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Moira Green
Interim Headteacher
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Dear Ms Green

Special measures monitoring inspection of Chiltern Edge Community School

Following my visit with Anne Turner, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 21–22 November 2017, 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 2017.

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 local authority’s statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school’s improvement plan is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children’s services for Oxfordshire. This letter will

be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Newberry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2017.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, by:
 - ensuring that improvement plans have clear targets and success criteria, so that governors and leaders can evaluate school effectiveness more accurately
 - ensuring that governors challenge school leaders, particularly on the performance of pupils
 - monitoring pupils' progress closely and using what is learned to inform next steps
 - making sure that the school's behaviour management system is consistently used to monitor and deal with derogatory language, so that bullying is eliminated and pupils feel safe
 - ensuring that leaders and governors routinely evaluate pupil premium expenditure so that it is focused on activities that rapidly improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils
 - strengthening subject leadership in English, mathematics and science
 - further improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and raise achievement, particularly in English, mathematics and science, by:
 - ensuring that teachers have high expectations of all pupils, including boys
 - making sure that teachers plan tasks that match pupils' starting points sharply, including pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - helping pupils to develop a love of reading that supports their access to and engagement with the wider curriculum
 - ensuring that disadvantaged pupils make good progress in English and mathematics
 - making sure that teachers use assessment information to identify and support pupils who are at risk of falling behind.

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 funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 21 and 22 November 2017

Evidence

Inspectors visited 21 lessons in the school and looked at learning jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of pupils' work and had discussions with pupils in prearranged meetings, in lessons and around the school. Meetings were held with the interim headteacher, senior and middle leaders, teachers, and members of the interim executive board (IEB). Documentary evidence, including safeguarding records, policies, strategic planning documents and analyses of pupils' achievements, were evaluated. Inspectors also scrutinised documents relating to behaviour, attendance, records of IEB meetings and visits from local authority advisers and external consultants. The lead inspector met with a representative from the local authority and an education adviser who has been supporting the work of the school.

Context

There have been considerable changes to the leadership and staffing at Chiltern Edge School since the previous inspection. In the summer term, the headteacher and deputy headteacher left the school. The local authority replaced the full governing body with an IEB, whose remit is to lead the school out of special measures. The IEB appointed an interim headteacher, who took up post on 5 June. A total of 20 teachers and 26 support staff, including the school's business manager, have left the school since the previous inspection. Senior and middle leadership teams have been restructured and new teaching appointments have been made. The Department for Education, the IEB, senior leaders and the local authority have begun the process of the school joining a multi-academy trust, but no firm decisions have been made yet.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Following the inspection in March, the local authority appointed the chair of the IEB, who wasted no time in creating an effective action plan, communicating the school's priorities to staff and appointing the interim headteacher. Current leaders and governors of the IEB fully accept the previous inspection judgements and have acted decisively. In the summer term, new leaders and governors rightly prioritised ensuring financial stability for the school and restructuring staffing. They have successfully achieved this. Teachers are now aware of the need to 'raise their game' and of how all staff will be supported by leaders and external consultants to improve. Many teachers and support staff have left. Those that remain, and the new staff, are keen to improve their practice; they feel valued and are well supported to do so. Staff morale at the school is much higher.

Following the previous inspection, in response to the threat of possible closure, parents and the local community mounted a public campaign and expressed strong

support for the school. Staff, governors and pupils are proud of their school and recognise that, recently, significant changes have been made and that it is improving. This has been recognised by the local authority, which published earlier this week that it is now recommending that the school stays open.

Since September, the restructure of staffing has enabled leaders to improve the pace of improvements. The interim headteacher has significantly higher expectations and has communicated these successfully to her staff. No time has been wasted in making the necessary changes to the roles and accountabilities of senior and middle leaders. Senior leaders have worked tirelessly to review, design and implement new procedures and systems this term. Although these improvements are very new, already there are early signs of some improvements to behaviour and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

The chair and members of the IEB are knowledgeable and discerning. They bring extensive relevant experience, including educational, financial and human resources expertise, together with successful IEB membership elsewhere in the past. They have very high expectations of senior leaders and the school. Governors' own routine monitoring activities are supplemented with detailed reports from the interim headteacher and external reviews. This equips governors with a crystal-clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and the rate of improvements.

Senior leaders' and governors' action plans have clear targets and success criteria, and are proving effective. Leaders work closely with advisers and external consultants to keep a check on actions needed to improve leadership and management across the school. Staff express confidence in the interim headteacher and trust that the changes being made are in the best interests of the pupils and the school. The interim headteacher has ensured that there is now greater transparency around all leadership roles, including what senior and middle leaders are accountable for, and to whom. In addition, she has ensured that there is appropriate training and support, particularly for those leaders new to their roles. Consequently, the capacity of leadership across the school is improving.

Leaders have ensured that the school has robust safeguarding arrangements and that there are well-understood systems in place to manage safeguarding requirements. There is a culture of vigilance and the school's records are carefully maintained and detailed. All staff have up-to-date training to an appropriate level so they know what to do should they be worried about a pupil. Governors are very knowledgeable about safeguarding and ensure that this aspect of the staff's work is given high priority and meets current requirements.

