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Mrs Deborah Hannaford
Federated Improvement Executive Principal
Ramnoth Junior School
Ramnoth Road
Wisbech
Cambridgeshire
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Dear Mrs Hannaford

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ramnoth Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 3–4 March 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 March 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 school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action was previously judged to be fit for purpose by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Lucas

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Rapidly improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the trust secures effective governance
 - clarifying all leadership roles and increasing leadership capacity to bring about sustained improvement in the quality of leadership, teaching, learning and assessment and, subsequently, pupils' progress
 - providing staff with training and guidance to help them fulfil their roles effectively
 - developing accuracy between leaders and staff in the use of assessment so it is used effectively to inform high-quality teaching and learning
 - developing leaders' understanding, use and evaluation of additional funding so that pupils' progress improves, including the physical education and sport premium, pupil premium and funding for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
 - reviewing the curriculum so that it enables pupils to develop greater knowledge and to deepen their understanding across a wide range of subjects
 - making sure that all staff understand the trust's vision for improvement and their responsibilities for raising standards.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and achievement by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can and should be achieving
 - making sure that all teachers use assessment accurately and effectively to plan learning in reading, writing and mathematics that meets the needs of pupils
 - planning lessons that follow a sequence, most notably in writing, so that tasks build upon what pupils already know and can do
 - developing pupils' opportunities to practise their writing skills across curriculum subjects
 - ensuring that teaching enables pupils to develop and rehearse their reasoning and problem-solving knowledge in mathematics
 - making sure that pupils leave with sufficiently developed knowledge and skills in reading, writing and mathematics to make a good start at secondary school.
- Improve pupils' behaviour for learning so that:
 - low-level disruption is eliminated
 - pupils feel confident to tell teachers when they feel capable of achieving more.

- The school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 3–4 March 2020

Evidence

I scrutinised the school's website and documents relevant to this monitoring visit. Together with senior leaders, I visited each class to observe pupils learning. With senior leaders, I evaluated pupils' work in several subjects. I also observed pupils at breaktime and lunchtime. I met with: the federated improvement executive principal; the head of schools; members of the senior leadership team; curriculum leaders; teachers; and groups of pupils. I also met with the CEO of The Elliot Foundation Academy Trust (the trust), along with two members of the operations group (which has responsibility for local governance). In addition, I took into account the views of parents and carers I spoke with about the school's work.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there has been a considerable amount of change in personnel. After the section 5 inspection, the executive principal, associate leader and vice-principal left the school. The federated executive improvement principal has continued in her role and is in school for two and half days each week. The head of schools (with responsibility for Nene and Ramnoth schools) took up her post in September 2019. A vice-principal also took up her position in September 2019. In the period since the previous inspection, six teachers have left the school and four teachers have joined. In September 2019, an additional class was added to Year 3 due to an increase in pupil numbers. The trust has continued to take responsibility for governance through its operations group.

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

Under the clear guidance from the trust, leaders are making the required changes, working to a carefully constructed timetable of improvement. The quality of education is better. Pupils' behaviour has improved. The level of care for pupils' well-being has been maintained. Classroom and other learning areas are bright and well organised. That said, aspects of leaders' work to improve the quality of education are very new. There is too much inconsistency in how the curriculum is delivered in several subjects. This means that gaps remain in pupils' knowledge and skills.

The head of schools has made clear her high expectations of what pupils could and should achieve. Staff share these expectations. As a result of suitable training, they have a more accurate understanding of what pupils know and can do in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers know what good-quality work looks like, particularly in reading and writing. This means that teachers plan learning in these subjects that is better matched to pupils' needs and capabilities. However, in spite of this planning, some aspects of the curriculum are new and teachers are getting to grips with how best to deliver them.

The head of schools has made improving the teaching of writing a priority. She has made essential and well-judged changes to the curriculum and how it is taught. Teachers have received appropriate training. Using the school's chosen approach of 'must-haves', they plan learning that enables pupils to build up their skills and knowledge in writing. As a result, many pupils' work is of an improving quality. Yet, on occasion, teachers choose content that is not best suited to the writing task in hand. Where this is the case, pupils struggle with the breadth and volume of new information they are asked to take on board. This makes it hard for pupils to achieve what is asked of them.

Standards in reading remain low but are improving. The head of schools has led the continued focus on teaching pupils to read. Reading has an increased profile among pupils and staff. Teachers know, and stick to, the school's approach to teaching reading. For example, teachers' focus on 'powerful words' is developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of key vocabulary. The library is well stocked and often used. Pupils read carefully chosen and appropriate texts. They speak knowledgeably about these books, their characters and their plots. Pupils enjoy reading and take their responsibility as reading buddies and reading ambassadors seriously. Pupils who find reading tough get the help that they need to catch up.

Leaders have a precise understanding of what needs to improve in mathematics. However, their work to improve the mathematics curriculum and how it is taught is very recent and not well established. This means that, while teachers have an accurate overview of the curriculum, they are not as confident teaching it. Until very recently, they have not adapted sequences of learning to take into account pupils' prior learning or understanding. For example, teachers report that they need support to make sure that pupils are secure in how they are applying the methods that they are learning in their work on measurement and fractions. Given the gaps in their knowledge, some pupils are not catching up as quickly as they need to. They rely on the support of adults to settle down to the more demanding tasks.

