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Mr Paul Quinton
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Dear Mr Quinton

Special measures monitoring inspection of Moorland Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 February 2019, 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 that 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 that took place in March 2018.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

leaders and managers are not 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 chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Milton Keynes. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2018

- As a matter of urgency, improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, by:
 - raising expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving
 - ensuring that senior leaders and governors routinely check and analyse school performance, including the use of pupil premium funding
 - making sure that governors rigorously monitor the school's safeguarding work
 - ensuring that effective strategic plans are developed to tackle weaknesses in teaching and learning, and to improve the behaviour of pupils.
- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, by:
 - ensuring that teaching is pitched accurately so that it is sufficiently challenging and meets the needs of all pupils
 - improving assessment procedures
 - raising expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving
 - ensuring that teachers' subject knowledge is secure.
- Quickly improve outcomes for pupils, by:
 - accelerating the progress that pupils make so that they catch up from their low starting points
 - increasing the proportions of pupils who attain a high standard.
- Improve behaviour and attendance, by:
 - increasing rates of attendance and swiftly tackling incidents of persistent absence
 - ensuring that all adults robustly tackle the use of derogatory language
 - eliminating low-level disruption in classrooms.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 5 to 6 February 2019

Evidence

During this monitoring inspection, part lessons were observed, all jointly with you. I met with you, the interim executive deputy headteacher, both assistant headteachers, other staff with significant responsibilities, and some class teachers. I met with one of the school's designated safeguarding leads. I also met with a representative from the local authority.

I spoke to parents at the start of the school day. I met with a group of six pupils in Years 4 to 6. I scrutinised school documents, including the school's own information about pupils' achievement, records relating to safeguarding and minutes from the targeted intervention board. The single central record was checked.

Context

The headteacher, who was in post at the previous inspection, resigned and left in July 2018. Also in July 2018, some class teachers, including the key stage 2 leader, left. In September 2018, you joined as interim executive headteacher. In November 2018, the local authority brokered additional leadership support through the appointment of two part-time interim deputy headteachers. One left, as planned, in December 2018. Since January 2019, the other interim deputy headteacher has decreased their time spent in the school. At the same time, two new assistant headteachers, with responsibility for mathematics and English, joined.

All classes have had changeable teaching arrangements from March to December 2018. From January 2019, following several new appointments, teaching arrangements in many classes stabilised. More classes are now taught by a substantive class teacher.

Following the inspection in March 2018, an academy order was issued. Discussions about the school becoming a sponsored academy are well advanced and a potential sponsor has been identified. The local authority has also made an application to form an interim executive board to replace the school's governing body. Governors are aware that the governing body is shortly to be replaced. At the time of the inspection, the school only had three governors in post, after receiving two recent resignations.

During the autumn term, a consultation to merge this school with Moorlands Nursery School took place. The consultation has now ended, concluding that the merger will not go ahead.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Following the previous inspection, too little was achieved. There was no obvious urgency to bringing about improvement and leaders did not act on the recommendations of the previous report. For instance, the required reviews of governance and pupil premium spending only took place in October 2018, seven months after the inspection. The previous leadership team was too slow to implement and share a robust action plan. Furthermore, during this period, pupils' achievement was not tracked closely enough. Standards continued to decline, and staff were not supported to improve.

Governance has not improved since the previous inspection. Although the chair of the governing body is well-intended, too few governors have the skills and expertise necessary to fully support and challenge school leaders. Governors have not monitored the school's work closely or judiciously enough. Minutes from governing body meetings during the summer term show that governors were unsuccessful at overseeing pupils' performance. The quality of governance has not improved, and a variety of statutory functions are not in place, including a system for monitoring leaders' spending of additional funding. During the autumn term, the proposed merger consultation added further distraction and uncertainty. As a result, challenge for school leaders remains poor. Sensibly, the local authority has begun the process of forming an interim executive board to replace the current governance arrangements.

Since your arrival, the school's leadership capacity at senior leadership level has begun to strengthen. You are providing stability and a sense of direction. This is helpful, and staff are now clearer on what is required. They talk very positively about this shift in purpose and are appreciative of the wise counsel you provide. With expert support, including from the interim executive deputy headteacher, there is now a sense of momentum and wish to improve. All are beginning to take a forward step. However, you recognise that school's overall improvement since the section 5 inspection has been too slow.

Appropriate action is now being taken by you and the interim executive deputy headteacher to improve the quality of teaching and learning. You are beginning to monitor the quality of teaching more regularly than has been the case in the past. Staff report that they now feel greater accountability and are pleased, for instance, to have performance targets in place this year. Holding responsibility for mathematics and English, the assistant headteachers have also started to monitor the quality of work in their subjects. However, subject leaders' action plans are underdeveloped and are not yet closely aligned to senior leaders' improvement planning. Consequently, subject leadership is in its infancy as new members of staff are still getting to know the school and the issues that need to be tackled.

