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Ms Lynn Small
Western Springs Primary School
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Rugeley
Staffordshire
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Dear Ms Small

Special measures monitoring inspection of Western Springs Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 26–27 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 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 improvement plan is 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 Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Harwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- As a matter of urgency, leaders and those responsible for governance should make sure that pupils are kept safe by ensuring that:
 - the recently revised safeguarding policy is implemented effectively
 - pre-employment checks are carried out and recorded accurately
 - adequate supervision is put in place at breaktimes and lunchtimes
 - systems and procedures for safeguarding are strengthened, including recording incidents and analysing records to spot trends and patterns.
- Strengthen leadership to bring about rapid improvement by ensuring that:
 - comprehensive and intensive support is provided for current leaders
 - the implementation of initiatives and policies is monitored and impact evaluated effectively, particularly in relation to the impact of pupil premium funding and other additional funding
 - the curriculum is reviewed so that learning is sequenced more logically, builds on pupils' prior learning and supports pupils' progression more effectively, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - teachers are recruited to fill vacancies as a matter of urgency
 - all teachers receive focused and effective professional development to improve their practice
 - all teachers have consistently high expectations and an accurate understanding of what pupils could and should be achieving for their age in reading, writing and mathematics
 - assessment information is used more effectively by teachers to inform pupils' next steps
 - teaching assistants receive support and training to provide more consistently effective support for pupils' learning
 - a love of reading is promoted across the school
 - staff monitor pupils' progress in reading more closely and intervene promptly when it is clear that pupils are falling behind
 - a coherent strategy for the teaching of writing is implemented, ensuring that pupils have consistent and frequent opportunities to write at length across the curriculum

- the teaching of mathematics follows a logical sequence, building on pupils' prior learning and making sure that pupils have frequent opportunities to practise and apply their skills in problem-solving and reasoning activities.
- Improve provision and outcomes in the early years by ensuring that:
 - adults receive targeted training to support children's learning more effectively, particularly children's speaking, listening, reading and writing skills
 - all activities are based on secure assessments of children's development and next steps.
- Improve personal development, behaviour and welfare by ensuring that:
 - clear behaviour systems and procedures are established across the school and staff receive support to implement these effectively
 - attendance improves to be consistently in line with the national average
 - relationships with parents are strengthened across the school so that parents can work more effectively in partnership with the school to improve pupils' behaviour, attendance and achievement.
- Improve provision for pupils with SEND by ensuring that:
 - immediate intensive support and capacity are provided to identify pupils' needs accurately and put in place effective systems, structures and provision
 - the school has an appropriately qualified member of staff to lead and manage SEND provision effectively
 - training and support are provided for teachers and support staff to address the needs of pupils with SEND more effectively.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 26 February 2020 to 27 February 2020

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher, subject leaders for English, mathematics and special educational needs, the early years foundation stage leader, designated safeguarding leaders and groups of staff and pupils. The inspector also met with two representatives of the interim executive board (IEB). She held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.

Context

There have been substantial changes to staffing and senior leadership since the previous inspection in June 2019. All leaders and most teachers are new to the school. The substantive headteacher and acting headteacher at the time of the inspection have both left the school. Immediately following the inspection, two members of the IEB acted as headteachers on a part time basis. A headteacher who was in post for the autumn term only has now been followed by an interim executive headteacher. The current deputy headteacher is a teacher seconded from a local school for the academic year. A class teacher has stepped up into the role of special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). In January 2020, a permanent early years foundation stage leader joined the school. Two classes are currently taught by teachers on temporary contracts. Long-term absences of support staff, including the school business manager, are covered in-house.

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

Significant changes in staffing slowed the progress of improvement immediately following the last inspection. However, staffing has now stabilised, the staff are committed to making a difference and the quality of education is improving. Pupils are keen to come to school and parents say that the school is improving a lot.

Current leaders have created a strong united team with a clear shared vision. Leaders' have raised the expectations of the quality of teaching. They provide relevant guidance and training for staff. Opportunities to work with other schools and to learn from good practice are more frequent. Teachers and teaching assistants are supported to develop their skills and knowledge. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure. They use questioning well to ensure that pupils show what they have understood. Agreed structures for planning lessons are in place. Leaders check regularly what is happening in classrooms and talk to pupils about their learning. This is helping to improve consistency in the classroom.

