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Mrs Jo Yeates
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Yeates

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Five Islands School

Following my visit with Julie Carrington, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Nathan Kemp, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 14– 15 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 September 2016.

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.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the director of education for the Diocese of Truro, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Isles of Scilly. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Karl Sampson

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in September 2016.

- Improve pupils' progress so that it is at least good, particularly at key stage 2 in writing and mathematics and key stage 3 in humanities and languages, by:
 - checking that teachers give pupils regular opportunities to develop their spelling, punctuation, grammar and presentation skills and that writing is given a high priority in all classes
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving
 - ensuring that all of the most able pupils are given tasks that challenge them to work in greater depth
 - making sure that pupils experience a well-planned programme of study that fully meets the requirements for the national curriculum in mathematics and French
 - ensuring that teachers develop the appropriate subject knowledge required to deliver the mathematics curriculum
 - making effective use of assessment information to address gaps and plan challenging learning activities.
- Improve behaviour so that pupils make better progress and are able to thrive at school, by:
 - promoting positive attitudes to learning and study in all age groups and across all subjects
 - dealing effectively and consistently with any behaviour issues, and regaining the confidence of the school community
 - developing pupils' resilience and perseverance further when tackling new tasks and challenges.
- Improve the quality and impact of leadership, by:
 - focusing classroom monitoring activities on how well pupils are learning, particularly the most able and disadvantaged pupils
 - using the findings from monitoring and evaluation to plan improvements to the quality of teaching, the curriculum and pupils' progress, and regularly checking whether these plans are working
 - reorganising the curriculum at key stage 2 so that pupils in each of the island bases have the same opportunity to succeed as others, and at key stage 4 so that pupils can achieve the range of qualifications of which they are capable
 - clarifying the roles of middle and subject leaders and holding them to account for their areas of responsibility
 - actively recruiting and appointing staff with sufficient skills to remedy the

current shortfalls in leadership

- strengthening governance so that governors hold accurate information on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement and can provide the right degree of challenge to hold the headteacher to account
- ensuring that effective safeguarding practice is consistently applied in all the school settings and on all island bases.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 14 November 2017 to 15 November 2017

Evidence

Inspectors met with the acting headteacher, the executive principal, the strategic lead for primary education and other members of the school's extended leadership team. Discussions were held with all four members of the interim executive board (IEB), staff, pupils, parents and representatives from the local authority. Inspectors visited each of the school's island bases to evaluate the progress made against the recommendations identified in the previous inspection report.

Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at social times and conducted visits to classrooms to observe pupils' progress and their attitudes to learning. Pupils' work across a range of subjects and year groups was scrutinised. A range of other documentation, including the statement of action, the school's improvement plans and minutes of the IEB meetings was reviewed. Inspectors checked a wide range of information about safety and safeguarding, including the single central record of checks on staff recruitment.

Context

Significant changes in staffing and governance have taken place since the school was deemed to require special measures in September 2016. A new acting headteacher has been appointed and senior leadership team roles and responsibilities have been redefined. A number of teaching staff have left the school and replacements have been appointed to start in January and April 2018.

The acting headteacher has been in post since July 2017. She receives support with the secondary phase from the executive principal for one day a week. A strategic lead for the primary phase also provides support for two days a week. These leaders draw on their respective school's resources to support staff and school leaders to redevelop the curriculum and to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

An external review of governance did not take place because the governing body stepped down and was replaced with an IEB from 1 January 2017. An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium has also not taken place. The introduction of a new individual pupil tracking and target setting system has resulted in a complete overhaul of the use of the pupil premium funding. Senior leaders are now held to account regularly for the performance of all pupils, including the disadvantaged, by the IEB.

The school had an academy order issued in November 2016, but the conversion to a sponsored academy is yet to take place. Current plans for the school to become an academy under the Leading Edge Academy Partnership are expected to be

finalised by 1 March 2018.

At the same time that this inspection took place, a monitoring inspection of the school's boarding provision was also undertaken. The inspection was conducted by one of Ofsted's social care inspectors and a separate report of the findings can be found on the Ofsted website.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The appointment of the IEB and its determination to secure better outcomes and stronger leadership at senior level has been instrumental in enabling the school to better safeguard pupils and improve the quality education. The IEB has made a good start in implementing the recommendations from the previous inspection report. The changes to the leadership of the school and regular meetings with senior leaders are raising expectations of what can be achieved. Senior leaders are now held to account for their actions to improve the quality of education. The IEB is providing the necessary governor expertise and challenge to secure the school's future and maintain improvement. Working closely with staff and the newly established senior team, it is rapidly regaining the confidence of the school community.

Although it has taken time to appoint an acting headteacher, her experience, ability and tenacious approach to remedying the school's weaknesses are starting to have the desired effect. With the support of the executive principal and strategic lead for the primary phase, she is building a more effective senior team. This team is working determinedly to challenge mediocrity and raise expectations of what staff and pupils are capable of. Its work has been most successful in the school's secondary phase, where pupils are now accessing a curriculum that is much better planned and organised. Senior leaders have developed a curriculum offering a coherent structure to secure better teaching and outcomes for all pupils. Conversely, leaders' work to improve the curriculum at key stage 2 has been limited to English and mathematics and, to a lesser extent, science. Leaders have been too slow in dealing with the endemic weaknesses in primary curriculum planning. As a result, some of the weaknesses in the key stage 2 curriculum, identified at the previous inspection, remain.

