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4 July 2016

Mrs Janet Walls  
Acting Headteacher  
Somercotes Infant School  
Nottingham Road  
Somercotes  
Alfreton  
Derbyshire  
DE55 4LY

Dear Mrs Walls

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Somercotes Infant School**

Following my visit with Damien Turrell, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 7 and 8 June 2016, 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 June 2015. 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:

### **Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.**

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 and the director of children's services for Derbyshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dorothy Bathgate  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in June 2015.**

- Improve teaching and pupils' involvement in their learning by ensuring that:
  - teachers have high expectations for pupils' progress
  - teachers use questioning well to check and to extend the learning of all groups of pupils
  - teachers set activities for children in the early years that stimulate their imagination and guide their learning
  - additional adults do not overly direct the work of the pupils they support in lessons
  - teachers help pupils to take greater care over the work in their books.
- Raise pupils' achievement by ensuring that teachers:
  - implement policies for teaching early reading
  - develop useful links with parents to enable them to contribute more fully to improving their children's reading skills
  - model good writing skills effectively
  - provide good opportunities for pupils to write at length
  - provide pupils with clear feedback which helps them to improve their writing
  - provide pupils with good opportunities to use and to apply their mathematical skills.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - policies and procedures for pupils' safety are urgently reviewed and robust systems are implemented quickly so that all safeguarding requirements are fully met
  - rigorous systems for coordinating the school's work are quickly established which enable all leaders to contribute effectively to driving improvement
  - rigorous systems for managing staff performance are established and used effectively to identify training needs, and to improve teaching, leadership skills and the quality of self-evaluation
  - disadvantaged pupils receive the good teaching and support they need to make good progress
  - systems for managing pupils' behaviour in the dinner hall are effective
  - governors rapidly improve their capacity to hold leaders firmly to account
  - the school's website is established and contains all the required information for parents.

An external review of governance, including the use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 7–8 June 2016**

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher and the consultant headteacher, a group of pupils, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and a local authority officer. Inspectors observed teaching in all classes and looked at work in pupils' books. An inspector spoke with several parents at the beginning of the school day. A range of documentation was reviewed. This included the school's development plan, the records of the school's monitoring of teaching and learning, records of the local authority officers' visits to the school and the school's most recent information on pupils' progress and attainment.

### **Context**

The headteacher continues to be on long-term sickness absence, as reported at the time of the last monitoring visit. The acting headteacher is being supported this term by a consultant headteacher from another local primary school. The acting headteacher will be leaving at the end of this term. The consultant headteacher will be undertaking an executive headteacher role on a part-time basis from September 2016. For a significant part of this term there has been no acting deputy headteacher in post. The substantive deputy headteacher has recently returned from maternity absence but will be leaving at the end of this term. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed from September 2016. There continues to be significant absenteeism among staff. Consequently, the school is heavily dependent on temporary or supply teachers.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

There is insufficient school improvement, particularly in the quality of teaching and learning. The difficulties and barriers that leaders and governors face are many and significant. The very high levels of staff absence and instability at senior leadership level are two of the most challenging shortcomings they face.

Since the last monitoring visit, the local authority has deployed a well-qualified consultant headteacher to support the school. She has undertaken joint observations of teaching and work scrutinies with the acting headteacher. She has also provided coaching and training for staff. However, this additional support has not had sufficient time to make any real impact on achievement or teaching and learning.

Although the acting headteacher has brought stability and direction to the school, leadership and management remain inadequate because of the lack of other capable leaders to share leadership responsibilities. The acting headteacher has undertaken frequent lesson observations but has been unable to regularly monitor pupils' workbooks, teachers' planning or check whether actions which have been agreed are happening in all classes. No checks have been carried out by subject

leaders or the leader of the early years. This is because some staff holding these posts have been absent or have left the school. Others do not demonstrate that they have the necessary capacity to influence or drive the improvements that are urgently required. Consequently, the procedures to monitor and evaluate teaching have been too superficial and have resulted in little improvement.

The management of the performance of teaching assistants is weak. Insufficient attention is paid to the impact of their work on the outcomes for pupils. Leaders have not observed the work of teaching assistants carefully enough to identify where improvements could be made; nor have they checked the pupils' work to ensure that they are making better progress as a result of working with the teaching assistants.

The information on the school website does not meet the requirements set out by the government. There has been significant delay in developing a new website. Consequently, parents do not have access to the correct information.

The consultant headteacher has devised a sound action plan following the review of the management of the pupil premium which was completed in February 2016. Swift action is now being taken to ensure that the identified weaknesses are addressed. However, the delay in securing an external review and the further delay in completing the action plan has resulted in little improvement to the provision for disadvantaged pupils during this academic year. Consequently, the progress of disadvantaged pupils remains inadequate.

The chair and vice-chair of the governing body are in no doubt about the fragile state of the school and the risk of further decline. They recognise that the full scale of the school's decline in the past has not been fully realised and is still coming to light. The major difficulties that the school has encountered with staffing instability, including at a senior level, has limited the impact of governors' better challenge, particularly in relation to improvements to teaching and learning. The chair and vice-chair of the governing body demonstrate determined leadership and are taking decisive action to ensure that there is sufficient leadership capacity that is of high quality from September 2016.

Safeguarding documents were checked during the monitoring visit and meet current requirements.