A new curriculum has been introduced, which provides appropriate coverage of the national curriculum. It is helping to sequence what pupils should learn and when they should learn it. It helps teachers to plan more carefully to meet pupils' needs. Pupils now have the opportunity to study a broad and balanced range of subjects. However, the legacy of poor teaching over time and frequent changes in staff has resulted in many pupils having gaps in their knowledge. Assessment linked to the new curriculum is helping identify these gaps but is still in the early days of being used. Leaders and teachers recognise that there is a long way to go before the majority of pupils are working at age related expectations.

Leaders are developing a love of reading across the school. A new library has been created and books previously hidden away are now available for pupils to read. Opportunities to read are a daily occurrence. Teachers read to pupils and new reading diaries support parents to hear their child read at home. As a result of training for staff, there is now a consistent approach to teaching phonics in reception and key stage 1. The sounds pupils know are checked regularly and support provided for those who struggle to keep up. Teachers ensure that those at the early stages of reading have books that match the sounds that they know. Pupils talk about favourite books and authors. They are beginning to develop the confidence and resilience to read more challenging texts. The leader for literacy knows that this is the beginning of the journey to ensure that every child is a reader.

A new mathematics scheme has been introduced and is being used consistently across the school. It helps teachers to plan and deliver an appropriate sequence of lessons. Teachers focus on developing pupils' basic number fluency and recall as these skills are weak across the school. For example, in Year 2 pupils struggle to manipulate numbers quickly to make 5,6 and 7. Teachers ensure that pupils have the chance to practise repeatedly until they are secure in what they are doing, and regularly ask pupils to explain and prove what they know. Older pupils were observed thinking deeply about division and decimal places. They are gaining confidence in their own abilities and are beginning to challenge one another purposefully. Additional resources and equipment are used well to support pupil's mathematical development. Leaders know that there is much more work to do until pupils can confidently use their skills in problem solving.

Pupils' books now show many opportunities to write across the curriculum. Teachers are more confident when modelling writing and showing pupils what to do. Pupils are developing the stamina to create longer pieces of writing which are detailed and interesting. Writers of the week are celebrated in assembly and their names included on the newsletter. Daily handwriting practice is helping many pupils to develop the ability to write clearly and neatly. Expectations have been raised and pupils are beginning to take more pride in their work. Many pupils, however, still struggle with poor letter formation and fluency. Basic spelling errors are being addressed by teachers, but some pupils' work can still be difficult to read. A strategy for the teaching of writing is in the process of being fully developed.

Support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is improving. There has been a culture shift in the school. Staff now understand their responsibility to help pupils with SEND make strong progress. They are beginning to use the assessment information more effectively so that they know exactly what pupils can or cannot do. 'Passports to learning' set out individual needs and take account of pupil and parent views. Targets set for pupils are more appropriate and achievable. The SENCo has only been in post for a matter of weeks. She is deeply committed and passionate about making a difference for pupils. However, this work is at the very early stages of development and the impact is yet to be seen.

Behaviour across the school has improved significantly. A new behaviour policy has been introduced, based upon respectful relationships and positive praise. It is implemented consistently by all staff. The school rules of being 'ready, respectful and safe' are understood by all. As a result, the school is calm and orderly. Pupils demonstrate good manners and show respect to those around them. They hold doors open for visitors and take care of their school by tidying away. Greater consistency in staffing is supporting the development of positive relationships. Pupils say that they are happier now that they don't have so many supply teachers. Attitudes to learning are more positive.

Leaders are taking appropriate action to promote good attendance at school. They have established systems to check on those who do not attend regularly or who are late to school. Any absence from school is quickly followed up and support provided to families if required. Improvements in the quality of education are also supporting the drive for better attendance. Pupils are keen to come to school as they are enjoying what they are learning. As a result, attendance is improving.