The local authority statement of action and the school development plan detail a

range of appropriate activities. However, the school's plan does not include quantifiable targets by which leaders can measure the impact of their actions. Neither governors nor staff have had oversight of the school's improvement plan. Staff are not all clear on what is to be achieved by when. Sharpening milestones and sharing the plan more widely will help all grasp the scale of improvement required.

A review of pupil premium spending took place much later than was anticipated. Leaders are yet to agree and publish a plan for how this year's pupil premium allocation will be spent. Despite the review in October 2018, this aspect remains significantly underdeveloped and non-compliant with the Department for Education's expectations. Although you have ensured that staff have a greater understanding of who the disadvantaged pupils are, there is still no clear strategic oversight, including at governance level, of this aspect. Greater urgency is required to ensure that disadvantaged pupils receive the support they need to catch up.

The school's website remains non-compliant. Most information is outdated or insufficient. This includes the school's accessibility planning, safeguarding policy and special educational needs information report.

There are some weaknesses in the school's approach to safeguarding pupils. The school's safeguarding policy does not meet requirements as it does not reflect the latest guidance. It was due for review in September 2018, although this has not taken place. It is important that this policy is reviewed urgently so that the school meets statutory requirements. The deputy designated safeguarding lead's training qualification has also expired. Nevertheless, where concerns arise staff know how to report these and to whom. Records are detailed and contain all the necessary information, including appropriate follow-up actions.

Discussions and plans for the school to become an academy are well advanced. A suitable sponsor has been identified and the transition to becoming a sponsored academy is well underway.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Improvement to the quality of teaching and learning has been too slow. Too little was achieved in the academic year 2017/2018 and standards either remained the same or declined further. Difficulties continued into the autumn term, as many classes were taught by temporary teachers. As a result, you and your senior team acknowledge that some training did not have the desired impact. Furthermore, the school also suffered from underdeveloped leadership capacity at key stages 1 and 2.

During the autumn term, you took up post. You describe the school during this period as chaotic, since classes continued to experience fluctuating and temporary teaching arrangements. You clearly communicated your concerns to the governing

body. This term, staffing arrangements have helpfully stabilised. More classes are now taught by a substantive class teacher. However, it is too soon to see the impact of this.

Nonetheless, since your arrival there has been a more resolute approach, embraced by all. For instance, you have rightly taken steps to adjust the way mathematics and reading are taught. A new mathematics scheme is now implemented consistently across the school. The current interim executive deputy headteacher has driven this aspect well. This is leading to a more cohesive approach. Nevertheless, some weaknesses remain as teachers do not yet have the confidence or insight to adapt tasks to meet pupils' starting points. Often, units of work move on too quickly. When this is the case, pupils, many of whom are underachieving, struggle to access the task. In reading, you have adapted the school's approach, introducing whole-class sessions. All are clearer on leaders' expectations. It is too early to judge what the impact of these changes will be on pupils' learning. However, leaders have not yet tackled the school's approach to the teaching of writing and standards here are low.

You have started a programme of appropriate support to develop teachers' skills. Teachers are now beginning to access opportunities to: observe other teachers to identify good aspects of teaching, be coached by the experienced deputy headteacher, and engage in regular training opportunities. For some, including teaching assistants, this is inspiring them to improve. This is encouraging as it is indicative of expectations now beginning to rise. Nevertheless, training has largely focused on delivering the new mathematics scheme. Other aspects of teaching, such as those relating to the teaching standards, are less secure. You hold a realistic view and know that although teaching is beginning to strengthen in some regards, pupils' outcomes remain low.

There are some encouraging signs that in some year groups, teachers are beginning to build on pupils' prior attainment more convincingly. This was particularly evident in a Year 1 phonics session. Pupils could blend and segment skilfully. Similarly, the quality of teaching in the early years remains a strength. Activities are planned well, and ongoing assessment means that children's needs and their next steps are catered for well.

