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15 March 2024

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Dear Mrs Edwards

Special measures monitoring inspection of Kirkby Thore School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on Wednesday 21 and Thursday 22 February 2024, 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 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, staff, governors, a representative of the local authority and members of the multi-academy trust that the school intends to join 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, talked to pupils, reviewed pupils' work and considered a range of school documentation, including the school improvement plan and the records of safeguarding, behaviour and bullying incidents. I have considered all this information 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 not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Following the inspection in March 2023, the local authority commissioned an interim headteacher to lead the school. This arrangement will end in April 2024, when a new substantive headteacher will take up post. One member of staff has been on maternity leave. This position has been covered by a temporary teacher. New governors have been recruited. The school is in the final stages of transitioning to become part of a multi-academy trust.

With the support of the local authority and the expertise of the trust, the school has taken the right actions to tackle the considerable shortcomings identified at the previous inspection. It has worked effectively, within its unique context, to overcome barriers to improvement. In doing so, the school has brought about positive change and established a firm foundation to underpin the next stage of its improvement journey.

Many aspects of the school's provision are stronger than they were previously. This is because the school has focused its attention on the most pressing weaknesses. Swift action to make sure that pupils are safe has borne fruit. Safeguarding is now effective. Staff are well trained and there are clear procedures in place to identify, report and record concerns about pupils' welfare. Pupils who are at risk of harm receive the support that they need to flourish. Effective use is made of external agencies to shape pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe. For example, community police officers help pupils to recognise unsuitable content on the internet and the impact of posting hurtful comments on social media. All of the pupils who shared their views with me said that they feel safe. They value the warm relationships that they enjoy with staff. Pupils know that it is better to share their worries rather than trying to hide them. This is because they trust staff to help them to resolve their concerns.

The teaching of early reading has moved on at pace. The phonics programme is carefully structured and followed faithfully by all staff. Children in the early years, and pupils in key stage 1, gain secure phonics knowledge. They use this knowledge well to read from books that closely match the sounds that they have learned. A strong focus on early writing means that pupils have the fundamental skills that they need to be successful in key stage 2. However, some older pupils, who have not had the benefit of this improved approach to reading and writing, have gaps in their knowledge. This hinders the quality of their written work.

Some other subject curriculums have also improved. For example, pupils' grasp of mathematical concepts is increasingly stronger due to the improved delivery of the mathematics programme. Even so, the school's work to ensure that pupils achieve well

across many subjects is in its infancy. The existing curriculums in many subjects are not enabling teachers to know what pupils in mixed-aged classes should learn and when this content should be taught. This means that pupils do not gain the knowledge that they need to be successful in their learning.

This is also true in the early years. While much work has taken place to improve the environment, the substance of what children should know is unclear. This leaves too much to chance. Children lose concentration and they miss out on opportunities to develop their vocabulary and communication skills through purposeful talk. Although children are ready to make a smooth start in Year 1 in terms of reading, writing and mathematics, they are less well prepared across other areas of learning.

There are stronger systems in place to identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The support that the school provides for these pupils to access learning is also improving. In those subjects where the curriculums are more effective, pupils with SEND learn well. This is less successful elsewhere. Teachers' strategies to check pupils' learning are more secure than they were at the time of the previous inspection. This means that teachers are better equipped to pinpoint misconceptions or spot when pupils are not keeping up with their learning. This is maximising pupils' progress through some of the subject curriculums. However, this is less effective in those subjects that are underdeveloped.

The new behaviour policy is helping pupils to understand the importance of showing respect through their words and actions. They value the kindness of staff, which gives pupils the courage to admit when they have been unkind so that they can put the situation right. Pupils behave well in classrooms and around the school. They typically work hard and show sustained concentration. They enjoy collecting pom-poms when their good behaviour is noticed and rewarded. Typically, teachers can teach and pupils can learn without distraction. Pupils have noticed that behaviour has improved. They acknowledge that harsh words are sometimes said in the heat of the moment, but in their view, such incidents happen less frequently. Most pupils attend school regularly.

Pupils are being better prepared for life beyond their small village school. They are gaining a deeper understanding of the differences between people. The school is providing increasing opportunities for pupils to develop their interests and talents, for example through a broader range of after-school clubs, trips to places of interest, visitors to school and organised activities during lunchtimes. Pupils enjoyed the recent opportunity to visit Manchester and sing alongside other pupils from many different schools. They are also looking forward to their upcoming residential visit with excitement. Such activities are enhancing pupils' learning but also giving them the experiences that they need to be part of modern British society.

Governance is more effective than it was at the previous inspection. Extensive training means that governors are better informed about their responsibilities and increasingly equipped to fulfil their roles. They have an accurate understanding of the school's current

position. Governors are keen to celebrate success but are equally realistic about the remaining weaknesses in the school.

Subject leadership has improved in some curriculum areas. Through close support and effective mentoring, staff's expectations of what pupils should and can achieve have been raised.

Staff value the care that is given to their well-being. They appreciate that the school has been mindful of their workload during a period of considerable change. Staff are proud of all that has been achieved so far. They are enthusiastic and optimistic about the next chapter of the school's development.

The school has made good use of the extensive external support available through the local authority and the trust. Thoughtful and well-tailored support strategies have made a tangible difference to almost every aspect of school life. The solid partnership between leaders at all levels has ensured that the school has the capacity and determination to improve the standard of pupils' education further.

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 Westmorland and Furness. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Jo Olsson
His Majesty's Inspector