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Mr Gareth Robinson
Headteacher
Stillington Primary School
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North Yorkshire
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Dear Mr Robinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Stillington Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4 February 2020, 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 improvement and 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 governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for North Yorkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently rectify the weaknesses in leadership and governance, by:
 - establishing capacity in leadership at all levels in the school
 - ensuring that governors rigorously hold the school to account for implementing actions to improve pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching and learning, so that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make the progress of which they are capable, by ensuring that:
 - gaps in pupils' knowledge caused by prior weaknesses in the quality of teaching are addressed swiftly, particularly in key stage 2
 - teaching challenges pupils, particularly the most able pupils, to make good progress
 - the assessment of pupils' progress is accurate to ensure that tasks match the different ages and abilities of pupils, including those with SEND.
- Improve the progress of children in early years, including those who are capable of exceeding the early learning goals, by ensuring that teaching challenges children consistently well to consolidate and extend their skills and knowledge.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 04 February 2020

Evidence

I held meetings with the headteacher throughout the day. I also accompanied him on visits to lessons. I talked to key stage 2 pupils in meetings and in lessons. I held a telephone conversation with the chair of the governing body. I also held a telephone conversation with the local authority school improvement adviser. I also talked by telephone to the headteacher of a local school providing additional support to the school. I looked at improvement plans, self-evaluation documents, governors' minutes and external evaluations of the school's work.

Context

Since the previous inspection, governors and the local authority have explored the school's future. At one point, consultations began on the possible closure of the school. This process has been deferred by the local authority as the school explores possible links with other schools. The school is now receiving direct school-to-school support from a local federation of schools. The local authority has supported this arrangement.

A temporary teacher took up post in October 2019 with responsibility for Reception class and key stage 1.

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

The headteacher has provided much needed stability over the past year. He has focused upon actions to improve standards of reading, writing and mathematics. This contributed to improving outcomes in these subjects for pupils at the end of key stage 2 in 2019. His actions to build leadership capacity have experienced some obstacles. He has experienced some instability in staffing in Reception class and at key stage 1. Nevertheless, he is now working with his key stage 1 leader to raise expectations of the work required from pupils in this key stage. More recently, he has been working with the headteacher of a local federation of schools. This work is bringing the potential to support more rapid curriculum improvement. It is also adding external checks on the quality of the school's work.

Governors have taken significant action to improve the quality of their work. They have worked closely with a national leader of governance to review their practice. They now have a much sharper awareness of their roles and responsibilities. They also receive better information on pupils' progress from the headteacher. As a result, they are holding leaders much more effectively to account for school performance. In addition, they have worked strategically with the local authority and local schools to build leadership and curriculum capacity. They are working intensively to secure a more certain future for the school and the community.

The headteacher has introduced new assessment processes. This has helped teachers to develop a more accurate picture of pupils' knowledge and progress through the curriculum. In addition, he has worked with other schools to check the standard of pupils' work. School assessment in writing was recently found to be accurate at key stage 2. However, there remain occasions where the quantity and quality of work required of pupils at key stage 1 is not good enough. Teachers have visited local schools to develop a better picture of what pupils can achieve. However, much needs to be done to implement the findings from these visits.

The headteacher has worked to strengthen the reading culture at the school. He has worked with colleagues to introduce a more coherent phonics programme at key stage 1. Staff have also used reading assessment to match books more carefully to pupils' reading abilities. The headteacher has also developed strategies to encourage pupils at key stage 2 to explore the meaning of texts more closely. A significant proportion of parents have taken up the invitation to come to school to read to their children each Friday. This is building a stronger reading culture.

The headteacher has also introduced a greater emphasis on problem-solving in mathematics. This is linked to a new emphasis for pupils to work at greater depth across the curriculum. However, the effect of this work is less evident. Pupils continue to show gaps in their understanding of times tables and in operations of number. Much needs to be done to strengthen pupils' mathematics knowledge.

The headteacher is a trained special educational need coordinator (SENCo). He has reviewed support plans for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). He is now reviewing the effects of support with parents and pupils. In addition, he is working with staff and external partners to help pupils with SEND to work more independently.

