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Ms J Waine
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Waine

Special measures monitoring inspection of Portway Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4–5 November 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2015.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with four members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. The lead inspector held discussions with a group of assistant headteachers and some older pupils. He met a number of parents at the beginning of the second day of the inspection. The inspector also met a team of staff responsible for supporting pupils' behaviour and liaising with parents. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated. The inspector also scrutinised a range of documents related to the quality of teaching and safeguarding. He conducted a scrutiny of a range of pupils' books with senior leaders and considered information held by the school about outcomes for pupils.

Context

The acting headteacher led the school in partnership with the headteacher and other leaders from a successful local school, Selwyn Primary, until you took up your post in

September 2015. Since the inspection, more than half of the teaching staff have left the school. Some departed in the autumn term but most teachers left before the summer break. Some support staff have also left the school since the inspection. Governors and their counterparts at Selwyn Primary School have pressed on with the process of creating a multi-academy trust which will include both schools. It is intended that the trust will operate from April 2016. You have been successful in appointing two new deputy headteachers, who will take up their posts in January 2016.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Senior leaders realised, immediately after the last inspection, that performance information on pupils was inaccurate and unreliable. This was restricting opportunities for leaders to examine rates of pupil progress and to hold teachers to account. Leaders tackled this by taking swift and effective action to determine the accurate attainment of pupils. They also established clear and well-considered plans for improvement based on this information and the areas for improvement identified at the inspection.

It became apparent from the revised assessment evidence that the quality of teaching needed to improve rapidly. Senior leaders took resolute and prompt action to challenge teachers robustly. They made expectations crystal clear and offered the necessary training and support to teaching staff in a coherent, systematic manner. These expectations focused sharply on areas for improvement identified during the inspection. For example, leaders made sure teachers were expected to improve the quality of their questioning. Leaders made frequent checks on how well teachers used the more accurate assessment information available to plan challenging activities for pupils. As a result, some teachers decided to leave the school and senior leaders secured a much more thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of those who remained. Assessment checks repeated at the end of the summer term indicated that these actions led to an immediate improvement in the rate of progress of pupils.

Since your arrival as headteacher in September 2015, you have continued to develop the skills and knowledge of teachers with suitable rigour and pace. You are managing this process well in the context of many new teachers being appointed in a short period of time. You are ensuring that everyone understands the part they are expected to play in plans for school improvement. As a result, they share your ambition for the removal of special measures at the earliest opportunity. The school improvement plan is well considered, provides clear measures of success, which are directly linked to pupil outcomes, and details when these measures are to be achieved. Those responsible for implementing actions and evaluating them are clearly identified. However, checks on the impact of improvements to the quality of teaching on rates of pupils' progress are not scheduled frequently enough.

You and other leaders continue to check on the quality of teaching in a systematic manner. You ensure that teachers are given regular, detailed advice on how to improve their skills and arrange appropriate training for them. The areas for improvement identified at inspection are at the heart of your plans to develop teaching further. Leaders at all levels have developed better skills to ensure they carry out their work with greater consistency. However, you are not checking up on the progress of all pupils regularly enough.

You have developed the partnership with Selwyn Primary School even further. This is allowing teachers to learn from experienced, effective practitioners. Shortcomings in teachers' knowledge, experience and skills identified at the inspection are being addressed well as a result. Senior leaders from your partner school are also helping you to moderate the judgements you make about the quality of teaching.

You have recognised that safeguarding procedures were not robust enough in the past. The local authority has helped provide you with an external view of the effectiveness of your revised procedures. You and your governors have used this well to sharpen policy and procedures further. As a result, these procedures are now more effective, and you have managed to ensure that the many new staff understand policies fully and implement them consistently.

An external review of the expenditure of pupil premium funding was completed in a timely manner shortly after the last inspection. Governors and senior leaders have used the findings of this review wisely to review the support given to disadvantaged pupils. For example, the review's recommendations for improvements to the provision for disadvantaged pupils who also have disabilities and special educational needs, have been implemented rapidly and successfully.

Governors have remained effective since the last inspection in challenging senior leaders and ensuring actions are having the intended impact. They have supported the extensive recruitment process well and have continued to nurture the partnership with Selwyn Primary School. This has enabled them to plan ahead confidently so that the school is well placed to continue to improve in the future. The standards committee considers a wider and more accurate range of information when checking on the impact of actions on standards. However, the current arrangement for meeting once a term leaves it too long to make sure improvements are being sustained with the necessary pace.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school is taking effective action towards the removal of special measures

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Newham and as below. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Wright

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2015

- Improve the effectiveness of the leaders and managers at all levels by ensuring that:
 - performance information is understood and used to identify the actions that are needed to secure swift improvements
 - the quality of teaching is checked systematically, and teachers receive advice and guidance to help them improve their skills
 - there is consistency in leadership across year groups so that all staff are involved in setting priorities for improvement and understand their role in implementing agreed policies consistently
 - safeguarding procedures and documentation are kept fully up to date
 - governors continue to be active in monitoring the school and checking that agreed actions are effective in improving the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils.

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good by:
 - raising teachers expectations of what pupils are going to achieve by setting ambitious targets for pupils' learning and progress
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment information accurately to set tasks that build on pupils' skills and are demanding enough for the most able and not too difficult for others
 - making better use of time in lessons so pupils have enough time to complete the work
 - developing teachers' questioning skills so they probe pupils' understanding deeply and so enable them to learn well.

