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Diana Gunn
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Dear Mrs Gunn

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Maldon Primary School

Following my visit to Maldon Primary School on 19 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 February 2022. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with the interim executive headteacher 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 arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Kennal Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Short
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 19 July 2022

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been changes to leadership and staffing. Most notably, the previous headteacher left in April 2022. An interim executive headteacher started in April 2022. A new, substantive executive headteacher will take on the role in September 2022. A lead practitioner working for the trust was permanently appointed as the deputy headteacher in April 2022.

There are some changes to teaching staff. Four teachers, including one on a temporary contract, leave at the end of July 2022 to be replaced by permanent teachers from September 2022.

This inspection focused on the school's safeguarding arrangements, including how pupils learn to keep safe through the school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme. It evaluated how leaders have responded to the issues identified at the previous inspection to ensure that pupils are kept safe at school.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

There is an orderly approach to school improvement. Ahead of plans to launch a revised curriculum in September 2022, leaders have used this term to strengthen the systems for safeguarding and supporting pupils' behaviour. Leaders recognise that pupils must feel happy and safe to be ready to learn.

There is much to celebrate in how leaders have addressed historical issues with safeguarding. After the previous inspection, leaders introduced weekly meetings to discuss pupils at risk of harm. These meetings ensure that no reported concerns go unnoticed. Leaders are tenacious in how they secure support for vulnerable pupils and their families. Leaders now keep comprehensive safeguarding records. Leaders also ensure that they and their staff are suitably trained. As a result, leaders and staff confidently discuss and follow the school's safeguarding policies and procedures.

Through carefully planned assemblies, pupils know how to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils of all ages know to adopt the 'star pose' in water if they ever need to await rescue. Pupils are well versed in the school's lanyard system for staff and visitors. Pupils recognise that improvements to peers' behaviour mean they rarely have concerns to report. Nevertheless, they know to speak to a member of staff to share worries when they have them.

Some pupils prefer to use the school's 'worry box' to write down and share a concern. However, these pupils say that not having this facility in the classroom makes it difficult to do this quickly. Leaders agree that the system lacks efficiency and they plan to resolve this at the start of September 2022.

Leaders reviewed the PSHE curriculum. They are satisfied that the adopted curriculum contains the topics pupils need to know. However, historically, leaders had not checked that all teachers were teaching the content. This left pupils with gaps in their knowledge. To overcome this, ahead of relaunching PSHE in September 2022, leaders arranged training for teachers. Teachers now know what to teach and when.

Where they have received helpful advice from trust leaders, governors are growing in confidence. Still, some governors do not question well the information that trust and school leaders share with them. Some governors use visits to school to check systems and see curriculum development in action. This allows them to identify what is working well and what needs to improve. There are plans for more governors to complete school visits in the new academic year to check on the introduction or relaunching of curriculums.

Trust leaders, alongside governors and school leaders, are revising the school improvement plan. They review, in detail, each week, the actions they are taking to drive improvement. This means that those involved in the prioritised improvements know what to complete and by when. This has ensured that aspects of practice, such as safeguarding, have improved quickly. Nonetheless, some objectives would benefit from having clearer, measurable targets so that leaders can check if their work is having the intended impact.

Additional support

The trust has provided a wide range of targeted support to address the issues identified at the previous inspection. Trust leaders visit at least weekly to evaluate progress against the school improvement plan. They use these meetings to facilitate extra training and support. The trust provided two to three days per week of tailored training to teachers, which has helped to strengthen teaching.

The local authority provided external support. A school improvement partner supported early years staff to review curriculum plans, offering advice regarding the early years provision. School leaders used this work to inform their whole-school curriculum development. Senior colleagues working for the local authority completed a safeguarding audit. They reviewed systems and records, sharing their evaluation of this with leaders. Leaders used this evaluation to determine appropriate next steps, such as displaying the names of key people in the local authority for school leaders to contact for guidance.

Evidence

The inspector scrutinised documents, including minutes of meetings and evaluative visit forms from the trust and the local authority. The inspector met with leaders, including the interim executive headteacher, other senior leaders, the senior director of education (primary) from the multi-academy trust and three governors. The inspector held separate

discussions with several staff and pupils. The inspector also visited PSHE lessons, observing pupils' behaviour in class and as pupils moved around the school.