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Mrs Sarah Smith
Interim Headteacher
Dartford Bridge Community Primary School
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Kent
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Dear Mrs Smith

Special measures monitoring inspection of Dartford Bridge Community Primary School

Following my visit with Sean McKeown, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 21 to 22 May 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 January 2019.

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 Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Theresa Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2019.

- Ensure that arrangements for safeguarding are effective by:
 - urgently completing a comprehensive safeguarding review so that all arrangements meet requirements and are fit for purpose
 - recording all concerns about pupils and subsequent actions in a central, secure and well-maintained system
 - making sure that all designated safeguarding leads understand their responsibilities and work collectively to keep pupils safe
 - making sure that governors maintain proper oversight of the effectiveness of the school's arrangements to safeguard pupils from harm.
- Improve all aspects of leadership and governance by ensuring that:
 - a sustainable and effective leadership structure is put in place
 - systems for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching are strengthened, so that leaders can drive improvement at a greater pace
 - the school's curriculum is developed so that it engages all pupils and deepens their learning across a range of subjects
 - additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively so it makes a positive impact on the outcomes of this group of pupils
 - leaders, including governors, secure the confidence of staff, parents and carers.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make good progress by ensuring that:
 - teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve in a wide range of subjects, particularly in science
 - pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are provided with consistently effective support in lessons to enable them to make good progress from their starting points
 - assessments of pupils' learning are reliably accurate
 - assessment information is used to address gaps in pupils' learning, so tasks are well matched to pupils' abilities.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 21 May 2019 to 22 May 2019

Evidence

During the inspection, inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher and senior and middle leaders. The lead inspector also met with two governors, including the chair of the governing body, plus the local authority's adviser and the executive headteacher from Cygnus Academies Trust. The lead inspector met formally with a group of pupils, and both inspectors spoke to pupils informally when observing the school's work. Inspectors spoke informally with parents before and after the school day. Inspectors conducted joint lesson observations with leaders and looked at work in pupils' books. The school's action plan was evaluated.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding and the safer recruitment of staff were checked, as were records of concerns about pupils' welfare, including those referred to the local authority.

Context

Following the school's section 5 inspection in January 2019, the local authority commissioned Cygnus Academies Trust to support the school. A headteacher from one of the schools in the multi-academy trust was deployed to the school as interim headteacher. One teacher has left the school. A new key stage 1 phase leader and another experienced teacher have been appointed for September 2019. Five new governors have been appointed, including a national lead for governance. One governor has left the governing body.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim headteacher has acted swiftly to stabilise the school since the last inspection. She has gained the confidence of parents and staff, who appreciate the clarity of her leadership. Staff's absence has reduced and, consequently, the turbulence caused by the frequent changes of staff has diminished. The atmosphere around the school is calm and purposeful.

Safeguarding arrangements and processes in the school have been significantly improved. Shortly after the last inspection, an officer from the local authority conducted a safeguarding review. The implementation of the review's recommendations is underway.

A new governor with expertise in safeguarding was appointed and has conducted a focused visit to see how well school leaders have responded to the safeguarding review. Both the governor and the lead inspector found a few procedures which could be refined but, overall, the school's safeguarding arrangements are now secure. Staff are vigilant and know pupils well enough to identify and report

concerns. Records of concerns about pupils are now filed systematically and securely. Concerns about pupils' welfare are acted upon promptly by the designated safeguarding leads and referred to the local authority's children's services when appropriate. The family liaison officer works effectively with families to help them to access support from other agencies. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe and know who to talk to if they have any worries. However, there remains some reticence among pupils to talk freely about their feelings and experiences.

Changes have been made to the school's environment to improve pupils' safety. Access to the school's premises has been tightened and parents now drop off and pick up pupils at the classroom doors, rather than entering the classrooms. Parents acknowledge that this means their children are more secure. Supervision of the playground has been strengthened. There is more play equipment available and lunchtime activities are better organised. The early years outside area has been improved to provide more structured activities and better supervision.

The interim headteacher conveys her vision for the future success of the school well. The school's comprehensive action plan covers all of the essential areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The plan describes clear actions to be taken, timescales and effective success criteria to facilitate and evaluate improvements. The plan could be modified to clarify the responsibilities of the senior and middle leaders in the school. Precise arrangements for monitoring the implementation of actions and evaluating their impact would also help leaders and governors to hold leaders more effectively to account than previously.

An external review of the use of pupil premium funding has recently taken place. Leaders are using the recommendations to improve the pupil premium strategy. Already there is a sharper analysis of the barriers which contribute to the underachievement of individual disadvantaged pupils. One response has been to provide enticing clubs on specific days to help improve attendance. Disadvantaged pupils are prioritised in the regular pupil progress meetings. However, significant additional actions to address the underperformance of disadvantaged pupils have not yet started. Unless weaknesses in teaching are addressed, the progress made by disadvantaged pupils will remain weak.

