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Cathy Clay
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Dear Mrs Clay

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Derrymount School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 27 and 28 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 have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in May 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 Stephen McMullan, Ofsted Inspector, and I discussed with the interim executive headteacher Neil Davies, other interim senior leaders, members of the interim executive board 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. We also visited lessons on both sites, met with pupils and staff and reviewed a wide range of documents including those relating to the curriculum and the school's plans for improvement. We focused on curriculum areas such as reading, mathematics and geography and the school's wider provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). We evaluated the school's safeguarding arrangements and the policies and procedures in place for managing pupils' behaviour. 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 having serious weaknesses.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes to the school's leadership, governance and staffing. In your absence, a full-time interim executive headteacher was appointed with effect from 26 February 2024. Following the resignation of the two assistant headteachers, a team of three interim associate assistant headteachers have been appointed from the internal staff team, with effect from January 2024. They have responsibility for the oversight of safeguarding, behaviour and the curriculum. In late 2023, the local authority secured agreement from the Department for Education to remove the governing body and replace it with an interim executive board (IEB), with effect from January 2024. Throughout the latter half of 2023, the school experienced significant and ongoing general staffing absences.

The school has acted effectively to improve the teaching of early reading. The introduction of a systematic phonics programme is having a positive impact on pupils' development as fluent, confident readers. All staff across both sites have been trained to deliver the programme, and they do so with confidence. The school has provided all the necessary resources to deliver the programme. Pupils respond well in the daily sessions. They now read from books that match the sounds they know. They are clearly proud of their achievements as emerging readers.

In all other respects, curriculum development is in its infancy. The curriculum itself, and its leadership and monitoring, remain weak. There is limited ambition for what pupils can achieve. Across all subjects, the curriculum has little or no structure or coherence to support pupils to develop appropriate knowledge and skills so that they know and remember more over time. These failings are most evident in the primary and key stage 3 provision. In key stages 4 and 5, the curriculum is better suited to pupils' needs as they follow nationally structured examination schemes of work. It is recognised by the interim leadership that curriculum development in all subjects is an essential priority moving forwards.

The provision for pupils' broader SEND needs beyond behaviour remains very weak. There are still large gaps in practice and systems. There is no up-to-date SEND policy or accessibility plan. There is no special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) present in school. In those respects, the school is not compliant with statutory requirements. Staff have not received sufficient training to understand the breadth of pupils' needs. The school does not use pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans to inform curriculum delivery. Pupils do not benefit from their learning being broken down into small, manageable steps. This means that teachers cannot plan appropriately or precisely assess how pupils are progressing. A complete overhaul of the provision for SEND is an urgent priority for the school.

The school has reviewed all of its policies and practices relating to behaviour, in response to the findings of the last inspection. The unsafe practices that were observed at that time are no longer evident. Secure rooms are no longer used to contain pupils against their will. Work is under way to systematically remove inappropriate locks from classroom doors. There has been a significant reset of behaviour expectations, with the aim of prioritising positive relationships and establishing an approach that is more restorative, and less punitive. Recently, all staff have been trained in the appropriate use of physical intervention. Staff say that they welcome the training provided for them. They feel very well supported in implementing the revised expectations. They are beginning to see the impact on pupils' ability to remain regulated. The school has recently begun to analyse incidents to identify trends and patterns of behaviour to inform the support provided for pupils. All of this work is in the very early stages. There is much more to do, to finalise systems and embed staff training.

Until recently, leadership capacity at all levels has been very limited. The interim arrangements for leadership and governance have resulted in the prioritisation of key actions to address the systemic weaknesses in many areas of the school. Improvements, although focused on appropriate areas, are recent and fragile. The IEB has a clear view of the severity of the issues faced by the school. They express a sense of ambition for the quality of education pupils should receive and understand that the current provision, including the curriculum, falls far short of this. There are positive signs that the board is effectively holding the school to account, alongside offering meaningful support to ensure urgent improvements. The leadership capacity is greatly improved.

The new interim leadership has prioritised safeguarding. Whole-staff training was refreshed in January 2024, in line with 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' guidelines. A new designated senior leader for safeguarding has been appointed, with plans to grow the team as more senior leaders come on board. All staff have received training in the new online reporting system. Records show that concerns are logged promptly and in sufficient detail. Staff report that they feel confident in raising concerns and know who to approach for advice. Pupils say that staff look after them well and are kind. They feel well cared for. The safeguarding culture has been strengthened, with a heightened sense of all staff having an appropriate 'professional curiosity' for pupils' safety and well-being.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding are now effective.

The school has benefited from a programme of support from the local authority. This has included, for example, assistance in prioritising actions around reading and safeguarding. A range of external reports and 'health checks' have given the school objective advice to support with improvement planning. The school is currently receiving intensive support from the Nexus multi-academy trust to bring about the widespread improvements necessary across many aspects of the school's provision.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Watkins
His Majesty's Inspector