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Kelly-Ann Lee
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lee

Special measures monitoring inspection of Etherley Lane Nursery School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 19 January 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in May 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, staff, governors and representatives from the local authority the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also spoke to leaders about their newly implemented curriculum. I visited the Nursery setting and checked the school's single central record. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Etherley Lane Nursery School remains inadequate and requires special measures. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.

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

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the last inspection, the school has formally federated with Etherley Lane Primary School. There have been considerable changes to leadership. You have been appointed as the executive headteacher across both schools. There is an assistant headteacher, who leads the school. This, with the formation of a new governing body, has brought increased stability to the school's leadership.

Your new leadership team, including the governing body, is conscientious about the order in which improvements are made. You have forged positive relationships with staff, so that they are prepared to take on the necessary changes to improve the school. You have a clear and ambitious vision for the education of all children. You know what needs to improve, and know how to do this in a sustainable way. This vision is shared and understood by all.

You and your leaders have taken swift action to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of your children. You have produced long-term plans which are the 'skeleton' of your curriculum. Your strategy is to ensure that staff from across the federation work together to develop your curriculum further. This will prepare your children for their next stage in learning, particularly when they transition to Reception. However, you know there is more work to be done to do this and to identify the specific knowledge and skills that children need.

You have carefully considered how you will engage staff on this journey of development and implementation of the curriculum, so that there is sustainable change. You have planned each stage of curriculum development in conjunction with training for staff. Staff have received regular training on safeguarding, oracy and autism. You use your staff meetings wisely to train staff in subject-specific areas. Staff understand the importance of well-sequenced plans that build on what children know.

You recognise that your current curriculum for early reading does not prepare children to learn how to read as effectively as it could. You have plans to develop early reading in your school. You intend to train your staff on how to implement this effectively over the coming months.

You are focused on improving provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). You have reviewed the plans for children with SEND and the support that they receive. Children with SEND now have updated and appropriate plans in place, with clear targets. You are further developing the provision for children with SEND.

You ensure that staff feel valued and cared for. Staff complete well-being surveys that inform your practice. You use research to implement strategies to improve the well-being of your staff. Your work to develop collaboration between the federated schools supports staff morale. This has had a positive effect on how staff feel about their workload and being part of a team. Staff are empowered by your actions, and embrace the changes.

You, governors and staff have worked closely with the local authority. The local authority school improvement team provides support and challenge. You continue to receive support from the local authority early years adviser to develop and refine your curriculum. This is leading to rapid improvement in school. Other support, including training for governors, has all contributed to the school's improvement.

Since the previous inspection, a new federated governing body has been established. The governing body consists of some members from the previous governing body and Etherley Lane Primary School governors. Members of this newly combined governing body have a range of skills and experience which make them well placed to challenge school leaders. They know the school and senior leaders well. They assure themselves that leaders are making the right decisions to improve the school through seeking clarification and asking key questions. They are highly focused on the areas for improvement in the previous inspection report.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Durham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Jenny Thomas
His Majesty's Inspector