At the time of the previous inspection, the curriculum was judged to be too narrow. Following on from their own review, leaders have taken steps to ensure that pupils study more subjects across the curriculum. Aspects of this work are in their infancy. Teachers are still feeling their way through the delivery of the curriculum. They are not well versed in the expectations of what pupils should achieve in foundation subjects. There is considerable unevenness in the way in which some subjects are taught, which hampers pupils' progression through the curriculum. Teachers do not routinely plan activities that enable pupils to build on previous content or to apply and fine-tune subject-specific skills. Teachers' feedback on pupils' work lacks subject specificity. There are too few appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills in subjects other than English. In music and art, sequences of learning do not currently match the ambition of the national curriculum. Leaders have credible plans to put this right.

Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2 rose in 2019. Their progress remained significantly below that of other pupils nationally in each subject. Pupils' work is of an improving quality but is not yet as good as it should be. Pupils are not well enough prepared for secondary school.

The quality of the provision for pupils with SEND is not improving quickly. Leaders have a better understanding of how funding is allocated. They are quicker to establish pupils' needs. However, leaders are not making sure that teachers consistently implement strategies to help pupils with SEND achieve well across the curriculum.

Leaders have laid out their high expectations of how pupils should behave. Adults and pupils are clear about what is expected of them in the school's 'Rainbow chart' approach to behaviour management. The policy and practice are commonly understood and consistently applied. Teachers and pupils report that behaviour has improved. The school is a calm and purposeful place in which to learn. Pupils mix happily at breaktimes and lunchtimes. That said, a small number of pupils find it hard to make the correct behaviour choices. This frustrates their classmates.

Pupils report that, if they have any concerns about their learning or well-being, they are confident about speaking with teachers.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

After the previous inspection, the CEO led a frank 'lessons learned' review. The trust has taken decisive steps to put the school back on the right path. Given the large number of changes needed, leaders have laid out a realistic timetable of priorities and actions. This combines urgency with the need to ensure that the school does not fall back to previous inadequacies.

Under the watchful eye of the CEO, the trust has made sure that governance is effective. The operations group (OG) is providing well-informed challenge and support to school leaders. Members of the OG are very familiar with the school's priorities for improvement and check the impact of actions that leaders are taking. Members of the OG know how additional government funding to support disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND is spent, and they check up on its impact. The OG invites external scrutiny of its, and the school's, work and acts upon advice given.

The trust has communicated clearly its vision and high expectations for pupils and staff. Staff understand this vision and embrace their role in improving the quality of education. The trust has invested considerable time and resources into developing leadership capacity. This is being done through a combination of astute external appointments, secondments and training to develop the skills of staff already in school.

The federated improvement executive principal and the head of schools provide consistent, effective leadership. They are supported well by the senior leadership team. After her appointment in September, the head of schools quickly gained the trust of staff. Staff morale is improved. Adults report that they are listened to and their contribution is valued. They consider leaders to be mindful of staff well-being. There have been few changes of teacher within the academic year. These factors are contributing to a sense of togetherness evident within the school. Parents are noticing the improvements that are being made. For example, parents commented on the increased focus on pupils' reading and on the broader range of subjects being offered.

Some parts of the leadership structure are still being put in place. Leaders, such as the progress leaders, are new to their post. With the support of the trust and senior leaders, they are developing the skills and knowledge they need to be fully effective in their roles. New leaders are eager and have a precise knowledge of what needs to be done. However, it is too soon to judge the impact of their work.

Leadership of and teaching in some foundation subjects are underdeveloped and are part of the trust's next phase of improvement for the school. At present, curriculum leaders do not have enough influence on how effectively the curriculum in subjects other than English and mathematics is delivered. Teachers have not received the training that they need to teach the curriculum well. This means that they lack sufficient clarity on how to secure pupils' progression through the curriculum in several subjects.

Leaders have an improved understanding of how additional government funding should be used and evaluated. Leaders have acted on the findings of the trust and external reviews of how they use and monitor the pupil premium. Leaders have changed how funding is allocated. The impact is monitored in school and by the trust. Disadvantaged pupils are gaining ground in reading and writing. In line with other pupils, this is not as strongly the case in mathematics and the foundation subjects. Too many disadvantaged pupils are persistently absent from school.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The trust, OG and school leaders have put in place a realistic plan to bring about the necessary sustained improvements. The actions outlined in this plan are being effectively implemented.
- Senior school leaders are effective in their work. They, in partnership with the trust, have made clear their vision and high expectations for what pupils can achieve.
- Staff have embraced their roles in bringing about improvement. Those new to leadership posts have a realistic appreciation of the skills and knowledge they need to develop so that they are effective in their roles.

- School leaders have drawn upon expertise from teachers and leaders from within other trust schools. This expertise forms an important part of the well-judged training and support that staff have access to.
- The curriculum in reading and writing is improved. The quality of pupils' work is getting better.
- The school's behaviour policy and practice are commonly understood and consistently applied by adults. Learning often takes place in a purposeful good-natured atmosphere.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders' work to bring about improvements in the mathematics curriculum is very recent. It has not had the same impact as the actions taken to improve the curriculum in reading and writing.
- The foundation curriculum and its leadership are not sufficiently well developed. Teachers are not secure in their knowledge of some subjects and how to teach them. In a small number of subjects, the sequences of learning do not match the ambition of the national curriculum.
- The provision for pupils with SEND is not strong enough. The rate of improvement has been slow.
- The attendance of a small number of disadvantaged pupils is too low.

External support

The school is receiving appropriate support from outside the trust. For example, leaders are working with a leader from another local trust to revise curriculum and assessment plans. Leaders who are new to their posts are accessing nationally accredited training. The trust invites external scrutiny of its work with the school. This is helping leaders to reflect upon and make appropriate changes to their improvement strategies.