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Miss Sarah Kober
Acting Headteacher
Darley Dene Primary School
Garfield Road
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Dear Miss Kober

Special measures monitoring inspection of Darley Dene Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22 to 23 October 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 June 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 plans are 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 executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Surrey. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Newberry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Leaders and governors must create a culture that keeps all pupils safe by ensuring that:
 - risk management plans and procedures are rigorous and effective
 - all access points to the school are safe and secure
 - all visitors are checked appropriately so that only those authorised to do so can gain entry to the school.
- Improve the quality of leadership, management and governance by ensuring that:
 - a sustainable and effective leadership and staffing structure is in place
 - leaders use the newly established systems to monitor the progress of pupils effectively, including the progress of disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND and the most able, so that the impact of teaching and additional support can be clearly evaluated
 - pupils access a broad, balanced and well-planned curriculum
 - bullying and incidents of poor behaviour are properly recorded, and appropriate action is taken to resolve issues and promote improvement
 - additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to improve their progress and outcomes
 - pupils attend school regularly.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, including in early years, so that all pupils, and particularly the most able and disadvantaged pupils, make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics by ensuring that:
 - teaching and support staff receive timely and focused training to carry out their roles effectively
 - teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - the teaching of reading ensures that pupils in all year groups improve their reading so that, as a minimum, they reach age-related expectations
 - communication between teachers and teaching assistants improves so that pupils, and particularly those with SEND, are provided with effective support
 - teachers use accurate assessment information effectively to plan tasks that meet the needs of pupils.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 22 to 23 October 2019

Evidence

Together with the acting headteacher, I made short visits to every classroom to look at pupils' learning and their behaviour. I visited breakfast club and observed behaviour at lunchtime. I met with a small group of pupils to discuss their experiences at school and review their work across a range of subjects. In addition, I had discussions with groups of pupils in lessons and around the school. I held meetings with the acting headteacher, leaders and non-teaching staff. I also met with the chair and two governors from the interim executive board (IEB).

I reviewed a range of documents including safeguarding records, policies and improvement plans. I also reviewed records of pupils' attendance. I considered records of the first meeting of the new IEB and had discussions with a local authority adviser who has been working with the school. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I spoke to several parents at the beginning of the day to gather their views of how the school has changed since the previous inspection.

Context

Following the section 5 inspection in June, major changes have been made to the leadership and staffing of the school. The local authority has arranged for the Lumen Learning Trust (LLT) to oversee the leadership and management of the school this term. The previous headteacher left the school in September and has been replaced by an acting headteacher from LLT. Several other members of staff have left the school and seven new teachers have started at the school, including the new deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. The governing body was replaced by the IEB on 30 September.

The programme of building and refurbishment work has continued at Darley Dene. The Department for Education, senior leaders and the local authority have begun the detailed process of the school joining a multi-academy trust. LLT have been named as the preferred academy sponsor but no firm decisions have been made yet.

I was aware during this inspection that serious incidents that occurred at the school are under investigation by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the incidents were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform my judgements.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for

improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

Delays to the building and refurbishment work, coupled with ineffective project management, meant that the school was not initially safe to reopen after the summer holidays. The local authority agreed for senior leaders within LLT to take over the day-to-day running of the school from the beginning of September. These new leaders immediately coordinated a package of improvements to site security and safety arrangements. This enabled the school to safely reopen to pupils from 11 September.

Since LLT have been involved, there has been a comprehensive overhaul of safeguarding systems at Darley Dene. From September the acting headteacher immediately worked with consultants from the trust and her new senior team. Together they have addressed the major shortcomings to safeguarding identified last June. Robust processes have been introduced to improve checks on staff, visitors and contractors. The site is now more secure, and leaders have established a culture of vigilance. There is an ongoing programme of support from LLT to oversee and embed these improvements.

New systems have been introduced to ensure more prompt reporting of concerns to outside agencies, such as social services, when necessary. Parents told me that they particularly value the new and more secure entry and collection arrangements on site this term. Most parents are pleased to see new leaders' much higher expectations of the conduct of pupils and the local community when on site. Some reflected on how standards in the classrooms have begun to improve. One group of parents summarised their hopes for continued improvement stating, 'We were on the verge of removing our children from the school, but the fresh start made by the new leaders and staff this term has convinced us to stay.'

