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Anna Stevenson
Interim headteacher
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Dear Mrs Stevenson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Birches Green Junior School

Following my visit with Vanessa Payne, Ofsted Inspector (OI), to your school on 28 and 29 September 2021, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in July 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Pye
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 September 2021

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in May 2021, there have been some staff changes. Two new teachers started in September 2021. A senior office manager has left and a new temporary administrator has joined the school. The school has also recruited a temporary site manager.

The headteacher of Birches Green Infants School continues as the interim headteacher. The interim executive board (IEB) is still in place. One board member has stepped down. The school plans to become an academy with a multi-academy trust (MAT). The target date for this is January 2022. The IEB remains committed to a long-term ambition for the infant and junior schools to come together as one primary school. The board continues to discuss this with the appropriate organisations.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

In response to the safeguarding failings identified by the monitoring inspection in May 2021, leaders took swift action to improve things. They have provided all staff with clear guidance about how medicines must be stored. Inspectors' checks on classroom procedures found that this guidance is followed. Staff now make sure that pupils have appropriate access to what they need, when they need it. Leaders have also changed the system for recording accidents in school. This new system requires staff to enter more information and let parents and carers know if their child has been hurt in school. Staff and pupils confirm that this system is used consistently. Inspectors' checks on other aspects of the school's safeguarding work found no concerns. Teaching and non-teaching staff are aware of their duties with regards to keeping pupils safe.

This inspection also found that determined leadership from the interim headteacher and both assistant headteachers is steering other aspects of the school in an upward direction. They present a clear and outward-looking vision for the future of the school, which has already driven some significant positive changes.

In response to the areas identified for improvement at the previous section 5 inspection, leaders are continuing to take effective action to improve the quality of education. In mathematics, calm leadership is bringing greater consistency in planning and teaching. In addition, staff have benefited from some external support from a local mathematics hub via the Robin Hood MAT. Assessment is being used with increasing effectiveness to plan next steps in learning. There is still some way to go to lift standards higher, but in all classes, pupils are learning more than they used to.

Ambitious leadership of English is also bringing change for the better. Expectations for staff and pupils have risen and there are daily routines for reading and writing in all classes. Similarly, a whole-school focus on widening pupils' vocabulary is also noticeable in lessons. When writing about 'Beowulf' in Year 4, for example, teaching explored a wide range of words and gave pupils the knowledge they need to structure and enrich their

writing. In addition, displays of pupils' written work celebrate achievement and make pupils feel proud of what they have done. However, variability in classroom practice remains. Staff keep pupils busy and usually manage their behaviour well, but some tasks and approaches are still not pitched at the right level. When reading class texts together, for instance, some pupils cannot make sense of the words. This means they either rely on copying others or do not join in. On top of this, staff have still not received much-needed training in phonics. This hinders progress, especially for those pupils who are not confident readers when they start in Year 3. In addition, delays to the delivery of new reading books mean that the school has not yet started sending reading books home. Currently, pupils do have access to reading books online.

In other subjects, staff have worked hard to revise and improve curriculum plans. These new plans map out the subject-specific knowledge, concepts and vocabulary to be taught in different year groups. They have been designed to improve progression of learning through the school, and different subjects are at different stages of development. The school is moving in the right direction here. The next step is to make sure that there is a well-thought-through strategic plan for implementing these new plans in the classroom. This will need to be managed carefully, with planned timescales for each subject and staff training.

Improved oversight of pupil premium spending means that leaders know how this money is being spent. In the main, this funding is used to make sure that all pupils can take part in all school activities and to provide some additional catch-up support for learning. The next step is for leaders to check on the difference this is making to pupils' learning and experiences at school.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is still a development area. During this inspection, some striking examples of effective inclusion were noted, particularly in subjects such as physical education and music. However, day-to-day support for learning is more hit and miss. While there is now a shared understanding that pupils with SEND can, and should, access all the school offers, there is a mixed picture as to how well this actually happens. The school has produced a SEND action plan that sets out the routines and procedures for staff to follow. The next step is to help staff understand exactly what this means for how they support pupils with SEND in class.

The school is doing a good job in checking on attendance and following up on any unexplained or unnecessary absences. This inspection found several instances of marked improvement to attendance in response to the school's actions. Overall, attendance appears to be improving, with pupils and parents saying that they are glad to be back at school full time after the disruption caused by COVID-19. Nevertheless, a few pupils still miss too much school for no good reason or are late too often.

The IEB provides capable governance and responded well to the findings of the first routine monitoring inspection. There is now a clear plan for the school to join a MAT. In preparation for this, board members and school leaders have been in contact with trust

staff to discuss future arrangements. The IEB and school leaders remain committed to their long-term aim to unite the junior and infant schools as one primary school.

Additional support

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the school has continued to receive regular support brokered through the local authority. This support has focused on the priorities identified by the May 2021 inspection and has also provided general support for leaders. In addition, school leaders have liaised with staff from Robin Hood MAT and benefited from support from the local mathematics hub via this link with the MAT.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and looked at the school's website. They met with the interim headteacher, other senior leaders, staff, pupils, members of the IEB, the chief executive officer of Robin Hood MAT and a school improvement partner.

Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's staff and parent questionnaires, looked at work in pupils' books and visited lessons. Inspectors spoke to some parents at the beginning of the school day.

Inspectors carried out checks on the school's safeguarding processes and asked staff, pupils and parents about safety matters.