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Mrs Carolyn Murray
Interim Headteacher
Caldew Lea School
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Dear Mrs Murray

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Caldew Lea School

Following my visit to your school on 26 June 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 June 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you and other school leaders. I met with two members of the interim executive board (IEB) and a representative of the local authority. I held a meeting with the chief executive officer of Cumbria Education Trust (CET), who is also a member of the IEB. Together, you and I visited classes in each key stage to observe the learning that was taking place. We spoke to pupils and viewed examples of their work. The local authority's statement of action was considered, and the school's improvement plan was evaluated. I examined a range of documents including the single central record and information about the performance of pupils.

Context

The previous headteacher resigned in the summer term 2018. Since then, the school has been supported by five interim headteachers. You are the sixth headteacher to support the school since the publication of the previous inspection report, having taken up your post four days prior to this visit. A substantive headteacher and deputy headteacher have been appointed for September 2019.

Since the previous inspection the governing body was replaced with an experienced IEB. Members are skilled and experienced education professionals. Two teachers have left the school and four new teachers are now in post. Three support staff have left the school and one new member is now in post along with three long-term supply staff.

Under the instruction of the regional schools commissioner, the school will be joining the Cumbria Education Multi Academy Trust (CET) in October 2019.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Following the publication of the previous inspection report the local authority put plans in place to bring about rapid improvement in the school. Support was successfully brokered from neighbouring schools through the written statement of action. However, over time, these plans have not been realised because they have not had a significant impact on the outcomes of pupils. Too many changes in the senior leadership team have caused many issues to remain unresolved. Much of leaders' time has been spent on stabilising the staffing structure and improving relationships. However, this has been to the detriment of the pupils. School plans to improve the school are limited and rely heavily on the plans that were originally created by the local authority. Ineffective action from leaders has led to slow progress in addressing the issues from the previous inspection.

Members of the newly formed IEB along with CET are beginning to provide support for the school. The deputy headteacher and headteacher designate are working alongside teachers during the transition to CET in the autumn term. Staff are aware of the changes taking place and they are happy that these have been communicated well to them.

Leaders have focused their attention on improving relationships between staff, pupils and leaders. Leaders have been successful in bringing about some improvements in pupils' behaviour. For example, they have redesigned playtimes to ensure that they are staggered so that the playground is a calmer environment in a bid to lessen instances of poor behaviour. A new behaviour system is being used across the school to develop a consistent approach to expectations, sanctions and rewards. Many pupils are happy and content in school.

Although members of the IEB have the right skills to improve the school, their influence has had too little impact on pupils' academic outcomes. Due to a series of successive headteachers, the small improvements made in some areas have not been sustained. Indeed, in many respects the school has fallen backwards since the previous inspection rather than motoring ahead to ensure that pupils achieve well. There is currently no assessment system in the school. Assessment work was started by the previous interim headteacher but due to an unforeseen early departure in June it was not implemented. There is no information available in relation to pupils' progress, including the progress of disadvantaged pupils and

pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders and teachers do not know if the needs of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND are being met.

The quality of teaching and learning remains inconsistent across the school. Over time, leaders have not ensured that pupils make the progress that they are capable of. Current school leaders have recently provided teachers with opportunities to visit good schools in the locality to observe good practice. Despite these good intentions, it is too early to judge the impact of this work. Teachers are beginning to match work better to the ability of pupils. Across the school, a small number of pupils were observed editing and developing their written work. Pupils with SEND are no longer taught in corridors; they are now taught in classrooms with their friends. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils with SEND are making improved progress.

The identification of pupils with SEND is improving. The leader for SEND has worked with staff to help them identify more closely pupils' social, communication and language issues. They have also ensured that staff have a better understanding of autism and the implications for their teaching.

Due to the significant changes in staffing and leadership, the roles of subject leaders have not gained momentum since the previous inspection. Subject leaders have received no training. There is currently no member of staff in the school who has responsibility for the delivery of the English curriculum. As a result, leaders, including governors, have been ineffective in building up the capacity to ensure that the school can improve quickly. Responsibility for improving teaching and pupils' outcomes is not evenly shared across the school.