Steps have rightly been taken to strengthen the governing body. Two of the newly appointed governors bring educational expertise to the role. The governing body's priority was to focus on safeguarding. Several visits have taken place for governors to see for themselves the impact of the actions taken by leaders. An external review of governance is underway, which will provide recommendations for the further development of the governing body.

This monitoring inspection report confirms that school leaders have worked hard to address the previous inspection's findings. However, senior leaders and governors recognise the need to drive further improvements, particularly regarding the quality of teaching and learning. The parents who spoke to inspectors were unanimous that

the school has improved and are supportive of the interim headteacher. They acknowledge the more stringent safeguarding procedures but feel there is scope for better communication with parents.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

While leaders have rightly focused on making the school a safe and calm place, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has not improved at the same rate. The interim headteacher promptly introduced some basic expectations about lesson structure and feedback to pupils. There are signs of improvement where teachers have responded positively to leaders' guidance and expectations. In these classes, more consistent routines in lessons are helping to set the right tone for learning. In some classes, teachers set appropriately challenging work. They know pupils well, as learners, and have high expectations. However, in other classes, leaders' expectations are not being met and the overall quality of teaching remains too variable.

In the most effective practice, tasks are well matched to pupils' starting points, pupils are engaged and purposeful, and teachers use their assessment of pupils' learning to guide their next steps. Where practice is strong, adults are alert to ensuring that pupils move more quickly from one task to the next so that they retain their interest and focus. In other classes, pupils are not making as much progress due to a lack of clarity, not enough challenge or insufficient levels of support. Where practice is least effective, teachers do not respond to pupils' needs, partly because of the lack of accurate assessment of pupils' learning. In these instances, pupils are not given useful feedback about how to improve.

There have been some improvements in the support provided for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Appropriate provision to meet pupils' needs is better organised. Teachers are making work more accessible, and this is leading to some low-attaining pupils making better progress. Staff with expertise from other schools in the trust are supporting the staff who work most closely with pupils with SEND.

The monitoring of the quality of teaching is now sharpening, for example through systematic work scrutiny, however this aspect needs greater urgency, coupled with precise training. A stronger response to the findings from the last inspection is needed, followed by a rigorous evaluation of the impact of the subsequent interventions.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils reported some improvements in behaviour around the school. At breaktimes and lunchtimes, the playgrounds are well supervised and at lunchtime pupils benefit from more structured activities. Conduct around school is orderly and courteous. In lessons, some pupils lose interest when tasks are not well matched to their needs

and, in a few cases, this leads to some low-level disruption. Overall, pupils are keen to learn and meet the higher expectations when required to do so.

Outcomes for pupils

The inconsistent quality of teaching and learning results in variable rates of progress for pupils. Some teachers do not use assessment information effectively to inform their planning and teaching. Consequently, pupils do not make consistently good progress. However, leaders and teachers have acted on the helpful advice provided by the local authority's adviser to improve pupils' writing and mathematics. Work in pupils' writing books shows some evidence of sustained progress and pupils taking pride in the presentation of their work.

Although feedback by teachers is now better, in accordance with the school's policy, there is insufficient challenge for the most able pupils. Pupils' work in mathematics shows that they are exploring questions in greater depth. In some cases, 'stretch tasks' are deepening learning and pupils are increasingly explaining their thinking.

Pupils' work across the wider curriculum shows an increase in the coverage of subjects other than English and mathematics since the last inspection. Nevertheless, the quality of pupils' work across the curriculum is highly variable. Teaching does not routinely deepen pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills in a range of subjects. Pupils rarely use subject-specific vocabulary to describe what they know or to explain their thinking. One notable exception is the better quality of science work in Year 2 books. In addition, there are a few early signs of a progression in pupils' skills in art and geography.

External support

The local authority acted quickly in response to the concerns identified at the last inspection. The astute improvement adviser closely monitors the school and produces insightful, detailed reports with well-targeted recommendations. An English and mathematics adviser conducted a detailed work scrutiny and gave precise advice which has been acted on.

Leaders from Cygnus Academies Trust have supported the interim headteacher effectively and enabled the school's leaders and teachers to visit other schools in the trust to observe best practice. Staff from the trust have also conducted joint-work scrutiny with leaders and provided beneficial training on the curriculum.

Trust leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Plans are underway for the school to join Cygnus Academies Trust by the start of the autumn term. Now that it is clear that the school will join the trust, leaders from the trust plan to work more intensively with the school to aid monitoring, evaluation,

and improvement planning. This is intended to increase the school's pace of improvement, particularly regarding the quality of teaching and learning.