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Mr N Vitarana  
Acting Headteacher  
Castlecombe Primary School  
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Dear Mr Vitarana

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Castlecombe Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 2 May 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the interim executive board are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior and middle leaders, and representatives of the interim executive board appointed by the trust of which the school is a member. This was to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I looked with senior leaders at a range of information about pupils' current progress, their behaviour and attendance. I reviewed records made of the school's external reviews of behaviour, handwriting and the expenditure of the pupil premium. I spoke to a group of pupils and observed them at play. I visited a number of classrooms, speaking to pupils about their work and looking at their books.

## **Context**

Shortly after the previous inspection, the board of the trust of which your school is a member decided to replace the local governing body with an interim executive board. This is composed of completely new members, many of whom are also members of the trust board. One teacher has left the school and has been replaced by a permanent member of staff. You continue to lead the school. However, a new full-time headteacher has been appointed to begin work in September 2017. The school has forged stronger links with Dorset Road Infant School, which is also a member of the trust. Plans for expansion of the school to include two Year 3 classes from September 2017 are going ahead. Many of the new pupils who are expected to join the school are likely to come from this infant school.

## **Main findings**

Since the previous inspection you have strengthened arrangements to assess pupils' achievement. You ensure that teachers understand the school's revised assessment policy and check they are using it effectively. As a result, senior leaders and governors now possess more accurate and reliable information in order to hold teachers to account for their impact on pupils' progress.

Your development plans are focused sharply on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. You monitor the impact of the planned actions thoroughly and regularly. As you have begun to gather more accurate information about pupils' achievement, the measures of success in your plans are becoming more demanding and reflect a suitable sense of urgency. For example, your plans rightly identify a need to continue to focus on differences between the progress of boys and girls in reading. However, you acknowledge that more needs to be done to focus on the performance of pupils with different starting points in your plans to check that all are making the same rapid progress.

Middle leaders are having greater impact on school improvement than in the past. Their support for other teachers, including the sharing of good practice, is beginning to strengthen the quality of teaching. However, you recognise that more work is needed to help them use information about pupils' achievement more skilfully when holding others to account.

After the previous inspection, the trust made a swift decision to replace the governing body rather than conduct an external review of existing arrangements. The trust has ensured that governors with a breadth of skills and commitment to rapid improvement are available to support and challenge senior leaders. It has also been successful in securing the appointment of a permanent headteacher from September 2017. Board members seek information at first hand to help them understand how teaching is improving. They use this alongside information about pupils' progress skilfully. This enables board members to support senior leaders

when challenging decisions are needed in order to sustain improvements in teaching. The board has a strategy for the return of a local governing body as soon as outcomes indicate the school is ready for this.

You are encouraging parents to play a more significant part in the school's work to help pupils become better readers. You have improved the range of books available. You are insisting that teachers place a sharper focus on helping pupils understand the meaning of books they are reading. As a result, there are early signs that pupils' attitudes to reading are improving and their progress is gaining pace. However, you recognise that the difference in achievement between boys and girls must diminish rapidly.

Teachers are helping pupils understand the importance of organising and structuring their writing effectively. Pupils I spoke to were able to explain how their writing is improving. The review of the pupil premium expenditure, which was carried out shortly after the inspection, recommended that disadvantaged pupils should understand the purpose of their lessons more securely. You have responded well to this recommendation in relation to writing. It has been a wise decision to provide individual pupils with specific advice on how they can improve their writing further. The school's external review of how to teach handwriting is also showing signs of early success. The changes made are helping the lowest-attaining pupils to improve their stamina for writing and understand how to introduce joined writing more skilfully.

The school's review of the mathematics curriculum has led to improved teaching of problem solving and pupils are making more rapid progress as a consequence. Pupils' work that we looked at together during my visit typically demonstrated pupils' growing confidence in selecting the correct mathematical method and information. However, teachers still seldom challenge the most able pupils to explain their reasoning or look for patterns and relationships in mathematics.

My discussions with pupils and your records indicate that pupils' behaviour is improving. Your efforts to involve parents in ensuring consistency in the use of the school's behaviour policy between home and school is paying off. You have acted effectively and promptly on the recommendations of an external review of your arrangements to improve behaviour. You have made sensible decisions about training for staff and keep the impact of this training closely under review. Staff are now acknowledging and rewarding good behaviour more overtly. For example, leaders send a postcard home when pupils uphold the school's values well. You have consulted with pupils through their learning council and listened to some of their recommendations when deciding how to improve behaviour. For example, you have decided to continue the practice of having playtime at the same time for children of all ages. Your records show that disruptive behaviour in lessons is being rapidly eradicated.

Pupils' attendance has improved in the current school year and is now closer to the

2016 national average for similar schools. You realise that the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is still too high. However, more effective use of external partners and improving relationships with parents has led to higher rates of attendance for nearly all of these pupils in the current term.

### **External support**

Senior leaders have used a broad range of external support wisely to evaluate existing provision and decide how to act on the recommendations from reviews. Consultants from the trust are providing effective challenge for leaders in driving improvements to behaviour, middle leadership and the quality of teaching.

I am copying this letter to the executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bromley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Wright

**Her Majesty's Inspector**