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Zoë Phillips and Andrew Carless
Executive Headteacher and Acting Headteacher
Martins Wood Primary School
Mildmay Road
Stevenage
Hertfordshire
SG1 5RT

Dear Mrs Phillips and Mr Carless

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Martins Wood Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 July 2022, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in November 2021. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the second routine inspection the school had 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:

The school continues to be inadequate. Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plans are fit for purpose.

The school may appoint early career teachers.

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 Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Tessa Holledge
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 July 2022

Context

There has been a change in headteacher since the previous inspection of the school. The deputy head has led the school since the previous inspection, taking on the formal role of acting headteacher from February 2022. An executive headteacher has also been appointed. The executive headteacher takes responsibility for both this school and another local school. The school is currently going through a staffing restructure process.

Following the section 5 inspection, an interim executive board (IEB) has been appointed to take over the role of governance in the school. The school has been issued with an academy order and is going through the processes to join a multi-academy trust in the autumn of 2022.

This inspection focused on the key areas of safeguarding, behaviour and governance. The quality of education was judged to be good at the section 5 inspection and so was not considered on this occasion.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Leaders are working closely with Hertfordshire local authority since the previous full inspection. They have undertaken a comprehensive review of safeguarding files. They have retrained all staff in safeguarding children and introduced weekly safeguarding updates. They regularly check on staff's understanding of how to keep children safe. Senior leaders now have safeguarding as the first agenda item at their weekly meetings.

Staff are knowledgeable about the risks that pupils face. They quickly pass information on to designated safeguarding leads. Safeguarding leaders take rapid action where needed and make appropriate referrals to external agencies, including children's services and the police. Leaders work effectively with agencies to ensure well-coordinated support for vulnerable pupils. Staff at all levels describe safeguarding as 'everyone's responsibility' and their actions show that this is the case.

Leaders have also prioritised teaching children about how to keep themselves safe through a well-thought-through programme of lessons and assemblies. One of the new, simplified school values is 'be safe'. Pupils know what this means, why it is important and how they can be vigilant about their own safety and that of others. They can identify adults they can go to if they feel worried or upset. Pupils are confident that adults will help them.

As a result of this range of work, the culture of safeguarding in the school is now taking all reasonable action to keep pupils safe. Safeguarding is now effective.

The IEB has been highly focused on the areas for improvement in the section 5 inspection report, together with ensuring the long-term financial stability of the school. Members of the IEB know the school well and have worked closely with senior leaders. Staff feel well supported by the senior leaders. The IEB is a temporary board until the school moves into an multi-academy trust.

Since the section 5 inspection, there has been a need for a comprehensive restructure of staffing. Some parents and carers are unhappy about the proposed changes. They are concerned about support for their children in the autumn term. There is still work to be done in rebuilding parents' trust and confidence in the school.

Leaders have introduced systems for recording pupils' behaviour. Senior leaders are now effectively tracking behaviour patterns. The tracking has led to targeted strategies, for example using a book about moods to help the youngest understand what to do when they are upset. Some staff recording on these systems is not yet as precise as leaders would like it to be.

Older pupils' behaviour at break- and lunchtime is sometimes boisterous, for example pulling on trees, knocking others off logs or kicking cones around. Several girls said that some boys are too rough when they play football, which puts others off joining in the games. Staff are not proactive in identifying ways in which they can engage pupils during this free time in more positive play and activities.

Additional support

Leaders have been open to support from Hertfordshire local authority since the section 5 inspection. They have worked closely with them to audit and improve their practice, particularly around safeguarding.

Evidence

The inspector met with senior leaders, middle leaders and other members of staff. The inspector spoke to members of the IEB and a representative of the local authority. The inspector spoke to groups of pupils, both as groups, and informally at playtimes. She observed play and pupils at lunchtimes. She scrutinised a wide range of safeguarding records and looked at how behaviour is now being tracked. The inspector spoke to parents on the playground.