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Mr Damian Booth  
Headteacher  
Seven Fields Primary School  
Leigh Road  
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Swindon  
Wiltshire  
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Dear Mr Booth

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Seven Fields Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 21 and 22 January 2020, 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 May 2019.

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

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plans are fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Swindon. 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 May 2019.**

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - the new headteacher receives the necessary support to discharge his responsibilities effectively
  - middle leaders, including the special educational needs and phonics coordinators, are provided with the time, training and support required to carry out their roles successfully
  - middle leaders develop strategic oversight of their areas of responsibility so that they can evaluate provision and impact more effectively
  - additional funding, particularly the pupil premium, is spent effectively, evaluated for impact and leads to higher achievement for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND
  - curriculum planning for reading and mathematics throughout the school pays closer attention to the requirements of success in these subjects.
- Improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement by ensuring that:
  - all staff have the necessary expertise and subject knowledge to plan effective teaching and assess pupils' progress accurately
  - all staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and what they can achieve
  - pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning because they are interested in, and stimulated by, the tasks they are set
  - pupils across the ability range are challenged and encouraged to think more deeply
  - pupils know how to improve their work and are encouraged to do so
  - all pupils take pride in the presentation and quality of their work
  - all staff are provided with the necessary training to teach phonics effectively.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by ensuring that:
  - staff systematically analyse patterns of attendance, exclusion, behaviour and bullying to identify the most effective strategies to overcome weaknesses
  - staff continue to act to reduce absence, particularly for those disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent
  - staff, pupils and parents work together to foster a culture in which pupils develop greater self-esteem, higher aspirations and mutual respect
  - all staff consistently apply the new behaviour policy to tackle offensive language and reduce the number of incidents of poor behaviour and bullying.

- Improve provision in the early years by ensuring that:
  - leaders develop strategic oversight of provision, plan accordingly and improve ongoing assessment of prime learning areas
  - all staff in the nursery and pre-school develop the expertise to enable children to acquire language more rapidly and effectively
  - children in Reception make progress in writing that more closely matches the progress they make in other areas of learning.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 21 January 2020 to 22 January 2020**

### **Evidence**

Together with the headteacher, I made visits to classrooms, and the school's nurture room, to look at pupils' learning. I also visited the early years department. I held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders and middle leaders with responsibility for phonics, English, mathematics and science. I met with the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and the early years leader. I had a meeting with a representative from the multi-academy trust. I also spoke to the chief executive officer of the trust and to the chair of the local governing body on the telephone.

I reviewed a variety of documents, including a range of school policies, improvement plans and external reports. The school's single central record was checked. I scrutinised records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance.

### **Context**

Since the last inspection, there have been some changes to leadership. One of the school's deputy headteachers left in July 2019. Leaders have appointed another deputy headteacher to a permanent position and promoted a teacher to be an assistant headteacher from November 2019, on a temporary basis.

There has been significant change to the teaching team since the last inspection. Over 50% of the teaching team are new to the school.

On 1 December 2019, the school joined a multi-academy trust (MAT), the River Learning Trust (RLT). Prior to the school joining RLT, the regional schools commissioner appointed a group of independent trustees. RLT have appointed the chair of this group to act as the chair of the local governing body. Trustees are recruiting additional governors in order to formally establish a local governing body.

### **The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection**

Leaders have made a very positive start to improving the school. They have set a very clear steer. Leaders have contended well with staff turnover and, in the main, have managed to fill positions with permanent staff. A fresh approach has been set in motion. Everyone knows what is expected and where the priorities lie.

The headteacher has successfully instilled a greater emphasis on collaborative working. For instance, teachers in the same phases now share time to prepare and plan together. This is creating a team ethos where staff welcome the opportunity to work together. Alongside this, leaders are striking a welcome balance between

communicating what is expected and recognising what is working well. Staff are appreciative of this approach. There is a high level of engagement with leaders' aims and ambitions.

The introduction of precise expectations (referred to as non-negotiables) are raising the bar. For instance, teachers communicate more clearly what it is that they intend pupils to learn. Teachers' planning shows that expectations are rising. New approaches, including in the teaching of phonics, help to provide greater clarity. However, some pupils, particularly those with underdeveloped language skills, are not yet able to reap the benefits. Teachers are improving their support of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, those pupils who need to catch up are not yet supported well enough. Pupils' achievement remains low. The proportion of pupils who met age-related expectations at the end of key stage 2 in 2019 in reading, writing and mathematics was significantly below that seen nationally.

