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Cate Peel, Jackie Knight, Kate Morris
Acting headteachers
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Dear Ms Peel, Ms Knight and Ms Morris

Special measures monitoring inspection of Hartcliffe Nursery School and Children's Centre

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 7 and 8 March 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in June 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, other senior staff, the local authority and governors the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also had a tour of the site, visited lessons, met with other staff and looked at documents and records. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Hartcliffe Nursery School remains inadequate and requires special measures. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.

The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the inspection in June 2022, there have been some changes to leadership in the school. As a result, three experienced leaders are covering the role of the headteacher from January to April 2023. One of these leaders is the substantive assistant headteacher.

During this visit, I focused on the actions leaders had taken to address the four key issues identified at the earlier inspection. Namely, that safeguarding was ineffective, that teaching did not meet children's needs, that children's behaviour was not well managed and that, without support, leaders did not have the capacity to improve the school.

Leaders have acted quickly to establish clear expectations for children's behaviour. Improvements have been made to classroom routines and the key-person role. Together, these have significantly improved the behaviour of children. Changes to the routines at the beginning of the day provide children with a calmer start. This is leading to better behaviour throughout the day. These improvements have been supported by the introduction of clearer expectations for children and staff. Children are increasingly aware of the 'golden rules', and staff value the information in the behaviour policy. The consistent routines and clear structure to the day that are now in place have resulted in an environment in which children can learn. Leaders have rightly identified that they now need to improve the interactions staff have with children.

Leaders have begun to develop a new curriculum. They have rightly identified ambitious outcomes that they want all their children to achieve. However, current curriculum plans are too complicated and do not give sufficient prominence to the areas of learning in the early years foundation stage (EYFS). Leaders and governors need to consider carefully how they will meet the requirements of the EYFS and ensure all children are able to make progress in all areas of learning.

The current curriculum does not meet the needs of all children. Not enough thought has been given to the needs of the youngest children, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those children with gaps in their knowledge as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. To meet the needs of these children, leaders need to break down the ambitious outcomes they have for the children into smaller steps so that staff know what they must teach the children on a day-by-day and week-by-week basis. Staff must then use this information to guide their interactions with children and plan meaningful activities. This will make it easier for all children to reach the school's ambitious outcomes and develop positive attitudes to learning.

At the time of the last inspection, the school's leadership did not have the capacity to make the necessary improvements by itself. Since then, leaders have benefited from considerable support to enable them to improve the nursery quickly. However, much of the current leadership is temporary and aspects of the leadership structure are unclear. To ensure that improvements are sustainable the school needs a clear leadership structure. This will help all staff understand how roles and responsibilities are shared between them.

Leaders are developing a clearer understanding of the quality and effectiveness of the school. Immediately after the inspection, leaders increased their monitoring of behaviour and routines to see how well new approaches were being delivered. This contributed to the success of the changes that were introduced. Leaders have rightly identified the need to develop a more systematic approach to monitoring the quality of the school's work, for example, to monitor the quality of provision for the youngest children and to ensure that all safeguarding checks are carried out at the correct time. It is now important that leaders and governors work together to introduce a structured approach to monitoring that will be delivered regardless of who is in the leadership roles.

Leaders have acted swiftly to improve the culture around safeguarding. As a result, children are safe and well looked after. Changes have been made to ensure that children spend more time with their key person. This is supporting children to form secure bonds with trusted adults. Staff have received additional training so that they have the knowledge they need to identify and record any concerns they might have about a child's safety or well-being. Leaders and staff have carried out risk assessments and introduced regular checks to ensure that adults supervise children appropriately.

As a result of the actions taken since the last inspection, safeguarding is now effective. The school's arrangements for safeguarding children meet statutory requirements. Leaders and governors must now ensure that they have rigorous systems in place to monitor the quality of all aspects of safeguarding, to secure these vital improvements.

The local authority has supported the school well in carrying out improvement work since the inspection. An appropriate improvement plan is in place that has been closely monitored by leaders working with the local authority. It important now to ensure that the improvements made are consolidated and built on so that any future changes in school leadership do not slow the pace of improvement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Bristol. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Phil Minns
His Majesty's Inspector