Teachers are confident that the school is improving under the current leadership team, as leaders' expectations are now much higher. They feel more supported to improve and are appreciative of the support they are receiving, including their participation in regular lesson observations. They note that the introduction of weekly staff meetings is supportive, ensuring that they are much clearer on what needs to be achieved. Staff are invested in fully championing school leaders to improve the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Since the previous inspection, including during this academic year, pupils' attendance has continued to decline. Attendance remains below that seen nationally. Absence and persistent absence are high. Nevertheless, systems for tackling pupils' absence are now more appropriate. You are insistent that attending school regularly is important and, since your arrival, everyone's expectations have risen considerably. Now, with greater support from local authority officers, families are appropriately challenged if their children do not attend school regularly. Leaders now issue warning notices, although this work is at a very early stage. With regular meetings now in place, individual cases show this aspect has improved markedly for a few pupils in a short space of time. However, this is not the case for all. Leaders are yet to introduce an attendance policy to share their higher expectations and different approach more widely.

Expectations of pupils' learning behaviour are beginning to rise, as relationships between pupils and their more substantive teachers begin to take hold. Fewer lessons are significantly disrupted. In classes where learning is improving, teachers' expectations are increasing. Nevertheless, this remains inconsistent and some pupils, for instance, sometimes continue to chat while their teacher is speaking. Pupils, too, say that it is sometimes too hard to concentrate in lessons because of others' low-level chatter.

Leaders have introduced a new behaviour incident logging system. It is too early to see the impact of this. Parents expressed some concerns about pupils' behaviour and bullying in the school. Pupils, too, do not always feel that bullying is dealt with promptly or sufficiently. They told the inspector that there is still some physical bullying, including fighting, particularly in Year 6.

Pupils, particularly those in key stage 2, are concerned about the quality of the school's curriculum. They say that sometimes learning is boring because most lessons are English or mathematics. Pupils say that they would like to also learn about modern foreign languages, computing and science, for instance. A scarcity of some of subjects, particularly in key stage 2, means that pupils' readiness for secondary school is not developing well enough and the school's curriculum is too narrow.

Parents are not yet fully involved in the direction of travel. They are concerned about the school's level of communication. Numbers on roll have steadily declined since the previous inspection. More is needed to gain the confidence of the wider school community.

Outcomes for pupils

Many pupils are underachieving. In 2018, standards in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 1 declined. Too few pupils achieved age-related expectations and standards were well below those seen nationally. The most able

pupils do not achieve the standards they are capable of. Too few pupils exceeded the standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 1. In 2018, the school's first cohort of Year 6 pupils took part in the end-of-key-stage-2 statutory tests. Pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics were well below those seen nationally. In key stage 2 in 2018, pupils' progress at the end of Year 6 was significantly below average and in the bottom 20% of that seen nationally in writing and mathematics. Standards remain low.

This year, you and your senior leadership team have introduced a new assessment tracking system. As a result, teachers now have an emergent understanding of how well pupils are learning and the standards that they are achieving. This is helpful. Leaders have also introduced meetings with teachers to discuss the progress that their pupils are making in the core subjects. However, leaders know that there is a degree of uncertainty about the accuracy of the autumn term performance information, as well as some missing information. While everyone shares an intent to accelerate pupils' progress, there is no useful analysis of whether this is indeed happening. Leaders are yet to draw meaningful conclusions about pupils' rates of progress, including for groups, such as the most able.

Although leaders are beginning to raise expectations, progress towards improving standards in the core subjects has been thwarted by staff changes and uncertainty about the school's future. Many pupils are not making the progress they are capable of. Teachers are only to just becoming more familiar with what is expected of their age group. Moreover, as the school's new assessment systems are very new to staff, many teachers are not yet planning tasks that are well matched to pupils' starting points. As most pupils are underachieving, too often planned tasks in reading, writing and mathematics are too tricky. Teachers do not yet demonstrate the confidence or insight to adapt tasks appropriately during lessons. This hinders pupils' progress. Too few are catching up in order to overcome previous underachievement. Consequently, too few pupils, including the disadvantaged and most able, are working at the standard expected for their age in reading, writing or mathematics.

In 2018, the proportion of pupils who met the standard expected in the Year 1 phonics screening check was below that seen nationally. Standards in this aspect have been too low for some time. However, changes to teaching approaches mean that this aspect is beginning to improve. Teachers and teaching assistants demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of what is required to support pupils in developing their early reading skills.

In 2018, the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development was broadly in line with that seen nationally. This represents strong progress as many children join the school with skills and understanding below those seen typically. Children are well prepared for key stage 1 as their needs are planned for well in this department.

External support

The local authority is beginning to support the school more strongly. In May 2018, officers convened a targeted intervention board, to meet regularly with school leaders. This is helpful as there is growing sense of accountability. Nevertheless, officers concede that with the merger consultation during the autumn term, meetings were not held with the anticipated sense of regularity.

Officers acknowledge that progress towards addressing the areas requiring significant improvement has been too slow. However, with effective brokered leadership arrangements in place, improvement is now underway and leaders' determination to improve the school is far more tangible.