The interim headteacher has set out a clear vision of the features of good-quality teaching and learning. New appointments have been made to improve the leadership of English and mathematics. A new lead practitioner will be joining the science team in the New Year. Working with local authority consultants and the

Maiden Erlegh Teaching School Alliance, the interim headteacher has ensured that a comprehensive package of training, for middle leaders and teachers, is now underway. Teachers are getting the support they need to make improvements. Senior leaders have started a regular programme of monitoring teaching with a clearer focus on pupils' progress. Senior leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment. They are turning their attention to supporting middle leaders to gain the same clarity.

New tracking systems have begun in key stages 3 and 4 to assess pupils' attainment and monitor the progress they make against ambitious targets. Leaders have ensured that teachers' assessments in key stage 4 have been externally moderated and validated. As a result, teachers' assessments in Years 10 and 11 are becoming sharper and increasingly accurate. There is now a much clearer focus on the progress pupils make during key stage 4 and the requirements of the GCSE examinations. There has not yet been the same level of focus and support to improve assessment in key stage 3. Consequently, assessment and tracking systems are less accurate in Years 7, 8 and 9.

The IEB has arranged an external review of the use of pupil premium funding, but this has not yet occurred. However, leaders have already acted to restructure and refine how they spend this funding with the aim of improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. A team of staff has worked with the assistant headteacher to support individual disadvantaged pupils by planning bespoke systems and approaches that are based on research. Pupils are aware of the support on offer and value the extra help staff provide. However, it is too soon to see the longer-term impact of these new systems on accelerating the progress of this group of pupils. With the planned improvements to assessment and tracking systems, leaders should be in a better position to evaluate this work next year.

The school has supported subject leaders and teachers through training, and by the purchase of new commercially published resources. However, more needs to be done to support teachers to tailor these resources to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. These groups include boys, the disadvantaged and the most able. Senior leaders are aware that teaching across the curriculum does not yet appropriately challenge the most able pupils. Nor does teaching properly support those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, or who are struggling to catch up. More priority needs to be given to improving teachers' subject and assessment knowledge so that they can upgrade their lesson planning, particularly in key stage 3.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Staff are working hard to put the interim headteacher's new principles for effective teaching into practice. Teachers are trying to challenge pupils more purposefully, including the most able. Where this is working well, pupils respond positively and demonstrate better progress. This is very apparent in the progress Year 11 pupils

are making in Saturday school classes in English and mathematics. In some key stage 4 mathematics groups, where teachers have higher expectations, then pupils' reasoning skills are promoted well. Another particularly strong example occurred in a Year 11 English group. Here, the new head of department's detailed planning and high expectations enabled pupils to develop their writing skills and produce more, and much higher-quality, work than they had previously demonstrated. Leaders, quite rightly, are now seeking to cascade this stronger practice across the school.

While they are improving overall, teaching, learning and assessment remain variable because teachers' expectations and the quality of challenge across the curriculum are still inconsistent. A school-wide focus on developing reading skills and promoting a love of reading has started this term. Staff have received training on how to promote reading skills, but it is too early to see any sustained impact of this work. Leaders have also prioritised improving pupils' writing skills. Work has begun to improve teachers' understanding of the skills that pupils have already developed in primary schools, and some teachers have raised their expectations as a result. However, in some areas, such as science and humanities, and in some English lessons, teachers do not provide enough regular opportunities for extended writing to promote deeper thinking.

Teachers are now better informed about pupils' targets and their differing needs. Leaders have shared details of strategies to support disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. In mathematics, some teachers have adapted their seating plans, questioning techniques and/or activities in order to improve the support they give to these groups of pupils. Inspectors observed activities where these pupils were helped by being provided with specific challenges and support that they needed to make progress from their starting points. However, the use of assessment information in this way is new and far from the norm; it is not yet happening effectively elsewhere in the school.

Teachers' use of discussion and group work to stimulate interest and promote pupils' progress is variable. Strong examples were seen, where teachers skilfully used probing questioning as well as ensuring that each pupil had a clear role in any group activities, in drama, dance and physical education lessons visited by inspectors. Where this occurred, pupils actively participated in the tasks set and keenly debated the skills and understanding that they were developing. Many were then able to forecast their next steps to achieve their goals. These teaching approaches are much less well developed elsewhere across the school. Where this is the case, pupils tend to be too passive by not offering answers to questions or actively participating in group work. This is reflected in the quality of work in their books. In some of these lessons, off-task chatter, particularly from groups of boys, slows the pace of learning.

