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Rose Payne
Woolden Hill Primary School
Netherfield Road
Anstey
Leicester
LE7 7ES

Dear Mrs Payne

Special measures monitoring inspection of Woolden Hill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4–5 March 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 taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2012. 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 school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Leicestershire.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Harvey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2012

- Improve the quality of teaching and the achievement of all pupils in English and mathematics by making sure that teachers:
 - make better use of assessment information to plan lessons that meet the needs and abilities of all pupils so that they are more engaged in their learning
 - check progress closely to make sure that the pupils have work that is demanding enough
 - mark pupils' work regularly to show them more clearly how they can improve
 - expect more of pupils
 - provide more opportunities for pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills when learning in other subjects, especially by providing tasks where pupils can write at length.

- Improve the capacity of leaders and managers to sustain improvement by:
 - linking the quality of teaching seen in lessons with pupils' progress and actual results
 - working closely alongside teachers to improve what they do by sharing good practice and coaching them
 - developing improvement plans that have a sharper focus on raising standards in writing and mathematics, including setting more demanding targets for improvement
 - developing more thorough systems to check the school's work.

- Improve the effectiveness and impact of governors by:
 - making sure that the governing body becomes more active and asks searching questions about the quality of teaching and how well different groups of pupils are doing
 - providing more training for governors so that they develop their understanding of the school's data and can easily identify when pupils are underachieving.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 4–5 March 2014

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work alongside the interim headteacher. The inspector scrutinised documents and held meetings with the interim headteacher, the leaders of English and mathematics, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the prospective academy sponsor.

Context

The process of academy conversion is continuing. A temporary governing body remains in place. The Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, who was in place at the time of the last monitoring inspection, has now taken over as the Chair of the Governing Body.

Since the third monitoring inspection on 9 October 2013, there have been further significant changes to the context of the school. A new substantive headteacher has been appointed to take up their post on 19 May 2014. The current interim headteacher will remain in post until 23 May 2014. Support from the previous interim headteacher, who is a Local Leader of Education from another school, has continued. This support is provided with a lighter touch than at the time of the previous monitoring inspection, and occurs in response to specific needs as they are identified.

The Year 6 teacher has left the school. A temporary class teacher has been brokered by the prospective sponsor academy to teach the current Year 6 class until the end of the current academic year. The temporary teacher in Year 3 who was due to leave the school in December 2013 has had her contract further extended. The temporary teacher in Year 1 left the school in December 2013. They have been replaced by another temporary teacher, brokered by the local authority to teach the Year 1 class until the end of the current academic year. This teacher has also taken on the leadership of mathematics, which has been relinquished by the Year 2 teacher. The Year 1 teacher has also taken on the role of acting assistant headteacher when the interim headteacher is absent. The Year 2 teacher has taken on the role as leader of coaching other members of teaching staff. The temporary arrangements in place at the time of the last monitoring inspection in the Early Years Foundation Stage, utilising a local authority consultant working in partnership with a full-time temporary teacher for three days a week, have continued. A new full-time substantive teacher has been appointed to take over leadership and teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage after Easter 2014.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Observations in lessons, the school's own data analysis and the scrutiny of the work in pupils' books confirm that standards have continued to improve and progress to accelerate for more pupils in the school since the last monitoring inspection. For some, progress has still not accelerated enough to ensure that they catch up with lost ground and achieve the levels that they should.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, systems which were new at the time of the last monitoring inspection have shown that they are effective in establishing the accurate assessment of children's needs. There is appropriate planning to provide daily activities to meet these needs and to support children to make accelerated progress from their individual starting points. Evidence in school confirms that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are on track to surpass the levels previously attained in the setting in all areas of learning. The progress that pupils make in Year 1 has also accelerated significantly this term because of strengthened teaching. These pupils still have some catching up to do because of previous inadequate progress. Pupils continue to do well in Year 2, where they are on track to achieve at least the levels expected for their age.

Since the last monitoring inspection, the effective action taken by leaders and staff to address the wide variation in the quality of teaching of the sounds that letters make (phonics) has paid dividends. As a consequence, pupils were seen to be making consistently better progress. Pupils enjoy taking part in lively activities in small groups. Activities are now matched appropriately to pupils' levels of understanding. In the main, adults were seen to be accurately modelling their expectations to pupils. As a result, Year 2 pupils are doing well in developing their understanding of phonics. Year 1 pupils are on track to make up the ground lost due to previously inadequate phonics teaching, and children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are on track to exceed expectations for their age. Pupils were observed to be using their skills with greater confidence when reading and writing.

Evidence in school confirms that the progress pupils make has continued to accelerate in Key Stage 2. Improvements are particularly evident in English in all year groups in Key Stage 2. Though progress has quickened for more pupils in mathematics, this is not the case for all pupils in Key Stage 2. This accelerated progress is due to the appointment of new teaching staff and to the improved effectiveness of existing teaching. Much inadequate teaching has been eradicated. Some teaching remains which is not consistently of sufficient quality to ensure that gaps in pupils' basic English and mathematics skills will be closed for all pupils, and that pupils catch up on previous lost ground. Assessment is used more effectively to identify where pupils need the most help and provide targeted additional support so that gaps in basic mathematics and literacy skills can be better addressed and pupils do not fall further behind. Teachers were observed to be more routinely developing the skills and confidence that pupils need to be tenacious and to solve problems for themselves. Teachers are more often challenging pupils to explain their ideas and

develop their thinking further. Pupils are talking about their work more willingly and with enthusiasm. This was particularly noticeable in the Year 6 class, where pupils are being better prepared to develop the skills they will need to be successful in the next stage of their education. This is not yet routinely the case in every class.