Pupils' attendance has not improved since the previous inspection. Attendance of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, remains below the national average. Rates of persistent absence remain twice the national average.

Staff understand and are working towards implementing the new behaviour policy. During the monitoring visit, pupils behaved well, in lessons and at playtimes. Pupils were observed working hard and concentrating on their learning. Leaders state that this is typical, and the majority of pupils behave well. However, there remain a significant number of pupils with behaviour issues. Teachers report that across the school there are still incidents of poor behaviour that are not being consistently addressed by all staff members. This is reflected in the fixed-term exclusion information. Rates of exclusions have increased since the previous inspection. Last year, nine pupils accumulated 32 exclusions between them. In the current academic year this rose to 15 pupils accumulating 39 exclusions to date. Leaders acknowledge that their approaches to improve behaviour are not having the desired effect on reducing the number of exclusions.

The teaching of reading has stalled because no one has responsibility for the delivery of the English curriculum. Pupils' access to books is limited to what is

available in their classrooms. Teachers have not received any specific training in the delivery of reading. As a result, the teaching of reading and comprehension skills is not effective.

Teachers are beginning to consider the wider curriculum. For example, in Year 6, pupils learn about Australian indigenous art. They make considered responses and explain that this example of art is a link to the past. Work is beginning to build on pupils' prior experiences of about colour and textile work. Opportunities to explore art through mathematics were evident in creative investigations inspired by patterns found in parabolic curves. Work in geography remains weak. Work is not pitched to meet the needs of pupils and it does not build upon prior learning. Leaders have not checked on the quality of work in different curriculum subjects beyond English and mathematics.

Pupils' writing remains inconsistent across the school. Teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of remain variable in different year groups. Pupils' opportunities to develop and extend their writing remain limited. In some year groups, pupils are beginning to edit and improve their writing. Following the previous inspection, more attention has been given to spelling. Pupils have access to resources to help them to improve their spelling of difficult words. For example, in Year 1, pupils were observed applying their new spellings well to their written work; they carefully considered verb choices while writing instructions.

The local authority has provided intensive support to the school via their early years team. An action plan has been devised that is closely aligned to the areas for improvement that were identified at the previous inspection. Leaders have consolidated the delivery of phonics into one consistent approach across the early years. Despite these small changes, the school's unvalidated performance information for 2018/2019 indicate that children will leave the early years with lower outcomes than children in the previous three cohorts. There is a stark difference in the entitlement that children in the different Reception class receive because resources are not shared equally. Leaders have not acted quickly to put measures in place to ensure consistency in the educational entitlement of these children. During the visit, Her Majesty's Inspector observed disruptive behaviour in the Reception class.

Children in the Nursery Class have well developed social skills. They enjoy singing songs and sharing with their friends. Children enjoy their learning, they take turns and they say 'please' and 'thank you'. Established routines are embedded.

The leader for early years has not monitored the quality of delivery of the early year's curriculum. Staff have attended training in relation to improving the opportunities for children to learn independently, but this has had little impact on children's outcomes. Successive school leaders have each had different opinions about the early years. As a result, little has been done to bring about the sustained improvements that are required.

The early years outdoor area has been enhanced since the previous inspection. However, children lack focus and direction in outdoor activities. Children do not know what is expected of them or what they need to do to achieve. For example, children at the end of the Reception Year were not prompted to improve their work by trying out their emerging writing skills; they were scribbling instead of writing. There is little evidence to suggest that children are ready for key stage 1.

Parents and carers are not satisfied with the progress that the school has made since the last inspection. They are unhappy that there has been significant turbulence in the school leadership. Many parents stated that their concerns are not listened to and leaders take little action. Parents said that communication remains weak and they were poorly informed, especially those who have children with SEND. Parents said that their children are safe in school. However, many said that they would not recommend the school to others.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

John Donald
Her Majesty's Inspector