Pupils are given feedback about how to improve their work more routinely now, and much of this feedback is in line with the school's new assessment policy. Some pupils told inspectors that this is helping them to understand how to improve their

work. The longer-term impact of this feedback on pupils' progress is not yet evident. This is because some teachers are not sufficiently subject-specific in their feedback and pupils are not aware of how to improve their work to meet their target grades. Some errors are not always addressed; examples were seen where teachers had credited work as being correct where pupils' explanations clearly had misconceptions. Where teachers' feedback is having a good impact, pupils have opportunities to revisit their work and make improvements. This is working well in some English lessons; however, it is not as effective elsewhere in the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour has improved. Pupils value their new uniform, and they are smart and polite and most conduct themselves well. Pupils told inspectors that they recognise that behaviour is much better than it was. They respect the new 'on-call' system and believe that behaviour in lessons is more focused and calmer than it used to be. Pupils feel that bullying is rare and that, when it does occur, staff usually resolve it well. Pupils confirmed that they feel safe at school, and they would trust staff to resolve any concerns that they may have.

Most pupils move calmly around the site. However, adult supervision at busy changeover periods, breaktimes and lunchtimes, and at the end of the day, does not sufficiently challenge instances of boisterous behaviour and some inappropriate language. Despite the tightening-up of rules on pupils' behaviour, some low-level disruption and disengagement remain in a minority of classes. This is particularly the case when learning activities are not well matched to pupils' needs. As a result, some pupils do not take enough care with their work, which means that it is sometimes incomplete, disorganised or inaccurate. This happens where teachers' challenge to learning or expectations of pupils are too low.

Exclusions decreased overall last year. However, they have increased since September as a result of the interim headteacher's clamp down on poor behaviour, and the tightening of the school rules. Leaders are aware of this and are monitoring the impact of these new systems. However, disadvantaged pupils, and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, currently feature even more highly as a proportion of these exclusions than previously. Senior leaders are rightly prioritising actions to ensure that the needs of these pupils are being met and to ensure that more effective support enables them to improve their behaviour.

Overall attendance last year was in line with the national average. However, that of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities was still well below that of their peers. It had not improved from historically very low levels. Leaders have set up new and robust systems to address this, including promoting the value of good attendance, better liaison with parents and the use of the minibus to collect those whose attendance is weak. There are early signs of some improvements being made this term. New tracking and monitoring systems are being developed, which should enhance this improvement.

Outcomes for pupils

Provisional GCSE results show that pupils made better progress in 2017 than in 2016. Overall, pupils made progress in line with pupils with similar starting points nationally. In English, pupils achieved nearly one third of a grade more than the average and in mathematics they achieved in line with all pupils nationally with the same prior attainment. While pupils' GCSE outcomes are moving in the right direction, senior leaders rightly recognise that there is still a long way to go. Key stage 4 outcomes in science and modern foreign languages remain weak. Within the improved overall outcomes last year, there were still significant gaps between different groups. In 2017, boys made less progress than girls and, although diminishing, there were still wide differences between the rates of progress made by disadvantaged pupils compared to other pupils.

The school's own assessment information shows that, in current Years 10 and 11, boys and disadvantaged pupils have a substantial amount of catching up to do if they are to make the progress they should by the end of key stage 4. Senior leaders and subject leaders understand the size of this challenge and know that they need to take urgent steps to address it. To support this, senior leaders have offered Saturday school classes in English and mathematics and, more recently, science, which are well attended by Year 11. Examples of work achieved during these sessions demonstrate that pupils are being supported to accelerate their progress by developing their extended writing skills and examination techniques.

The achievement of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities is a strong priority within the improvement plan. Much work has been done in restructuring and relocating the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Leaders have shared information and useful strategies, so that teachers can develop their understanding of what works well with these pupils on an individual basis. However, this approach is in its infancy and visits to lessons, together with reviews of pupils' work, show that these pupils are not yet supported well enough across the curriculum to make progress in line with their peers.

In key stage 4, pupils recognise and welcome the greater level of challenge offered by teachers this year, particularly in some English and mathematics lessons. However, leaders and governors are aware there is still a long way to go to ensure that consistent improvements are made in these core subjects and that teachers have higher expectations in science. Some books indicate that insufficient challenge for the most able pupils and/or weak support for pupils with low prior attainment are limiting their progress across the wider curriculum, particularly at key stage 3.

External support

The chair and governors of the IEB are dedicated and committed to the school. They have worked hard to support and challenge the school and ensure that standards have improved during a time of considerable staffing turbulence. The IEB has conducted detailed negotiations with its preferred multi-academy trust and the process of applying for sponsorship is currently underway. Governors are highly experienced and have offered very effective challenge and support to leaders.

Sensibly, governors and the interim headteacher have made good use of local authority-brokered school improvement consultants and the Maiden Erlegh Teaching School Alliance. This has helped them develop a range of training opportunities for teachers and leaders, and to check the impact leaders' actions are having on school improvement. There is a shared vision and commitment to continuing improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over the next year.

Coaching, shared planning and some moderation of key stage 4 pupils' work with other providers have improved teachers' skills and the overall provision for pupils. Recent improved assessments are starting to secure more accurate data relating to pupils' attainment in each year group. Leaders and consultants are working together to ensure that this information will enable the school to refine the accuracy of its tracking systems, so that leaders and governors can start to monitor pupils' progress more effectively.