Expectations that have been agreed for the presentation of pupils' work, and which were new at the time of the last monitoring inspection, have become embedded more widely across the school. The interim headteacher has quite rightly identified that expectations in this regard are still not high enough in some classes. For example, incorrect letter formation and repeated simple spelling errors are not always addressed immediately. In addition, not enough is done in some classes to ensure that work in topic books is of the same quality as that seen in pupils' literacy and mathematics books.

The number of pupils on track to achieve the higher levels has increased. There is still more to be done to ensure that even more pupils reach the levels of which they are capable. Similarly, some inconsistency remains in the rate at which disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make progress.

The quality of teaching

There has been an improvement since the last monitoring inspection in the impact of teaching on the progress that pupils make. This is due to a combination of changes to teaching staff and the on-going bespoke professional development and coaching provided for individual teachers. However, some of the new teaching appointments are temporary arrangements. All staff were seen to be working hard to implement the necessary improvement actions agreed in school. In a very few cases, improvements achieved previously have not been successfully sustained. However, more of the effective elements of teaching agreed within school were observed to be evident in lessons and in pupils' work than at the time of the previous monitoring inspection.

Because teachers are working hard to plan interesting and exciting activities, pupils were observed to be more often enthusiastically engaged and enjoying learning. Most teachers were seen to be using questions skilfully to quickly pick up and tackle pupils' misconceptions, or to challenge pupils to think more carefully and learn even more effectively. The effectiveness of teachers' written feedback to pupils has continued to strengthen across the school. However, sometimes the comments made are not relevant to the learning in the lesson, or what pupils need to do next is not made clear. Pupils were seen to be responding more often to the feedback they receive, but this is not always followed up by the teacher.

Additional adults have responded positively to the guidance they have been given and, as a result, they are making a stronger contribution to pupils' learning in lessons. Assessments are accurate, so teachers know at what level pupils are

working. However, not all teachers are using this information equally successfully to plan the next steps of learning for pupils of different abilities in their class. The objectives of each lesson and what pupils need to do to be successful in the lesson are usually shared by teachers and are on display for pupils. Teachers do not always make sure that these are clear enough to be understood by all pupils. A very few teachers continue to lack confidence in their subject knowledge. This is particularly the case in mathematics.

Nearly all teachers and additional adults circulate around groups of pupils in lessons, keeping an eye on what all pupils are doing. Very occasionally, individual pupils may get missed. Occasionally, opportunities are missed by teachers in some lessons to get pupils to explain their ideas or how they have worked problems out so that teachers can be confident that pupils' learning is maximised.

In partnership with the local authority, the interim headteacher has kept a close focus on driving improvements to teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Appropriate staffing and organisational arrangements have been made. During the monitoring inspection, children were seen to be engaged in meaningful and enjoyable activities planned for each area of learning. Adults were seen to be secure in their knowledge of children's needs and in their knowledge of how to ensure that young children learn effectively.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

During the monitoring inspection, pupils were seen to be polite and to move around the building safely and considerately. Evidence in school records confirm that there has been a significant reduction in incidents of inappropriate behaviour and, during the visit, no behaviour was seen to interfere with learning in lessons. Pupils were observed to show interest and enthusiasm for learning, and were keen to talk about their work. More rigorous procedures are being routinely applied and have ensured that attendance is currently better than that found in most schools.

A review of safeguarding policies and procedures has been carried out with the support of the local authority. Swift action has been taken as a result; for example, the erection of new perimeter fencing and the addition of security locks on external doors.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The interim headteacher has continued with steadfast determination to drive improvements to the quality of teaching and to improve pupils' achievement. She sets high expectations. These are shared by the staff team, who are united in their determination to succeed in continuing to improve the impact of teaching on pupils' progress.

The quality of school improvement planning has improved. Appropriate actions are identified. Often, there are clear targets set, along with points to measure whether actions for improvement are on track for success and in the time available. This is not always the case, particularly in the information now regularly given to members of the governing body to support them in checking on the work of the school and in holding school leaders to account for the effectiveness of their work.

Regular and careful checks are made by school leaders on the effectiveness of teaching and on how well pupils are making progress. The system for tracking pupils' progress, which was new at the time of the last monitoring inspection, is being used effectively by leaders and by teachers to make sure that challenging targets are set for pupils. Teachers are held to account for how well these targets are met.

However, arrangements for leadership at all levels are currently temporary. Senior posts are covered by temporary staff. Middle management is not yet secure. The leaders for English and mathematics were new at the time of the last monitoring inspection and, since then, the leadership for mathematics has changed again. Both leaders are temporary. However, they are beginning to be able to talk in terms of the positive difference they have made to teaching and to pupils' achievement; for example, the improvements to the teaching of phonics and the consequent improvements in pupils' knowledge and their ability to use their phonics skills. An effective practitioner has been appointed to provide coaching to other teachers and to ensure the most effective practice is shared across school.

Membership of the governing body is in state of transition. Individual members are highly supportive of the school. They make visits to school to observe its work at first hand. They have responded positively to the training they have received and are looking forward to further training to strengthen their understanding, for example, of the school's data. However, they have not adopted a rigorous and coordinated approach to this work and, as a consequence, are not playing their full part in driving the strategic direction of the school and, importantly, in ensuring that improvements are happening as quickly as they should.

External support

The local authority has consistently taken swift and decisive action in response to on-going staffing turbulence. The local authority service manager, two education quality advisers and a Local Leader of Education visit regularly to work alongside the interim headteacher, either to quality assure the school's work or to provide the appropriate training and support so that leadership is strengthened and the quality of teaching improved. All have worked in willing partnership with the prospective sponsor academy to ensure that necessary actions can take place; for example, to facilitate effective temporary staffing arrangements in the period of transition to academy conversion.