The early years foundation stage has seen significant improvements. More rapid improvement is evident since the arrival of the permanent early years leader. The classrooms and outdoor learning environment now provide a safe, purposeful space. Observations and assessment of what children are doing have been strengthened. Planning takes account of children's needs and interests. As a result, children are beginning to engage and concentrate for longer periods of time. They enjoy sharing their learning with adults and visitors. For example, children were excited to show that they knew four add one makes five and so did three add two. Daily phonics lessons are well organised. A strong early years staff team is developing because of the mentoring and coaching provided by the new leader.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The arrangements for safeguarding are now effective. Leaders have taken rapid action to put this right. A strong culture of vigilance is developing across the school. Staff are well trained and are using up to date guidance. They are alert to any potential risks faced by pupils. They are knowledgeable and understand the responsibility they have for keeping children safe. Record-keeping is now strong and reflects the swift action that leaders take to protect children. Leaders have ensured

that all pre-employment checks are carried out on new staff. Security and safety around the school site have been improved. Staff demonstrate a greater awareness and risk assessments are no longer tick-box exercises. Supervision at breaktimes has been reviewed and is now adequate. This is being managed especially well during the extensive building works taking place. Pupils feel safe in school and know who to talk to if they are worried. Parents agree that their children are safe and well cared for at school.

Members of the IEB have provided strong effective leadership during a period of uncertainty and instability. They have managed major staffing changes especially that of senior leaders well. During the late summer and early autumn term, the IEB maintained a strategic overview while supporting the day to day running of the school. Through regular close monitoring, they held staff to account and challenged where improvements needed to be more rapid. The IEB have secured strong interim leadership for the school which has brought about much needed stability.

Although only at the school for a short period of time, the interim executive headteacher has unified the team of leaders. They are determined to raise standards and improve the quality of education. They work closely together to drive the necessary improvements. Leaders are effective role models for staff, parents and pupils. The school development plan is being updated and refined. Senior leaders work with subject leaders to align subject specific plans with the whole school strategic plan. Plans focus on improving outcomes for pupils through an improved quality of education. However, it is too soon to fully evaluate the sustained impact of the improvement plan.

There is a strong sense of a united staff team committed to improving the school. Staff reported feeling more valued and supported. They have opportunities for training and development. Staff say that they know what is expected and fully understand their responsibilities. A positive culture and ethos is being embedded across the school.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the barriers disadvantaged pupils face. They have put in place a range of strategies to provide more appropriate support. They work closely with families to ensure pupils thrive. There is a plan detailing how additional funding will be spent. However, leaders have yet to fully evaluate the impact of this funding.

Relationships with parents and the wider school community are improving. Parents value the chance to talk to leaders each morning at the school gate. They say that communication has improved, and they feel well informed. Parents note the improvements across the school but say that there is still a lot to do before their children have a good education.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The school is a safe place with all the required safeguarding checks undertaken. Robust systems and processes are in place to keep children safe.
- The school is currently fully staffed with all leaders and teachers committed to the full academic year. Leaders and teachers are suitably experienced.
- Staff morale is high. Staff say that they are well supported and feel valued by leaders. They are determined to improve the school and make a difference for pupils.
- Pupils' behaviour is considerably better than it was previously. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive. The school is calm and pupils move around between lessons sensibly. Appropriate supervision is in place at breaktimes.
- Expectations of what pupils can do have been raised. Staff recognise that pupils were underestimated before. They are aspirational for pupils and want them to achieve what they are capable of.
- Rates of attendance are improving. Pupils and their families are being supported to develop good habits in coming to school regularly and on time.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Uncertainty about the timescale for academisation and the identification of a suitable sponsor has resulted in senior leaders and many staff in the school remaining on temporary contracts. Any further significant staffing changes will continue to hinder the pace of improvement.
- Over time, low expectations and the lack of a cohesive ambitious curriculum have left a legacy of underachievement. This is clearly evident across the school in every year group. Pupils have considerable gaps in their skills and knowledge. Although leaders have introduced a new curriculum, they are at the early stages of ensuring that it meets pupils' needs. Schemes of work and lessons need to be continually adapted to address gaps in pupils' learning.

External support

Two local trusts are providing effective support both in terms of providing interim staff to work at the school and professional development. Support commissioned by the local authority for the early years helped to improve the learning environment and planning for learning. These visits are now less frequent since the appointment of the early years foundation stage (EYFS) leader. A series of whole-school monitoring visits have been commissioned by the local authority, but to date only an initial fact-finding visit has been carried out, with others scheduled for the next few months.