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Jane Holt
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Holt

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Charlbury Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 October 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 March 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

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

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Moles
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently review safeguarding arrangements to ensure that:
 - the school's designated safeguarding lead acts on reported concerns
 - staff receive up-to-date safeguarding training to improve their understanding of potential risks that pupils face
 - chronologies of adults' concerns are maintained and acted upon
 - record-keeping is systematic and methodical
 - the welfare requirements of the early years foundation stage are met
 - governors keep sharp oversight of the school's safeguarding policies and procedures.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - strengthening school improvement planning and leaders' self-evaluation
 - improving leaders' analysis of how well pupils are learning
 - ensuring that pupil premium plans focus on providing effective support so that disadvantaged pupils make better progress
 - reducing the number of pupils who are frequently absent from school
 - developing the effectiveness of middle leaders
 - tracking incidents of behaviour more closely and taking swift action in response to any issues, including any instances of bullying.

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 pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how well this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 9 October 2019

Evidence

The main focus of the monitoring visit was the school's safeguarding arrangements. I also considered some elements of leadership and management that were identified as areas for improvement at the previous inspection.

I met with the headteacher, other school leaders, and with groups of pupils, staff and governors. Alongside the headteacher, I visited lessons in Years 2, 4, 5 and 6. I met with a representative of the local authority and spoke to a small number of parents at the start of the school day. I visited the playground at playtime to observe behaviour and talk to pupils. I reviewed relevant documentation on the school website and provided by school leaders.

Context

Since the last inspection, the governing body has been restructured and a new chair of the governing body has been appointed. The deputy headteacher has been absent from school for a sustained period of time. The headteacher is leaving the school at the end of the autumn term. A new headteacher has been appointed and is due to start in January 2020. Plans are in place for the school to become a sponsored academy within the next few months.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

Leaders have prioritised addressing weaknesses in the school's safeguarding arrangements. Records and systems have been overhauled and are now fit for purpose. Staff and governors have undergone rigorous training. Records of this training are documented meticulously. Leaders check to make sure staff understand what they have been taught. As a result, leaders, teachers and governors share a keen awareness of the potential risks to the pupils in their care. Staff ensure that any concerns are passed on, so that leaders can act swiftly and in pupils' best interests. The welfare requirements of the early years foundation stage are now met. Pupils describe feeling safe and well cared for by adults. Leaders know that some staff need more support to use the new electronic system confidently to record their concerns. Leaders are taking steps to address this through further training and support.

In comparison, work to address the area for improvement around behaviour and bullying is less well developed. Leaders know that pupils behave well in lessons and are friendly towards each other during social time. This was evident from the atmosphere in school during the inspection. Leaders have improved the quality of the records they keep about any concerns that may arise. They do not currently step back to look for any emerging patterns in the information they gather. This

risks impeding how effectively leaders pre-empt issues before they escalate. Leaders are involving pupils and parents in their work to develop this aspect of the school. Governors are mindful of ensuring that relevant policies, some of which are out of date, support the findings from this work.

Leaders emphasise the importance of pupils attending school regularly. Their new policy makes expectations clear to pupils and parents, linked to the impact on pupils' learning. Leaders make routine checks, particularly on those pupils who risk becoming persistently absent. Where necessary, they put support in place for pupils and their families. Attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, is improving as a result of this increased focus.

The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school

Leaders have not shied away from the necessary and urgent improvements identified at the last inspection. They are determined to tackle the areas of weakness. The local authority is providing them with highly effective support. This is enabling leaders to prioritise their work appropriately. School improvement plans are fit for purpose and being used well to ensure that progress is sustained. Recent changes to the school's senior leadership structure have provided extra capacity that is helping to improve the school.

At the time of the last inspection, teaching and learning were judged to be good. Staff and leaders have a shared focus on ensuring that disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have their learning needs met successfully via quality-first teaching in the classroom. Middle leaders' work alongside experts from the local authority is supporting this part of the school's ongoing development. Staff are receptive to the training they have received with respect to safeguarding, teaching and leadership.

Governors have responded decisively to the findings of the last inspection. They have used external support to evaluate the governing body's strengths and weaknesses accurately. They have not allowed the potential distractions of headteacher recruitment and the school's transition to academy status to impede their work, despite the investment of time and thought that these have required. Changes to structures within the governing body have redefined roles and emphasised accountability. New recruits have strengthened the governing body's collective skills and expertise. As a result, governors are now much better placed than in the past to support and challenge leaders about the difference their work is making to pupils.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders' thoughtfulness and willingness to engage with external help are supporting the school's journey of improvement successfully. Governors are mindful of ensuring that changes made now are sustainable as the school

becomes an academy and experiences a change of headteacher. They are managing this period of transition carefully.

- Leaders' measured approach to getting under the skin of concerns around behaviour and bullying places them well to make sustainable improvements.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Safeguarding and behaviour management processes and record-keeping are now more effective than in the past. However, leaders' approach to reviewing the information they collect is not yet systematic. As such, this limits leaders' strategic oversight of emerging issues and how to tackle or pre-empt them. Leaders are sometimes too reliant on how well they know the pupils and families who are part of this close-knit community.
- The long-term absence of the deputy headteacher has inevitably reduced leadership capacity in the short term. As such, some aspects of school improvement have been slower than is desirable.

External support

The local authority's intensive work is ensuring that momentum is sustained as the school improves. A range of local authority staff are providing support that is helping to strengthen leadership at all levels. Plans are in place to sustain this high level of support through the early stages of academisation, to ensure the school's smooth transition into a multi-academy trust.

External reviews of governance and the use of pupil premium funding were commissioned promptly. These provided valuable and detailed feedback to leaders about how these aspects of the school's work could be developed. Leaders are using this feedback to support school improvement. This is evident from improvements to governance and from adults' shared focus on meeting the learning needs of disadvantaged pupils.