The IEB has secured a part-time strategic primary leader to bolster leadership capacity. This action has brought greater stability to planning and is helping to ensure greater consistency of provision across the primary phase. However, staff are not yet working with the rapidity that is required to eradicate the widespread weaknesses in provision at key stage 2. Leaders' action planning in the primary phase is not sufficiently focused on improving pupils' outcomes. While systems for checking pupils' understanding are being put into place, teachers' assessments have not been checked for accuracy quickly enough to enable teachers to adapt their teaching where necessary. Leaders are not yet giving sufficient focus to tracking pupils' outcomes and measuring how pupils' work in books is improving. As a result,

too many primary teachers on the island bases and at the Carn Gwaval site are not clear about the pace at which pupils' underachievement needs to be remedied. Further work is required to establish effective quality assurance to improve teaching across all of the primary bases. The acting headteacher has needed to prioritise her work elsewhere this term, which has limited her improvement role within the primary setting. Senior leaders and governors recognise the need to drive improvement at a more rapid pace over the coming months.

Procedures to track the progress that different groups of pupils make in subjects and across the school have been strengthened. Staff know they are accountable for the progress that their pupils make, irrespective of pupils' backgrounds, abilities or starting points. This is reflected in the school's improvement plans, which set out clearly what needs to be done. However, the plans to monitor and evaluate the impact of each action are not linked precisely enough to the progress that pupils are expected to make over time. This inhibits leaders' and governors' ability to evaluate clearly the impact of action taken and adjust their work quickly when progress starts to falter. A lack of timely milestones and success criteria make it difficult for the IEB to hold school leaders to account fully for the impact of their work to raise standards. This is most noticeable in the primary phase, particularly with regard to leaders' work to support teachers to adjust teaching in light of current assessment information.

Much good work has been done by the IEB and senior leaders to improve the school's approach to safeguarding across all the island bases. A safeguarding audit has been used well to identify where improvements need to be made. However, leaders and governors recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that new systems are robust and that record-keeping is sufficiently precise. Weaknesses in the way that information was recorded on the single central record were identified on the first day of the monitoring inspection. Swift action was taken and this issue was rectified by the end of the inspection. Elsewhere, although evidence exists to show that staff monitor closely those pupils who need additional support, this is not always captured effectively in individual records.

The acting headteacher ensures that appropriate staff are aware of the different needs of individual pupils who require additional support. Appropriate plans are in place for these pupils and outline strategies for teachers to support children to reduce emotional distress and improve their attendance in class. There is good evidence that support plans are understood and implemented by teachers. The school's work is complemented by good multi-agency support so that pupils are kept safe and able to achieve.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders are taking appropriate action to tackle inadequate teaching. This has been most successful in the secondary phase. Although there is still a considerable distance left to travel, the journey to improve the quality of teaching is gathering

momentum. The acting headteacher has the support of many members of staff and the wider community. Expectations of teachers and pupils have risen, and all can see the benefit of the changes being made. Teachers appreciate the direction and support to improve their teaching being offered by the school's new leaders. Consequently, morale is positive among those who work and learn here. Teachers and leaders at all levels recognise the collective effort required to take the school forward to establish and maintain a 'culture of achievement'. All must ensure that the new approach is fully embedded across the school so that more pupils achieve in line with their capabilities.

The work being done by the new senior leaders responsible for achievement and for quality of teaching is an emerging strength. Working with the interim and executive headteacher, they have established the importance of placing clear professional standards central to improvement work. Staff have welcomed such a focus and have been fully involved in the development of the school's new approach to teaching, learning, assessment and target setting. This work has been instrumental in raising teachers' expectations of what they and pupils can achieve. Visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work show that teachers are beginning to incorporate these shared ideas into their teaching. The impact of leaders' strategy for improving teaching and learning is most evident over the last three months. Improvement has, however, not yet been sustained for long enough to reverse widespread underachievement, nor has it entirely eliminated weaknesses in teaching at key stage 2. Although staff are able to articulate the need to improve teaching swiftly, their work to achieve this remains fragile, particularly in the primary phase.

The use of assessment information to address gaps in knowledge to plan challenging learning activities is patchy. Although used more effectively at secondary level, there are still areas of weakness in some subjects at key stage 3. For example, in history and in French work was often too easy and limited the depth of pupils' response, thereby restricting their access to achieve high standards. Despite such variable quality in key stage 3, senior leaders have taken effective action to secure the quality of teaching and learning in music and history at key stage 4. Year 10 pupils are on track to achieve well in history. This is demonstrated by the improving quality of their written responses, which show the increasing depth of argument and analysis necessary at this level. Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that in mathematics, English and science pupils have fully engaged with the new curriculum approach.

