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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Victoria Mellor
Headteacher
Balliol Primary School
Chesters Avenue
Longbenton
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE12 8QP

Dear Ms Mellor

Special measures monitoring inspection of Balliol Primary School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 3 and 4 December 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 October 2023.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's key and (where applicable) provision judgements, 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, other senior leaders, staff, governors, the local authority and representatives from the multi-academy trust who are supporting the school 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 made visits to lessons, met with groups of pupils, observed social times and considered school documentation. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Balliol Primary School continues to require special measures. Leaders have made insufficient progress to improve the school.

The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

The position regarding the appointment of early career teachers will be considered again during any monitoring inspection we carry out.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the previous inspection there have been some changes to the staff body. The school has appointed new staff as class teachers and teaching assistants. There have also been changes in leadership responsibilities for some members of staff. The governing body has had some new members join. During this visit, I primarily focused on leader's actions and the school's work to improve the quality of education that pupils receive, including early years, work to improve behaviour and attitudes and work to improve attendance.

The school has begun its journey of improvement. Staff and governors have reviewed the school's provision and now have a clearer understanding of what needs to improve. The school recognises the need for significant change across many aspects of the school's provision. It is clear the school wants to provide a better education for all pupils. However, the school's pace of improvement remains slow. The school recognises that there is still a significant amount of work to do to address the recommendations made at the previous inspection.

With the support of a multi-academy trust, you have ensured that there is a broad and ambitious curriculum for all. The work to ensure that all pupils benefit from this curriculum is in the very early stages of development. There has been insufficient thought to ensure that pupils are ready to learn this new curriculum. Previous gaps in learning are not well understood or checked on. This limits how well pupils can integrate new knowledge with what they already know.

Staff have engaged with wider training opportunities to further develop the quality of education. Some of this has focused on shared pedagogical approaches to the teaching of the curriculum. Leaders recognise that there continues to be significant variation with how this training is being used across school. The school's expectations around lesson structure and the new curriculum are not consistently evident. In mathematics, the curriculum is more effectively sequenced than previously. In other subjects, including reading and wider curriculum subjects, there is an inconsistent approach to how the curriculum is taught. Learning intentions are not well matched to the activities that pupils engage in. This means that pupils are not clear on what they are learning about. This prevents pupils from building knowledge over time.

The school is developing a clearer understanding of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders are able to identify pupils with SEND with more clarity. Pupils with SEND now work alongside their peers more effectively in class. The targets that pupils with SEND need are developing. Nevertheless, the support pupils with SEND need to meet these targets is not effectively mapped out. The school recognises that interventions for pupils with SEND are in the earliest stages of development. This means pupils who may need support with specific areas of need are not benefiting from this focused support consistently.

The school has set out a new behaviour policy. Pupils have a better understanding of this policy. They are now recognised for their positive behaviour more often. Consequences for pupils' behaviour are clearer. This is improving pupils' attitudes to learning. Classrooms are more settled and pupils can focus on their learning more readily.

Pupils' attendance was weak last year. Too many pupils were persistently absent from school. This had a negative impact on their learning of the curriculum. The school has improved its focus on pupils' attendance. There is a reduction of pupils who are absent from school. You should continue to maintain this focus as the year progresses.

Staff feel well supported to manage the changes expected of them. You have ensured that staff have the opportunity to discuss these changes. Staff talk about the benefits of working with other staff through networking opportunities with other schools. This helps staff reflect on and develop their practice.

The governing body has started to improve its understanding of how to hold the school to account. It recognises that the pace of improvement for the school is not what they would have hoped for. Governors need to ensure that they are checking the work of the school with sufficient rigour to aid its improvement more rapidly.

The school's engagement with external support has brought about some improvement but this has not gone far enough. You have raised your expectations of what pupils can and will achieve. This has meant the school has initiated a significant amount of change in recent months to many aspects of the school's offer. Oversight of these changes is limited at present. The school is unable to be assured that these changes are having the necessary impact to improve the school further. The school has set out its expectations for how lessons should be taught. These expectations are not being met. This limits the school's capacity for rapid improvement.

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 North Tyneside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Emily Stevens
His Majesty's Inspector