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Tim Richards
Uplands Junior School
Melbourne Road
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Leicester
LE2 0DR

Dear Mr Richards

Special measures monitoring inspection of Uplands Junior School

Following my visit with Clare Cossor, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 23–24 September 2014, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

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

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection without consultation with me.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Leicester and as below.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Harvey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014

- Raise the quality of teaching so that pupils make consistently good progress, by:
 - demanding more work in lessons from all groups of pupils, particularly the most able and those who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium
 - monitoring pupils' progress closely and adjusting the work set to speed it up, especially for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs
 - making clear comments on pupils' work in lessons and in their books to show them how well they have done and what to do to improve their work
 - always making the best use of teaching assistants to help pupils make rapid progress.

- Improve pupils' achievement in English and mathematics by:
 - encouraging pupils to develop their ideas, and helping them to speak fluently
 - focusing on improving pupils' skills in reading with fluency and understanding
 - ensuring pupils understand how to work out calculations
 - strengthening teachers' skills in teaching mathematics.

- Strengthen the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels by:
 - when observing lessons, making rigorous checks on the impact of teaching on the progress different groups make
 - giving teachers clear and accurate feedback on the effectiveness of their lessons in improving pupils' progress
 - providing suitable training, linked to specific staff targets, to improve the quality of teaching
 - improving the monitoring skills of subject leaders, particularly in analysing assessment data and using the results to bring about improvement.

Ofsted has made recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the school. 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 governance may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 23–24 September 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher, the leader for special educational needs, assistant headteachers, phase leaders, year group leaders, consultants brokered by the local authority, pupils, and the Chair of the Interim Executive Board. The lead inspector spoke with the local authority school improvement adviser on the telephone. Inspectors held informal discussions with parents and carers.

Context

There have been changes to the context of the school since the first monitoring inspection which took place on 13 May 2014. The substantive headteacher, who has been absent from the school since September 2013, has now permanently left. The temporary acting deputy headteacher, who was appointed in August 2013 and became temporary acting headteacher in September 2013, has left the school. The executive headteacher who was appointed by the local authority to support the school full time until the end of the summer term 2014 is continuing to support the school for two and a half days a week until the end of the autumn term 2014. An assistant headteacher has been appointed as the acting deputy headteacher. A second assistant headteacher has left the school and two interim assistant headteachers have been appointed. New leaders have been appointed to take responsibility for the leadership of English, mathematics, and to lead the development of a new curriculum. Responsibilities have been allocated for the leadership of year groups and for lower and upper phase groups. Three substantive members of the teaching staff have left the school and one is absent on maternity leave. Three temporary class teachers have been appointed to permanent posts and a further new class teacher has been appointed.

The local authority, with the interim executive board, is using its statutory powers to explore the conversion of the school to an academy.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Observations in lessons, the work in pupils' books and the school's own data confirm that attainment has begun to rise in English and mathematics. The outcomes of national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2014 confirm that the previous downward trend in attainment, which began in 2011, has been arrested in mathematics and there have been a slight improvement in the proportion of pupils achieving the standards expected of them in reading and writing. More of these pupils made accelerated progress than Year 6 pupils in previous years. In some classes, in all current year groups, there are examples of rising standards and quickening progress

but this remains variable, depending on the quality of teaching in each class. There is some teaching which is still not good enough to ensure that all pupils in these classes do as well as they should. For some pupils, the legacy of previous underachievement remains great and they still have considerable ground to catch up. That is particularly the case for pupils in Year 5. However, where teaching is stronger and assessment is used consistently well to plan activities that challenge all pupils to do well, and where teachers have acted on the feedback and professional development they have received, the progress that pupils make has accelerated. As a result, gaps in learning for many are beginning to close.

Pupils supported by pupil premium funding (additional support provided by the government for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals) often make quicker progress than other pupils. More rigorous analysis of assessment information by school leaders is ensuring that additional resources for these pupils are targeted more effectively. However, these pupils often do not do as well in writing as other pupils or as well as they do in other subjects. Because of specifically tailored interventions and closer tracking of assessments, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are making better progress than previously. However, the progress that some of these pupils make remains a concern, particularly in reading and mathematics. Many teachers have embraced the need to increase expectations and challenge for the most-able pupils. This is not always the case, so there are still not enough of these pupils reaching the levels of which they are capable.

The focus on developing pupils' speaking skills is beginning to pay off. Pupils were seen to have grown in confidence and be more willing to talk about their work and explain their ideas. However, in mathematics, too many are still unable to choose an appropriate technique to solve problems and they are unable to clearly explain their reasoning for what they have done.

The quality of teaching

There have been some improvements to the quality of teaching. These improvements were evident in lesson observations and in the scrutiny of pupils' work carried out by inspectors. They are reflected accurately in the school's own recorded analysis of the quality of teaching. However, while the improvements to teaching are resulting in better progress for more pupils, teaching is not consistently strong enough to sufficiently raise the attainment of all.

