders are aware of the key areas for improvement. Their detailed action plans are linked directly to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Plans are built around specific, measurable actions designed to meet objectives. The impact of these actions is considered by a project group which is overseeing the school's progress. This group is made up of school leaders, governors and local authority staff. Plans assist the project group in holding leaders to account. Plans feature 'milestones' to chart progress but these are not specific enough. Teachers who have responsibility for the leadership of early years and different subjects are also planning with greater rigour, specificity and consistency. This approach is helping leaders throughout the school to focus on what matters.

Leaders now conduct activities which are linked to the priorities in the school's 'Raising Achievement Plan' and subject plans to monitor teaching more rigorously. Although monitoring activities focus on what teachers are doing to meet objectives, there is not enough analysis of the impact of these actions.

Governance is strengthening. The chair of governors brings experience and expertise to the role, in part because of his governance role at another school. He has introduced a more rigorous, evidence-based approach. Consequently, governors are now taking a more honest, objective and informed view of the school's effectiveness. They are now focused on holding leaders to greater account. For example, governors ask more challenging questions in meetings.

Governors continue to implement the findings of the governance review which took place last year. For example, the chair has secured training to ensure that governors understand their roles and responsibilities. However, there has been a high turnover of governors that has prevented the governing body from becoming better established.

Although leaders are taking effective action to improve teaching and raise pupils' achievement, progress has been hampered by leaders' reluctance to engage fully with external support. Leaders have been slow to accept the judgement of the previous inspection. This has meant that they have not been sufficiently receptive to the advice provided by external professionals. A greater willingness on the part of leaders to accept the findings of external visitors would have led to more rapid progress.

The special educational needs coordinator, who took up post after the previous inspection, understands her role and responsibilities well. She has effective oversight of the provision and knows the needs of individual pupils well. She has been proactive in providing training to staff on the identification of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and on meeting their needs. This work is supporting these pupils to make better progress.

Leaders have worked hard to maintain positive staff morale during a difficult time. Staff are highly supportive of each other. Throughout the time since the previous inspection, they have been keen to work together to improve their work. Staff care about the pupils in their care and want the best for them.

Not enough has been done to act on the findings of the pupil premium review which took place in October. There is still too little leadership oversight of this work to ensure that additional funding is used to best effect to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have concentrated their efforts on improving reading, writing and mathematics to meet the demands of the new national curriculum. They have continued to embed mathematics mastery approaches and to

raise expectations of what pupils can achieve in reading and writing. However, too little attention has been paid to developing the wider curriculum. Leaders acknowledge that there has not been enough work to ensure that pupils acquire knowledge and skills in other disciplines, including science, humanities and the arts.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Staff have taken advantage of professional development opportunities to improve their practice. The main whole-school teaching priority this academic year has been to improve the teaching of writing. Staff have attended courses and worked with staff in other schools to improve their practice. Consequently, pupils are now provided with more opportunities to practise writing for different audiences and purposes. Staff have also put greater emphasis on teaching technical skills. Moreover, pupils are now being encouraged to 'wrestle' more with their writing – to reflect on it, edit it and make improvements.

Teachers' assessment is now more accurate and is being used to generate more reliable performance information. However, this has only happened recently. Nevertheless, staff have engaged in internal and external moderation activities. External activities have utilised the expertise of staff in other schools and the local authority. These activities have helped staff to understand what is required to meet different expectations and pitch their judgements with greater accuracy and confidence. Staff are using their better knowledge of what pupils know and can do to monitor their progress more closely. Leaders have also tightened up the process for monitoring pupils' progress so that staff can intervene in a timely way to prevent pupils from falling behind. For example, staff conduct regular pupil progress meetings that lead to adjustments in teaching or provision for individual pupils.

Teachers in the early years and key stage 1 plan groups, activities and resources to meet the needs of pupils effectively. This approach provides stimulating teaching for the most able pupils and enables less-able pupils to attempt work which might be too difficult without the right support. Teaching assistants are well deployed. They provide effective support to groups of pupils or individuals, including pupils with SEND. Often, teaching assistants work interchangeably with teachers as staff take turns to work with small groups or deliver teaching to the whole class.

