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Rebecca Lightfoot
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lightfoot

Special measures monitoring inspection of Wenlock CofE Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 18 and 19 July 2022, 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 both you and the supporting headteacher gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most 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 November 2021. 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 pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my 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's improvement plans are fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of St Albans, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Luton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Kristian Hewitt
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 18 and 19 July 2022

Context

Since the previous inspection in November 2021 there have been significant changes in the leadership and governance of the school. With the support of the diocese and local authority, effective action has been taken to provide stable leadership in the school. This has included the appointment of an established member of senior staff as an acting headteacher and the support from an experienced consultant headteacher, for up to three days per week.

Following a full review of governance, a new governing body has been recently established. This is made up of members identified for the range of skills and expertise they can contribute, to support improvement in the school.

Leaders have been united in securing sustainable change in safeguarding arrangements and the quality of education in the school. They have used ongoing rigorous and critical analysis to identify weaknesses in provision, honestly and accurately. This has informed a realistic strategy for improvement and a precise development plan. Historically, in the absence of effective governance, leaders have made effective use of external partners to provide assurances that pupils' experiences and the quality of education have been improving.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Leaders have started this early development work with steadfast commitment to bring about improvement at the school.

Following the establishment of a new leadership team, actions taken have moved from being reactive to being rooted in secure and strategic plans for long-term improvement. These strategies are captured clearly in the school improvement planning. There are specific milestones set for achieving measurable success, over time. When arrangements for governance were in a period of transition, leaders and external partners put in place systems to check the improvements taking place.

The establishment of a new governing body is starting to provide clearer accountability. While this is beginning to demonstrate that leaders' actions are challenged, and that evaluations of progress are independently checked, the work to ensure focus and precision in their actions is in its infancy.

The approach leaders have taken up to this point validates their ambition to bring about sustainable change. This is to ensure that there is reduced pressure to make short-term decisions that may not be in the interests of pupils. All staff and leaders are united in this vision. Staff in the school are also realistic about the early stages of progress made so far. They have a shared focus to establish and secure the improvements starting to take root.

At the time of the previous inspection safeguarding practices in the school were judged to be ineffective. Since that point, safeguarding has had a high priority in school improvement actions. Leaders have targeted all areas of practice to ensure there are shared, high standards for the safety and well-being of pupils. As a result of effective and ongoing training, staff are beginning to demonstrate strong understanding of their roles and responsibilities to safeguard pupils. Leaders have established new routines and systems that are fit for purpose and pupils are already benefiting from these approaches. Pupils are confident that their voices are listened to and that they are safe in school. Leaders have further intentions to strengthen the practices in place and to fully establish the culture of safeguarding that now exists. At this stage, leaders are ensuring that pupils are well looked after, and safeguarding arrangements are securely in place.

Leaders are working to establish a broad curriculum that is ambitious to meet the needs of pupils in the school. This plan goes beyond a core expectation to meet the demands of the national curriculum. Leaders want the education experience of pupils to support them to develop strong knowledge and embed core values that are part of the school's ethos. Staff have been engaged in the redesign of the curriculum to make sure that it is a shared priority, that is fully realised. Changes have been agreed and work is underway for a relaunch in September 2022.

Curriculum developments are at an early stage. Subject leaders have had useful and targeted training to build their understanding of how best to structure learning in lessons. They have also considered how best to develop the subject expertise of teachers across the school. The strategy in place, including the way plans are formatted and accessed, is ensuring that there is improving coherence in the curriculum. As part of curriculum developments, leaders are currently in the process of developing their approach to relationships and sex education (RSE) to ensure that the school's offer is fit for purpose and meets statutory guidance.

The teaching of reading has been a clear priority in the development of the curriculum. Leaders have regard for national guidance and pertinent research. They are demonstrating how these principles are now beginning to be used regularly in the practice of staff. They are focused on ensuring that pupils learn to read and catch up if they have gaps in their knowledge.

Leaders have invested in a phonics programme to support all pupils to have a strong foundation knowledge in the crucial sounds they need to know to read well. They have outsourced expert support and training for all staff. This is improving consistency and quality in the way lessons are taught. Pupils also practise reading from books that precisely match their reading levels. Pupils reflect positively on the changes made and can see the impact this has had on the confidence of their friends who benefit from additional support with reading. Leaders have not fully engaged parents and carers in their work to support early readers and know that this will add value to their offer. Leaders also identify there is a need to widen the range and diversity of texts that pupils can access during their time in school.

A recent focus for teachers' development has been an emphasis on supporting pupils to practise recalling the knowledge they are learning. Staff know that it is important for new knowledge to be remembered for learning to take place. Pupils reflect positively on the opportunity to recap and rehearse important knowledge and can identify where these opportunities are provided for them. There is more work to do to ensure these opportunities are reliable and feature regularly across the full curriculum.

Up until recently, the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has not been effective. Robust and honest evaluation, including the use of a local experienced headteacher, has provided a clear understanding of where weaknesses exist. Practices have already started to evolve and improve the experience of pupils with SEND. This includes the setting of clearer targets and making better use of advice from external professionals. Teachers and support staff are appreciative of the advice and guidance that has been given to improve provision for pupils with SEND. They have acted on this already but know there is more to do to make sure all pupils receive their entitlement to fair access to the evolving curriculum. Leaders have considered how to build capacity in this area of development and have appointed a new and experienced special educational needs and disabilities coordinator (SENDCo), who will take up their post in September 2022.

There is a specialist resource base on the school site, known as The Lighthouse, which meets the local needs of pupils with specific behavioural needs. The Lighthouse provision is managed by and serves nine local schools within the area partnership. To secure stability in the oversight of this provision, two local headteachers from within the partnership are actively supporting leaders in the school. This has ensured that the provision is meeting the needs of pupils and that staff in the setting are supported and held to account. There are ongoing discussions between the local authority and area partnership to consider the quality and long-term prospects of the setting. This has not distracted leaders from making sure that pupils are receiving relevant and impactful education while attending there. During this complex period of transition, leaders' priorities, identified actions and related monitoring activities have not been clearly enough recorded. They understand the need for this as the provision continues to be held in a temporary state of flux.

Staff are united in the view that important changes made by leaders are making a difference to pupils in the school. They appreciate and value the clarity of direction provided by the leadership team in place. They feel empowered, included and listened to.

Additional support

Leaders have actively sought the support and evaluation of external partners. They have analysed the evidence gathered and been self-critical to ensure that no area of practice is left unchecked. Leaders have used this external guidance to ensure that resources are prioritised on actions that make lasting impact, such as the development of subject leaders across the school. There is evidence that all external partner working is leading to improvement and beginning to have a positive impact on pupils at this early stage.

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, the supporting consultant headteacher and other leaders in the school. The inspector spoke with pupils, a range of staff from across the school and met with three members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.

To consider the use external support the inspector spoke with the school improvement adviser, expert teacher and the safeguarding and education manager at the local authority. The inspector met with three local headteachers who are supporting with SEND provision in the school, including oversight of The Lighthouse behaviour provision. The inspector also spoke with the deputy director of education at the Diocese of St Albans.