This term, staff are adapting to a new approach to the teaching of early reading. All have received useful training. Nevertheless, staff are only just beginning to master the skills required. In most cases, adults are not yet checking whether pupils have grasped the sounds that are being taught. Often, pupils' mistakes and misconceptions go unnoticed. Therefore, many pupils are still not catching up. Nevertheless, this new approach is helpful, and staff are appreciative of the support that they are receiving.

Leaders are fully aware that the school's work to strengthen teachers' expertise is at an early stage. For instance, sometimes teachers' questioning lacks precision or is not targeted well enough. At times, pupils' misconceptions remain unchallenged. Pupils' productivity remains low.

There is a high proportion of pupils in the school with additional needs. Some improvements are beginning to take hold. The school's SENCo has been given more time to dedicate to the role. Consequently, leaders have made a start in identifying pupils' needs more promptly. There is now a better package of support for pupils with SEND.

Staff place a far greater emphasis on rewarding pupils' positive behaviour. The headteacher is determined to create an environment where pupils can learn free from disruption. Staff are making progress in managing some pupils' challenging behaviours. The newly established social inclusion team is working well. Some pupils benefit from timeout strategies, for instance. This means that learning in classrooms now flows without interruption from serious incidents. However, pupils' transition from lessons to social times is less established.

Leaders have redesigned the way that they log behavioural incidents. More comprehensive information is gathered than in the past. Staff follow up incidents

more thoroughly, including reporting more frequently to parents. Nevertheless, the number of incidents has yet to reduce convincingly.

Pupils' attendance remains low and persistent absence high, especially among disadvantaged pupils. However, the school has introduced more robust procedures to encourage pupils to attend regularly. Leaders now host face-to-face meetings with families causing concern. It is too soon to see the difference that this is making.

The school has joined a MAT. This transition has happened quickly and seamlessly. The school is benefiting from the expertise of trustees.

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

The headteacher is leading the school with conviction. He has introduced many new policies and ways of working. His decisive approach has led improvements over the last term. Staff are fully supportive and rising to the challenge. This has been a period of rapid change. Leaders now need to take stock and allow new ways of working to take hold.

Leaders communicate clearly to staff about where the main priorities lie. The school's improvement planning aligns tightly with the statement of action. This is helpful and provides clarity. Senior leaders have established a useful middle tier to the school's leadership structure. New curriculum leaders receive helpful support from those with expertise within the trust. Curriculum leaders are clear about what their roles entail, and they feel empowered to make change. At this early stage, they have prioritised making improvements to the school's range of teaching resources. However, curriculum leaders are not yet exerting an influence on how well the curriculum is implemented in their subjects.

A representative from the trust is working closely with the school. This is helpful. Trustees are clear about what needs to improve, and they support the headteacher's work well. Useful monitoring and scrutiny of the school's work is contributing well to setting a tone of improvement.

Trustees, who worked with the school prior to it joining RLT, provided a much-needed steadying influence. At a time of change, they remained highly committed to meeting their statutory duties. Now, work to formalise a local governing body arrangement is well underway. An appropriate scheme of delegation is in place and trustees have appointed a chair of governors.

Despite recent staff turnover, leaders have ensured that the correct pre-employment checks are undertaken in a timely fashion. However, this information is not always transcribed across to the school's single central record.

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- The capable leadership of the headteacher has enabled everyone to make a strong start to securing school improvement. Staffing structures have settled and staff turnover slowed. Parents and carers feel that the school's communication has strengthened. They are well informed about what school leaders are setting out to achieve.
- Leaders are focusing on the right things. For instance, the school's curriculum has strengthened and the most challenging of pupils' behaviour is managed more convincingly. The process of improving the quality of education is well underway.

### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Leaders are beginning to identify the needs of pupils with SEND more accurately than in the past. The SENCo makes sure that staff are better informed about how to meet these needs. However, when pupils' education, health and care plan applications are successful, the co-production of plans with local authority (LA) partners is taking too long.
- Leaders have introduced a raft of new ways of working, including establishing a middle leadership tier. However, staff are still getting to grips with new ways of working, including curriculum leaders. It is important that leaders allow enough time for new ways of working to take hold so that staff develop expertise in delivering the school's curriculum.

### **External support**

The LA is providing some useful support, including helpful training for the school's SENCo. This is making a positive difference. Other advisers are supporting staff in the early years effectively. Helpful advice on matters including the teaching of early reading, classroom organisation and adults' planning are helping to strengthen children's progression through the curriculum.

The school's use of part-time timetables for some pupils is not overseen well enough by LA partners. For instance, when such arrangements extend beyond appropriate timeframes, LA personnel do not challenge this practice. Arrangements for some pupils are allowed to drift unnecessarily.