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Catherine Harris
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Harris

Special measures monitoring inspection of Middleton-in-Teesdale Nursery and Primary School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 8 and 9 March 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, the CEO of the multi-academy trust that is currently supporting the school, other staff, governors and 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 visited lessons, spoke to pupils, met with teachers, looked at pupils' work in books and reviewed safeguarding procedures, including a scrutiny of the single central record. I also looked at other documentation and considered the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire and Ofsted's staff survey. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Middleton-in-Teesdale Nursery and Primary 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 appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

The previous headteacher left the school in July 2022. A temporary headteacher provided leadership of the school from September 2022 until you were appointed in February 2023. Leaders are currently in consultation with the Department for Education and Durham local authority about the school joining a multi-academy trust.

You identified that the school did not have a curriculum that was fit for purpose. With the help of leaders from a multi-academy trust who are supporting the school, you have quickly implemented a more structured, coherent curriculum. You also identified that the mathematics and English curriculums needed to improve. You have successfully implemented programmes to address these issues. To support pupils in mixed-age classes you have organised group teaching in some subjects. Pupils are taught content specific to their needs. This enables staff to address misconceptions that arise more quickly.

You have introduced a new early reading programme. All staff have been trained so that there is now a consistent approach to the implementation of the chosen phonics programme. A significant investment in new reading books means that books are now matched to pupils' knowledge. This is leading to improvements in how pupils develop fluency in reading. You have also invested in a high-quality selection of library books, which pupils enjoy. A new mathematics programme has been implemented, which is supporting pupils where they have gaps in their knowledge. Teachers are aware that many pupils are not able to access the curriculum at an age-expected standard and are therefore adapting the curriculum so that pupils study appropriate content.

Teachers are slowly getting to grips with the new curriculum, although there is still a lot of work to do to ensure that the curriculum is taught consistently in all classes. There are promising signs that the order in which knowledge is taught is improving. For example, in mathematics, multiplication and division knowledge is taught before pupils attempt more complex work on fractions and percentages. This means that pupils have the required knowledge that they can apply confidently when tackling new parts of the curriculum.

You are determined to improve pupils' personal development. You identified that the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum lacked structure and coverage. As a result, pupils received a disjointed curriculum that was not checked to ensure that the relationships and sex education curriculum was fully delivered. You have now put in place a well-structured, comprehensive PSHE curriculum that helps pupils understand diversity, inclusion and difference. Pupils have historically missed out on trips, clubs and enrichment activities. You have plans in place to rectify this and have already started to introduce clubs and extra-curricular opportunities for pupils.

You have made significant progress with pupils' behaviour and attitudes. You have raised expectations for what types of behaviour are acceptable and what are not. Initially, some pupils found this challenging but are now starting to see the benefits of rules and boundaries. Pupils now move around the school sensibly. Most pupils engage positively in lessons. You are keen to include pupils in the life of the school. The development of

leadership roles, such as school ambassadors, librarians and school council, is a positive step forward.

The ongoing support from a multi-academy trust is invaluable. Teachers appreciate the curriculum support they receive, as well as opportunities to collaborate with staff from the trust's schools. The experience that leaders from the supporting multi-academy trust bring with regards to human resources, finance, estate management as well as school improvement is resulting in rapid improvements in many areas of the school. Teachers are supportive of each other and enjoy working at the school. They feel valued and can see the improvements that are taking place.

Governors continue to meet their statutory responsibilities. They have worked in partnership with the supporting multi-academy trust leaders. This has enabled leaders to identify exactly what is required to improve the school.

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

David Milligan
His Majesty's Inspector