All staff have had appropriate training, enabling them to become more confident in safeguarding matters. Most teachers and support staff now understand the school's new safeguarding policy and follow procedures well. New leaders wasted no time in robustly tackling previous areas of weakness. This has led to a more nurturing and caring culture developing across the school. Leaders have developed improved record-keeping and communication of any concerns about vulnerable pupils. However, this new system is at an early stage of implementation. More time is needed to ensure consistency of use by all staff and that it contains links to all the appropriate information the school has about pupils. In addition, some staff need further training and support to ensure that they follow all risk assessments and safety procedures appropriately.

Currently the size of the playground and kitchen facilities are reduced due to the ongoing refurbishment work. New leaders have responded to this challenge well by introducing changes to the start of the day and arrangements for lunch time. These ensure a more orderly arrival to school and that pupils can eat, play and socialise at

lunchtime safely.

Leaders' new 'stay on green' system has quickly raised expectations of pupils' behaviour around the school. Most pupils are smart and polite and conduct themselves well. Pupils and parents attribute this better behaviour as being due to all staff now having more consistently high expectations. However, despite this recent tightening-up on rules, low-level disruption remains in some classes. This is particularly the case when learning activities are not sufficiently well suited to meet pupils' needs.

New leaders' revised arrangements for the start of the day and much better communication with families has quickly brought about a significant improvement in punctuality this term. In the past attendance figures have been poor and the school's record-keeping of attendance has not always been accurate. Better communication and a tighter oversight since September have resulted in early signs of some improvements to attendance figures for different groups. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils and for pupils who speak English as an additional language. However, the attendance of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has not improved and remains too low. Further monitoring of attendance patterns over time is needed to assist leaders to analyse the impact of their new strategies to improve attendance.

The new acting headteacher has worked tirelessly with support from her senior team and consultants from LLT to quickly improve safeguarding, behaviour and attitudes. However, they know that their work to improve the curriculum is in its very early stages. There have been some successes. For example, this term additional staffing has boosted provision for Year 6 pupils whose learning was disrupted by a succession of staffing changes last year. Feedback from these pupils and reviews of their books demonstrate how they are relishing their new teachers' higher expectations in English and mathematics this term.

Senior leaders have rightly prioritised improving safeguarding and behaviour so far this term. However, they already have outline plans to provide a broader and richer curriculum for all pupils. New appraisal systems have been established to make lines of accountability within the school clearer. Subject leadership is currently in the process of being reorganised and staff are embracing the changes. Senior leaders and the IEB know that the curriculum requires an overhaul to make sure that all subjects are well sequenced across the year groups. In addition, they are aware that the range of enrichments and experiences on offer needs to promote pupils' personal development more systematically. To meet these aims, programmes of support from external consultants from LLT and other schools are underway. These offer training and coaching to subject leads to improve provision for reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders and the LLT are committed to establishing similar packages of training across science and the foundation subjects in the near future to improve the coverage of the wider curriculum.

Senior leaders are aware that the teaching of phonics is variable. They have coordinated support packages to boost teachers' subject knowledge. In addition, leaders have provided extra phonics sessions to assess pupils' early reading skills and boost achievement in key stage 1. Pupils' writing currently shows some promising signs of improvement in some year groups. For example, in Year 6 pupils now proudly draft, edit and refine their written descriptions. However, there remains variability across the school, particularly in terms of spelling and grammar. Leaders are currently rolling out a new approach to the teaching of mathematics. There are early signs that mathematical reasoning skills are being promoted more often. English and mathematics subject leads know that there is still much work to do to ensure consistency of approach in these subjects.

A comprehensive package of support from the LLT is in place to support leaders to improve the identification of and provision for pupils with SEND. However, teachers need further support in using assessment to plan suitably challenging learning that meets the needs of all their pupils. Clearer leadership and further training for staff are needed to tackle this.