In the best examples seen:

- teachers' expectations of what all pupils can achieve were high
- questions were used well to check pupils' understanding and extend their learning pupils were encouraged to reflect on and to assess their own learning
- careful use was made of data and assessment to move learning on, even when pupils' were working independently.

Features of the less effective teaching seen include:

- assessments not being used well enough to plan lessons that are pitched at the right level for pupils of different abilities
- low expectations of what pupils can achieve
- activities that are not interesting enough to engage or motivate pupils or not resourced appropriately
- adults failing to check pupils' understanding and that learning is taking place
- teachers missing opportunities to extend learning further
- teachers failing to develop the skills pupils need to be able to share and talk about their own work, particularly in mathematics
- additional adults not developed, prepared or deployed well enough
- teachers not making it clear enough to pupils what they need to do to be successful
- adults providing poor models for pupils' writing skills
- weak subject knowledge, particularly in mathematics
- adults being too ready to accept and praise pupils for their first and often simplistic answers to questions.

There was little evidence in pupils' books of an agreed approach to providing written feedback to pupils. Not all teachers are identifying meaningful and clear next steps. Others are not providing opportunities for pupils to address the written feedback they have been given or are failing to check if pupils' responses are appropriate.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Most pupils are friendly, polite and well behaved. They conduct themselves well in and around the school with only a very few who are unable to achieve the high expectations held for their behaviour without the support of adults. Most teachers are working successfully to encourage pupils to be more engaged, self motivated and confident about sharing ideas in lessons.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons is often linked to the quality of teaching. When activities do not inspire or challenge them, pupils lose motivation and concentration and their attitudes to learning suffer. They are not disruptive but their progress slows. Pupils say that incidences of poor behaviour and rare incidents of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively by the school.

Attendance remains broadly in line with the national average but there is work to be done to tackle the persistent absence of a very few.

A considerable number of changes have been implemented since the last monitoring inspection to improve the safety of pupils and how well pupils adopt safe practices.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

A new leadership structure has been implemented since the last monitoring inspection. Leaders' roles and responsibilities are now clear in almost every respect. There is a strong focus on addressing the issues identified at the last section 5 inspection and a recognition of the need to drive improvement swiftly throughout the school. The majority of leaders are new to their posts. They are enthusiastic and have high expectations. They have been astutely deployed to drive improvements to the quality of teaching at year-group and phase levels, where they have begun to coach and mentor colleagues. Though improvements are beginning to be seen in pupils' work, it is too soon to fully evaluate the impact of these new leaders. Similarly, there are new leaders for mathematics, English and other subjects. They are getting to grips with identifying the work that needs to be done. External consultants have joined the leadership team to work alongside these new leaders. They are helping them to develop the skills they need to carry out their roles effectively; for example, in the formulation of robust action plans so that their work is systematic and rigorous, and in developing a system to evaluate the impact of this work. However, roles, responsibilities and systems for the effective leadership of special educational needs and aspects of safeguarding lack clarity and rigour.

Staff report that, because of the more purposeful and clear direction they are being given by senior leaders, their morale and their own expectations have risen. Significant improvements have been made to the school environment to better support pupils' learning and their safety. Parents say they feel more welcome and that communication between home and school has improved.

Leaders' have identified and embarked on the correct actions to be taken to tackle weaknesses in almost every regard. However, the quality of documentation for planning improvement actions and for checking that plans are on track to achieve targets is not good enough to support the interim executive board to fully hold leaders to account for their work.

Senior leaders have an accurate view of achievement and the quality of teaching in the school through first-hand observation, analysis of pupils' work and through their more systematic analysis of assessment data which the introduction of a new system has allowed. Training and individual feedback and support for members of staff to improve their effectiveness is therefore well targeted and beginning to demonstrate its impact. Staff are being held to account for their effectiveness through pupil performance meetings. However, a formal performance management system has not been fully implemented.

The interim executive board is now well established and playing a strategic role. Its members have been trained in the use of pupil performance data and they are beginning to use this to hold school leaders to account. They are working to ensure that time spent considering the future of the school does not detract from the vital

work of driving school improvement. The interim executive board, along with senior school leaders and the local authority, responded swiftly after the last monitoring inspection to implement a range of actions to improve the school's arrangements for safeguarding. They have not checked that the actions implemented have ensured requirements are fully met. They have not put robust leadership in place for safeguarding to ensure that requirements for policy and procedure will continue to be met.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is now fit for purpose. There is work to be done to align this with school improvement planning. The local authority has forged positive relationships with the school since the last section 5 inspection. It has made a swift response to issues raised at the time of the last monitoring inspection, and in response to changes in school leadership, in order to maintain and to build the leadership capacity of the school. The support of external consultants has been effective in helping to promote improvements to teaching and, in particular, in improving assessment procedures. The support of the local authority school improvement adviser is currently focused on bringing rigour to school self-evaluation and improvement planning, and to completing the evaluation of the school's use of pupil premium funding.