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Ms Catherine Harris
Headteacher
Middleton-in-Teesdale Nursery and Primary School
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Dear Ms Harris

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

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 11 and 12 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 was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in March 2023.

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, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust that is currently supporting the school, the vice-chair of the governing body 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 reviewed the school's single central record, visited lessons, met with pupils and staff, reviewed a range of pupils' work and a range of curriculum documentation. 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 be no longer judged as requiring special measures.

The school may appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the previous monitoring inspection, in March 2023, you have continued to lead the school with the determination that all pupils will receive the quality of education they deserve. You have further strengthened leadership of the school by securing the appointment of a permanent associate headteacher who is also the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and early years leader.

You continue to support staff and ensure that the new subject curriculums are implemented effectively. Improved consistency in the teaching of English and mathematics is beginning to reduce the gaps in pupils' knowledge. For example, in mathematics you make sure that pupils have various opportunities to revisit and rehearse important number facts, such as multiplication tables. This helps pupils to solve more complex problems. You and the supporting multi-academy trust have continued to provide training to strengthen staff subject knowledge. Teachers break learning into smaller steps to support pupils to build knowledge. They check pupils' understanding regularly and address any misconceptions. Staff know when to give pupils additional support so that pupils learn better.

You make sure that the youngest children in school continue to learn to read well. The school's phonics programme is taught effectively. Regular training ensures that staff have expert knowledge to teach the phonics programme. You regularly check how well pupils read and provide precise support for those who fall behind with their reading. This helps pupils to catch up. You make sure that pupils are given time to practise unfamiliar words and sounds regularly. Older pupils love choosing books from the well-stocked library. You make sure that older pupils who have gaps in their reading knowledge receive the right help so that they are catching up.

In foundation subjects such as geography and history, there is still work to be done to ensure that the new curriculums are taught effectively. This will ensure that pupils' new knowledge builds on what they already know. You make sure that all subjects are now taught. You are working to ensure that the activities that pupils complete reflect the new ambitious subject curriculums that are being written.

You have prioritised improving the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Together with the new SENCo, you have reviewed the provision for pupils with SEND. Systems are now in place to identify pupils' individual needs. These systems are at an early stage. You are working with staff to ensure that they are well trained and understand how best to support pupils' specific needs. You and the leaders from the trust check how well staff help pupils with SEND to follow the full curriculum, supporting adults to make adaptations where needed. The support plans for pupils are now precise. They help staff to see how pupils' outcomes are closely linked to the appropriateness of the support that they receive.

You recently implemented a new curriculum for personal, social and health education. The curriculum provides detail and structure to ensure that pupils learn about important topics such as healthy relationships, how to keep safe and the individual characteristics that make people unique. This is at an early stage and you continue to strengthen provision to enrich pupils' wider development. Pupils enjoy attending a range of clubs and joining in extra-curricular activities, for example singing, and learning to play musical instruments such as the ukulele. Participation in the new football and netball teams is growing.

You make sure that pupils know how to behave well so that they can focus on their learning. At times, a small minority of pupils struggle to follow the expectations for behaviour. With the support of trust leaders, you are developing the staff team and providing training to help these pupils to manage strong emotions. You have implemented a system for recording behaviour incidents. This enables leaders to have a clear picture of any patterns in behaviour so that pupils' behaviour can be managed more effectively. You ensure that there is a consistent approach for staff to use in their work with pupils. This approach supports them to address, for example, friendship issues. This is helping to prevent more serious behaviour, such as bullying, from arising. Consequently, the school is a calmer and safer place for pupils to learn.

The significant improvements have been made possible by the continued external support provided by the multi-academy trust. Together, you have chosen to focus this support on the development of middle (subject) leadership. The external support plans demonstrate the importance of building the school's internal stability in leadership, including middle leadership. You understand the importance of ensuring that this is built over time. This will help to ensure that the improvements seen so far are sustained and built upon and that the school continues to improve. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the support that they receive to teach the new curriculum. You make sure that their workload is manageable. Staff take great pride in working with you to improve the education that pupils receive.

Governors continue to work in partnership with the multi-academy trust to fulfil their statutory responsibilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Kathryn McDonald
His Majesty's Inspector