- Improve pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics throughout the school by:
 - making sure that pupils develop basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics securely by the end of Year 2
 - ensuring that teachers' assessment of pupils' understanding are accurate
 - closing the gaps between pupils supported by the pupil premium and other pupils in school
 - ensuring that pupils correct and improve their work when it has been marked
 - closely checking pupils' progress during lessons and moving them on quickly to more demanding work as soon as they are ready.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 4–5 November 2015

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes for pupils are improving. Pupils leaving the school at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2015 attained levels higher than the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils entitled to the pupil premium funding achieved as well as other pupils nationally and exceeded the national average in reading. This represents a big improvement on outcomes in 2014. However, the school's own information demonstrates that many pupils in the current Year 6 classes are attaining levels below those expected for their age. Leaders have recognised this, and have well-considered plans to promote rapid progress for this group of pupils in the coming year.

The proportion of pupils attaining a good level of development by the end of the Reception year matched national averages in 2015, which again represents an improvement on 2014. Nearly one in five pupils exceeded expected standards. In addition, all disadvantaged pupils in the Reception year entitled to additional funding attained a good level of development in 2015. Improvements in standards in basic reading skills are also evident from the improved proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1. The proportion achieving this is in line with national averages. Outcomes at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2015 were still below the national average, but improved on the previous year. Disadvantaged pupils entitled to additional funding still achieve significantly less well than other pupils nationally at the end of Year 2.

Across the whole school, patterns of progress and attainment vary. Leaders have recognised that these variations are a consequence of the inconsistencies that remain in the quality of teaching. While nearly all of the weakest teaching has now been eradicated, the legacy of weaker teaching is still evident in low levels of attainment and rates of progress in some classes.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Senior leaders and governors took prompt and effective action to eradicate the weakest teaching after the last inspection. They quickly realised that assessment information, which teachers were using to decide on lesson plans, was both unreliable and often poorly used. Leaders made sure that teachers were supported to check on levels of attainment again early in the summer term. These were then checked up on towards the end of the same term, so that accurate measures of progress could be made. This information was extremely helpful in holding teachers to account for the impact of their work, and led to some difficult but necessary decisions being made about managing the required further improvements to teaching.

During the same period, senior leaders provided training to help teachers match activities to the abilities of pupils more effectively and provide more helpful feedback on pupils' work. The positive impact of this is evident in the improved range and quality of work seen in pupils' books. Senior leaders have made sure that they work alongside teachers to help them plan, prepare and assess each lesson, encouraging and supporting them to apply the skills and knowledge learned in the training provided. They also make sure that teaching is monitored closely and rigorously, using a range of methods, including examination of pupils' work and regular observations in lessons. The performance management process has been thoroughly reviewed to ensure that objectives set for teachers are closely aligned with areas for improvement identified at the inspection.

The most-able pupils are being challenged more, although this is variable across subjects and classes. Some pupils do not benefit from sufficient opportunity to demonstrate their mastery of skills in reading, writing and mathematics as soon as they are ready to do so.

Pupils have noticed that work has become more challenging. They told the inspector that they enjoy the more structured approach to the teaching of writing. This gives them more time and guidance to improve and complete their work. Many teachers give helpful feedback, both through more effective questioning and structured comments in books. However, the quality of this guidance still varies too much. Although assessments have become more accurate and reliable, as a result of better training and better moderation, checks on pupil progress are not carried out frequently enough to ensure teachers and leaders can refine plans for lessons and to check on the impact of improvements. Pupils told the inspector that they appreciate the wider range of reading material now on offer, which is inspiring them to read more widely and broadly. Parents recognise the positive changes in teaching and learning, although some told the inspector that they do not receive sufficient guidance on how to help their children learn at home.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders recognised the need to review safeguarding procedures and policies promptly following the last inspection. As a result, these are sharper and understood better by all staff, including those new to the school. Governors ensured that an external view of safeguarding procedures was sought from the local authority, which has helped them to ensure that procedures are effective and pay due regard to the most recent guidance from the Secretary of State. Senior leaders now record and check on occurrences of poor behaviour more robustly and rigorously. As a result, low-level disruption has declined since the last inspection. The team of staff who work with parents and support behaviour management provide helpful information and guidance to both pupils and parents, as soon as it becomes apparent that this is necessary. They have been successful in gaining the confidence of parents and ensuring that pupils are more accountable for their behaviour, punctuality and

attendance. Pupils say they feel safe in school and demonstrate their commitment to the school's values.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders took swift and effective action to gather more reliable assessment information about pupils' attainment soon after inspection. They used this to make expectations for improvement clear to teachers and decide on appropriate training aimed at addressing gaps in teachers' skills and knowledge. Further checks on pupils' progress show that these actions secured some immediate improvements in outcomes for pupils.

A new headteacher took up her post in September 2015. She has maintained the pace of improvement and managed the further development of teaching well during a period when many new staff have joined the school. The headteacher is making sure roles and responsibilities in plans for improvement are clear to all. These plans are fit for purpose and include clear measures for success. However, checks on the impact of actions on pupils' progress are not scheduled frequently enough.

The headteacher and governors are using the partnership with Selwyn Primary School effectively to address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.

Senior leaders have ensured that safeguarding procedures are more effective and that new staff understand them.

The external review of the expenditure of pupil premium funding has been used well to refine and sharpen provision, especially for pupils who have disabilities and special educational needs.

Governors continue to challenge and support leaders. They are playing an effective role in sustaining the important partnership with Selwyn Primary school. However, they do not consider the impact of actions on pupils' progress frequently enough to make sure improvements are sustaining the necessary pace of improvement.

External support

The local authority has provided helpful external verification of leaders' work to improve policies and procedures related to safeguarding. They have provided encouraging and effective support in nurturing the partnership between the school and Selwyn Primary School. The local authority's statement of action defines a suitable process for improvement and reflects a sound understanding of the needs of the school. The partnership with Selwyn Primary School has provided crucial expertise and strategic guidance since the last inspection. This support has ensured that a sharp focus has been maintained on areas for improvement.