Senior leaders are aware of the need to develop more-detailed plans for the targeted spending of additional funding this year. More information is needed to be supplied to teachers to ensure that disadvantaged pupils receive the effective additional support they need to make rapid progress. An external review of the pupil premium is due to take place later this term.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The acting headteacher and LLT have acted decisively and with a clear vision. Their much-improved communication with parents and the local community has been particularly valued. The new leadership team have quickly introduced a raft of appropriate new systems and procedures. They can demonstrate a clear trail of improvements in safeguarding and behaviour.

There has been a total revolution in staff morale. The new leadership team have quickly cultivated much more positive relationships with staff. Teachers and support staff were keen to tell me how much they feel the culture of the school has been transformed. They now feel well-supported, accountable and particularly appreciate the care shown by leaders for their well-being. The staff I met are fully committed to new leaders' vision for the school and are embracing the changes being made. Teachers value the subject-specific support from the LLT for English and mathematics. This is helping to develop their subject knowledge and build their confidence.

LLT's short-term action-planning has clear strategies to support continued improvements and is suitably ambitious. However, more work is needed by the local

authority to develop appropriately detailed and longer-term support plans for the school. This will enable the new IEB and senior leaders to be held to account for continued improvements.

The small but highly experienced team of governors within the very recently formed IEB want the best for the school. Already, governors know the school well and they have plans in place to use their wide range of skills, knowledge and experience to offer appropriate support and challenge to leaders. They understand their roles well and have clear plans about how they will fulfil their statutory duties.

New assessment and monitoring systems are being introduced. These will enable leaders to hold staff to account more effectively. Senior leaders and governors recognise which staff need further development.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Senior leaders together with the IEB are committed to better standards and higher achievement across the school. The acting headteacher and her new senior leadership team have made a very strong start and are focusing on the right areas. Safeguarding systems are now much more robust, behaviour and attendance are improving and the process of upgrading the quality of education has started. Parental confidence in the school is growing.
- Working with the LLT, the acting headteacher has wasted no time in restructuring the school in a systematic and measured way. New performance management systems are being established to clarify lines of accountability.
- Senior leaders have significantly improved communication within the school and with the local community. As a result, Darley Dene is safer, more secure and calmer than it was. Parents and staff recognise the improved working relationships and culture of the school.
- The experienced and dedicated governors of the newly formed IEB have a clear vision of the school and the work ahead. Governors are setting up systems to check the progress of the school regularly. They expect significant improvement but at a pace staff can manage.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Longer-term support plans are needed for next term and beyond. This will ensure that the local authority is able to monitor and evaluate the pace of improvements to safeguarding and the quality of education.
- The school's plans for curriculum development need to be implemented. Subject leadership beyond English and mathematics needs to be put in place. Staff need training to develop their subject knowledge and plan learning in their subjects so

that it happens in the right order. Subject leaders need training to quality assure provision across the school.

- Leaders need to monitor the new safeguarding and risk-assessment systems to ensure that improvements are maintained and there is consistency of approach across the school.
- Leaders' current work to improve provision for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND needs to be given priority to ensure that it makes an impact in every classroom.
- More-effective leadership of phonics and reading is needed. Staff training is required to improve the consistency of approach in developing pupils' reading skills and fostering a love of reading throughout the school.
- More-thorough monitoring of attendance is needed to enable leaders to evaluate the impact of the school's work to improve the attendance of pupils with SEND.

External support

There has been a comprehensive package of support, guidance and coaching from the chief executive officer and consultants from LLT. This has underpinned the significant improvements to leadership, safeguarding and site security that have occurred since the beginning of this term.

The experienced chair and governors of the IEB are dedicated and committed to the school. Although the IEB was only formed three weeks ago, governors are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have already started to support and challenge leaders.

The local authority provided external consultants to challenge and support previous leaders and governors. It is committed to support the school until it becomes an academy. Local authority officers supported the formation of the IEB and brokered the support of the LLT earlier this term. However, the local authority's support plan lacks detail and is now out of date. It does not reflect significant changes that have occurred in the school since the previous inspection last June. The plan did not ensure that previous leaders and governors were held sufficiently to account. For example, a lack of oversight of the building works meant that the school was unable to open on time after the summer holidays. This support plan needs improving to hold new IEB members to account and cover the full timescale required before the school becomes an academy.