Staff in key stage 2 plan interesting and engaging activities that encourage pupils to participate in learning. Teachers ask questions that encourage pupils to think, which they enjoy. Consequently, classrooms are safe, comfortable spaces in which it is fine to ask questions, contribute views and make mistakes. Pupils benefit from positive relationships with staff, and mutual respect promotes an atmosphere in class which is conducive to learning. However, staff do not sufficiently plan activities to meet pupils' different abilities. All pupils in a class, regardless of ability, tend to complete the same piece of work. This prevents the most able pupils from making the progress of which they are capable.

Pupils who spoke with the inspector reported that they enjoy their learning because they are helped to help themselves. When they get stuck, they can use different resources to help them. Teachers and teaching assistants will readily help pupils, but only once they have shown persistence in using other means to find answers independently. Attractive wall displays act as 'learning walls', which pupils can use as a learning resource to help themselves. The inspector observed one key stage 1 pupil using a wall in this way when he needed to write the word 'Sunday' in his work. He was unsure of the spelling and he looked immediately to a learning display which featured the days of the week.

Staff are doing their best to provide an attractive, stimulating learning environment for pupils. However, their efforts are limited by the condition of some of the school buildings. During the inspection, staff were in the middle of preparations to move to new school buildings set to open after half-term. The new build has also had an impact on pupils' use of outside space. Pupils will benefit from a better learning environment once the new build has been completed and unsuitable buildings are no longer used.

The assiduous approaches staff are taking to developing pupils' literacy skills in reading and writing are not being applied in other subjects. For example, staff note spelling errors and prompt pupils to correct them in reading and writing. However, this approach is not applied to pupils' writing in science or geography. Similarly, staff do not take full advantage of opportunities to develop extended writing skills in subjects other than writing. There is little evidence of pupils' increasing mathematical fluency being applied to subjects other than mathematics.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are cheerful, polite and friendly. They were keen to introduce themselves to the lead inspector and make conversation when he observed their behaviour at lunchtime. Pupils behave well around the school and are considerate to each other. Older pupils become 'buddies' and look after younger pupils to help them navigate their way through school. The pupils who spoke to the inspector reported that there is no bullying in the school. In the past, when bullying occurred, it was dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff.

Attendance has improved overall and for some groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND who require support. It is broadly in line with the national average overall and for these groups. However, the attendance of the small number of pupils with SEND who have an education, health and care plan is below average.

Since the previous inspection, pupils are being better prepared for the next stage of their education in certain respects. They enjoy their school experience and are learning to become confident, self-assured young people. The greater demands now being made of pupils in core subjects are preparing them better for secondary

school. However, pupils are not as well prepared for the study of other subjects in key stage 3.

Outcomes for pupils

Improvements in the quality of teaching, assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress are leading to better outcomes for pupils. Disadvantaged pupils are making comparable progress with their peers, even though pupil premium funding is not being used to best effect to raise their achievement. Pupils with SEND are receiving the support they need to get the most out of their school experience.

In 2018, pupils who left the school made progress that was in line with the national average in reading and mathematics. Pupils' attainment was also higher than it had been in previous years and, for these subjects, compared well with the national averages. However, pupils' progress and attainment in writing were well below the national averages. Consequently, improving the teaching and assessment of writing has been a key focus for school improvement this year.

The attainment of pupils at the expected level at the end of Year 2 in 2018 was in line with, or just above, the national average in all subjects. However, across the school, too few pupils are achieving at greater depth, including the most able pupils.

The proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the phonics screening check is above the national average and has been so over time. This is also true of the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year.

Pupils are taking greater pride in their work and its presentation. This is because teachers have higher expectations of how work should be set out and how pupils should engage with it. Increasingly, pupils are being encouraged to use teachers' feedback to reflect on their mistakes, explain their understanding and redraft improvements. However, expectations of what pupils should know and be able to do are too low in non-core subjects, as explained above.

External support

The local authority has provided, or brokered, intensive support for the school since the previous inspection. The project group has been established to support leaders in meeting the objectives set out in improvement plans. This group meets regularly and is important for holding leaders to account. Furthermore, a local school has worked in partnership with Drybrook to provide leadership support, alongside opportunities for moderation and professional development. The school improvement partner, a local authority representative, knows the school well and is committed to its improvement. However, as stated at the beginning of this letter,

leaders have not always fully embraced external support, which has prevented them from making more rapid progress. By the time of the next visit, leaders must be able to demonstrate that they are taking full advantage of external support and making more rapid progress as a result.