The headteacher has started to review the wider curriculum. He has mapped out the knowledge and skills that pupils need to achieve in each year group. At present, these plans lack detail. The work required of pupils in subjects such as history and geography is not of sufficient depth. In addition, the school lacks sufficient specialist teachers to implement a more ambitious curriculum. He is now working with leaders from a local federation to enhance the curriculum. This work is very recent. Leaders and governors are aware that the pace of improvement now needs to accelerate rapidly for pupils to experience an acceptable quality of education.

In the wake of the January 2019 inspection, actions were put in place to improve the quality of the curriculum in the early years. This helped an increasing proportion of children achieve a good level of development in the summer of 2019. However, leaders have not addressed the challenge for greater challenge in the early years as no children exceeded early learning goals in 2019. Further improvement was stalled by a period of staffing instability. This has now been resolved and the new teacher is working with the headteacher to enhance the learning environment, including making improvements to outdoor learning.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has introduced better systems to check the progress that pupils make in the curriculum in core subjects. He has brought in standardised tests to get an accurate picture of pupils' abilities in reading and mathematics. Leaders and governors now have a more accurate picture of pupils' curriculum progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

The headteacher has monitored the quality of education at key stage 1. He has invited external scrutiny to monitor standards. He has arranged visits to other schools to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve. Due to his own heavy teaching commitment, there has been less monitoring of the curriculum at key stage 2. Governors are mindful of this. They have recently brokered more intensive school to school support to receive more regular updates on the quality of the curriculum at key stage 2.

Governors have taken purposeful action to enhance their own expertise. They have taken part in regular training. They have listened and acted upon guidance from a national leader of governance. Governors' minutes show that they are asking much more focused questions on school improvement. They have worked with a local federation to secure external views of the school's work. They have balanced the difficult process of maintaining checks on current standards while exploring the long-term future of the school. They know their school well and have a much stronger picture of the quality of education offered to pupils.

The headteacher and governors recognise that the curriculum needs to be strengthened. They realise that pupils are not developing sufficient knowledge and skills in the wider curriculum. They also acknowledge that they lack staffing capacity in this area. They have recently started to work with a local federation to build their curriculum plans. Leaders realise the vital importance of this curriculum work and that much needs to be done in the months ahead.

The headteacher is striving to raise expectations of the work expected from pupils. He is setting tasks that encourage pupils to work with increasing challenge. There remains much variability in how well these approaches are being implemented. This challenge is not consistently seen in the curriculum that pupils experience.

Leaders have continued the improvement journey over a period of uncertainty for the school. Some of this uncertainty has slowed down aspects of that journey. The recently brokered school to school arrangement has the potential to build leadership capacity. It also provides an opportunity to rapidly enhance the curriculum. However, this development remains at a very early stage. Leaders and governors will need certainty over the future direction of the school in order for improvements to accelerate at the pace required.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The headteacher has provided much needed stability after a period of instability.
- Governors have taken significant action to improve the quality of their work. They are holding the school much more effectively to account.
- Governors have worked strategically with the local authority to explore long-term improvement, stability and to build capacity.
- Leaders have improved standards of reading at the school.
- Leaders are inviting external scrutiny from the local authority and local schools to support the improvement journey.
- Leaders are providing better staff training.
- Leaders are making staff more aware of the needs of pupils with SEND.
- Improvements in teaching and assessment contributed to better outcomes for pupils in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2019.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Despite greater stability, leadership capacity remains limited. A lack of specialist teaching undermines the implementation of the curriculum at key stage 2.
- Recent actions have the potential to strengthen leadership and the quality of the curriculum. However, they remain at a very early stage of development and, at this time, it is not possible to measure their impact.
- Raised expectations of what pupils can achieve are not sufficiently embedded across the curriculum.
- Gaps in pupils' understanding persist in many areas, including mathematics. Work is still not consistently pitched to meet the curriculum needs of pupils of different ages in mixed-age classes.
- Leaders' actions to develop the curriculum are at a very early stage of development.
- Continued uncertainty over the school's long-term future has undermined aspects of the improvement process.

External support

The local authority has worked closely with the school over the past year. They have carried out evaluations of the school's work. They provided support during consultations on possible closure. They have now deferred this process as the school explores links with local schools. The local authority has supported the school to school support programme that began in January 2020. This will see the school receive ongoing support from a local federation in both improving and checking the quality of education.

In addition, leaders and teachers have visited local schools to explore good practice in the early years and at key stage 1. Leaders have also provided additional training for teaching assistants.

Members of the governing body have worked with a national leader of governance to make significant improvement to the quality of governance.