There is no proposed date to convert to academy status at the present time.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Teaching is not improving fast enough. Staffing instability, which has caused frequent disruption to pupils' learning and progress, has hampered leaders' efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

There remain too many variations across classes in the pace and challenge being offered to pupils in lessons. These weaknesses were also reported at the time of the last monitoring visit and at the time of the school's inspection in June 2015. Currently, learning observed in lessons, assessments of pupils' progress and the quality of work seen in books show that too many pupils continue to underachieve over time.

Teachers have had a range of training and support from local authority consultants and advisers, as well as opportunities to visit other schools to observe good practice. However, this does not appear to have had a significant impact on improving their teaching.

Teachers do not always use the information gained from assessment to help them pitch the lessons correctly. As a result, sometimes the work is either too hard or too easy for different groups and individuals. This particularly affects the most able and those who have special educational needs or disability. Frequently, teachers do not have a secure understanding of what good learning will look like and, consequently, are not able to question or prompt pupils to develop their understanding.

In the few classes where teaching is better, pupils are engaged in more purposeful and productive learning. For example, in a highly effective phonics lesson in Year 1, the teacher's excellent subject knowledge enabled pupils to make rapid progress in identifying sounds, reading real and alien words and using their phonics knowledge to spell words. They were then challenged to be 'sound spotters' as they read sentences together.

In many classes, pupils' workbooks reflect their teachers' low expectations and the pupils' lack of pride in their work. Too much work is poorly presented and untidy. Many pupils have poor pencil grip and many reverse their letters and numbers. Frequently, pupils complete very little work during the lesson. Teachers do not pick up and address these concerns quickly enough and, consequently, bad habits are formed.

The significant impact of the early years specialist teacher in the Nursery this term has ensured more purposeful learning than previously. The classroom and outdoor area have been transformed and are magnets for learning. Children are faced with a wide range of exciting tasks which seek to develop their basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics. For example, children were captivated by making ice-cream cones with playdough, seed pots, glitter, sprinkles and lolly sticks, and were encouraged to write down their recipe, recording the ingredients and method used.

The recent reorganisation and refurbishment of the Reception classrooms has improved the quality of the inside environment. However, the classrooms are not organised thoughtfully enough to excite and capture the children's curiosity and natural instinct to learn. Children still do not have easy access to the outside environment. This is limiting their opportunities to make good progress in all areas of learning. The school's records of children's learning in the Reception classes do

not clearly show what children know, understand or can do. Consequently, teachers are not always planning the next steps in children's learning well enough. Currently, many children are ill-prepared for entry into Year 1 next term.

Teaching assistants do not always support learning effectively because they do not have the skills required to correct misconceptions or move pupils on to the next stage in their learning. Too frequently, they just help pupils to complete tasks that pupils are capable of doing independently and do not deepen their understanding of key concepts. As a result, pupils whom they support often make little progress.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Pupils behave well around school, at playtimes and in the dining hall. Parents report that any behaviour incidents are handled appropriately. However, attitudes to learning and behaviour in lessons are not consistently good across the school. This is because some teachers accept low-level disruption, such as constant chatter or calling out. Many parents say that the high dependence on supply teachers is causing their children to be anxious and unsettled in school.

Since the monitoring visit in February, the school's work to keep pupils safe has been maintained. Site safety and security around the many separate buildings are regularly checked. As a result, all adults and pupils work and learn in a safe environment. The pupils who met with inspectors say that they are happy and well cared for in school.

The highly effective work of the family support worker is rapidly improving attendance rates and punctuality. The number of pupils arriving late at school has reduced dramatically from 177 in the autumn term to 47 this term.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Significant weaknesses remain in the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Pupils' work, learning and progress over time in too many classes remain inadequate. As reported when the school was placed in special measures in June 2015, teachers do not set consistently high enough expectations. Many pupils are capable of achieving higher standards and making faster progress but are not doing so because the teaching over time is not ambitious enough. Although the proportion of pupils making expected progress in key stage 1 is improving slowly, it is evident in school that the quality of work and the progress made by pupils varies widely depending on which class they are in.

New learning journals in the Nursery class, introduced this term by the new teacher, are of high quality and provide clear evidence of the better progress being made by the children. However, in the Reception classes, the observations recorded by staff are not linked closely enough to learning outcomes. As a result, the information they provide does not help to identify next steps for learning or show the progress children have made. In addition, the evidence is mainly of children's progress in

writing and mathematics and there is little evidence of other aspects of their development, especially their physical, personal, social and emotional development. It is not clear how some aspects of the curriculum are being taught. Consequently, there is a danger that not all areas of the early years curriculum are being covered. Too few of the most able pupils make sufficient progress across the school. This is because they do not receive high-quality teaching on a daily basis or benefit from tasks which are specifically aimed at stretching them as fully as possible.

The gap between the standards of disadvantaged pupils and others is too wide and is not closing. This is because appropriate intervention work and support is not in place.

Although there are a few pockets of good progress, the quality of teaching is far from consistent and certainly not strong enough overall to sustain improvements to pupils' progress over time in all classes and across the school.

### **External support**

The local authority has provided a range of support to the school. This has included training for teachers and facilitating links with other good and outstanding local primary schools. However, this has not resulted in staff fully realising the higher expectations that are required of teaching and learning. The local authority does not have appropriate plans in place for senior leadership from September 2016. The link officer understands the need to urgently revise the current plans, in discussion with governors, and ensure that a much stronger level of support is provided. It is of concern that many of the local authority's statement of action milestones for April were not met and many of the July milestones look unlikely to be met. For example, the April milestone to ensure that 60% of teaching is good or better was not met. Consequently, the school does not currently demonstrate improvements at a rate that would enable special measures to be removed within the required timescale.