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Molly Marlow
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Marlow

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Willowbrook School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 5 October 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 took place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspections.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, governors, staff 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 met with pupils, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and scrutinised school documentation, development plans and minutes of meetings. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- implement and carefully track the new reading programme to ensure more pupils in the early stages of reading develop their reading knowledge in a timely way.

Main findings

After the previous inspection, you worked with external partners to support the school. They helped you to prioritise the important actions needed to bring about rapid improvement. You established a managed partnership with a multi-academy trust and, with their support, you have reviewed and prioritised the actions the school is taking. In particular, you have focused on the quality of education, especially in mathematics and English.

The school has ensured that the mathematics and English curriculums are carefully sequenced from early years through to Year 6. You have made sure that the learning process for writing is consistent for pupils. Teachers identify what pupils need to work on to get better. Pupils take the time to correct their errors. The school identified the parts of the mathematics curriculum that pupils did not know so well and has taken action. For example, pupils now learn number facts successfully. With clear systems for checking, the school makes sure that the curriculum is well embedded.

Pupils in key stage 1 do not make as much progress through the curriculum as they should. Since the inspection, there has been a lack of stability in staffing for some classes. This has been a barrier to making rapid improvement. You have acted to make sure there is consistency in what key stage 1 pupils are learning. Previously, too many pupils did not learn to read in a timely way. The phonics reading programme did not have the impact the school expected. With the support of external partners, you have changed the reading programme. All staff are trained to teach the programme. Pupils who have extra lessons to help them catch up are learning the precise phonics sounds they need. The school makes sure all pupils in key stage 2 have additional phonics lessons to learn the sounds they have not yet secured. However, this programme is very new. The school tracks carefully how well pupils are doing, but it does not know yet how well pupils are learning to read with the new programme.

The school has trained teachers to adapt learning for pupils. The work to develop this further is ongoing. Recognising that there are some pupils with complex needs, you have recently opened the 'pod'. This is a specialist area providing support for these pupils.

Since the previous inspection, the governing body has made changes to how it assures itself of how effectively the school is taking action to improve. Governors have developed their skills and expertise to ask challenging questions. They understand the priorities of the school and hold it to account to assure themselves of the quality of the school's provision. You have worked with external partners to restructure the leadership team. You have identified clearly the leadership roles and areas of accountability, as well as putting in effective structures to ensure there are clearer lines of accountability, monitoring and communication. Staff say this has been significant in improving their workload.

Along with the managed partnership, you have worked with the local authority to focus on the key actions of the school development plan, in particular to manage the instability of

staffing in key stage 1. The school is very positive about the impact of its work with external partnerships.

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

Yours sincerely

Rachel Hesketh
His Majesty's Inspector