In some subjects, assessment opportunities are used efficiently to fill pupils' gaps in learning. For example, in English, good work is done to help pupils catch up quickly when they arrive in Year 7. Similarly, in mathematics, a diagnostic assessment of what pupils know, understand and can do is used with precision to adapt the key stage 3 curriculum to address swiftly pupils' misconceptions. Unfortunately, this level of analysis is not being fed back to key stage 2 leaders and teachers to inform future curriculum planning across each of the island bases. As a consequence, cohorts of pupils are being allowed to make the same mistakes year on year. It is

important that this issue is addressed by the time of the next special measures monitoring visit.

The quality of mathematics teaching in the primary phase is improving but not sufficiently quickly to address fully the legacy of underachievement in key stage 2. There is now a consistent approach to timetabling and planning for the mathematics curriculum, which is beginning to improve the quality of provision across most island bases. Leaders have started to take appropriate steps to increase their checks on teaching, learning and assessment in mathematics. They provide clear guidance to teachers about how to improve their teaching strategies. For example, improvements to the regular and systematic teaching of number facts and multiplication tables are increasing pupils' fluency in mathematics. Better-quality training means that teachers' subject knowledge of calculation skills in mathematics is improving and teachers' assessments in mathematics are increasingly accurate. However, leaders have not yet ensured that all aspects of the national curriculum in mathematics are taught well. As a result, pupils do not receive adequate exposure to problem solving and reasoning in their mathematics learning. This restricts the progress that pupils make.

Since September, there has been greater urgency to secure improvements to the teaching of writing across the school and the island bases. The teacher currently leading English has strong subject knowledge and is well placed to drive further improvement. Better-quality training is ensuring that staff's subject knowledge of planning sequences of learning is improving. Shared planning means that there is greater consistency in the teaching of writing across all sites. Where teaching is stronger, progress in pupils' workbooks is noticeable and builds on prior knowledge. Although outcomes are improving, teaching across the primary phase remains too variable. Pupils who have previously underachieved are not catching up quickly enough. The quality of teaching in Years 3 and 4 remains weak across all sites, and pupils underachieve regardless of starting point, background or ability. For example, the learning for the most able pupils is often over structured and restricts pupils' ability to develop and demonstrate their understanding in greater depth.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The new behaviour policy is having a good impact. Pupils understand the expectations and most adhere to them well. New systems to reward pupils individually and as a class are used more consistently across the school. Where teaching does not meet pupils' needs well enough, pupils' concentration wanders and they chat about other things. At times, pupils get frustrated when teachers spend too much time reinforcing rules to the whole class rather than dealing directly with the individuals whose behaviour is disruptive. This is particularly noticeable in lower key stage 2.

Older pupils said how much they appreciate the opportunity to practise, demonstrate and apply their new learning as a result of the changes to the

secondary curriculum. Key stage 3 pupils particularly enjoy those subjects where the new curriculum approach is most embedded. For example, pupils' books in English, mathematics and science showed good evidence of an increasing depth of knowledge and understanding, particularly for the most able and for the small number of disadvantaged pupils.

Pupils' planning skills and their stamina for writing are improving across the primary phase. Since the previous inspection, teachers' expectations of pupils' presentation have improved markedly. Overall, handwriting is improving and more pupils are showing a greater determination to produce a better quality of work. However, at times, most-able pupils are unable to demonstrate the resilience to apply their learning to challenging and/or unfamiliar situations because the work they are given is too easy and does not require them to think hard enough.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' outcomes by the end of key stage 4 followed a similar pattern to the previous year. In the 2017 examinations, pupils made above-average progress in English and mathematics when compared with pupils from similar starting points nationally. At the same time, progress in languages, humanities and science remained below the national figure. The legacy of weak teaching and poor curriculum design has limited pupils' achievement and their ability to fully access the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc).

All pupils in key stage 4 now access an appropriate range of courses to better demonstrate their achievement. Teachers are much clearer with regard to the progress that pupils are expected to make in each subject. As a consequence, teaching is better planned to sequence and develop pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills across and within subjects. Leaders have acted swiftly to improve teaching quality at key stage 4. Scrutiny of work shows that in most subjects, pupils, including the small number of disadvantaged, are making better progress than previously. However, the progress made by pupils in some key stage 3 subjects remains fragile. Despite the development of a more structured curriculum in history and in French, too many pupils are not challenged enough to develop the subject knowledge, application of skills and conceptual understanding needed to reach high standards by the end of the key stage. This situation is exacerbated, in the short term, by changes in staffing and the wait for new replacements to start in January 2018.

Pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 2 remain too low and show little sign of improvement. In the 2017 key stage 2 national tests, pupils made below-average progress in both mathematics and writing. Work in pupils' books shows that, while standards are improving, too many pupils are not catching up quickly enough to fulfil their potential. Checks by senior leaders in the primary phase are not adequately focused on improving pupils' outcomes.

The primary curriculum is too narrow and does not meet fully the requirements of the national curriculum, particularly in subjects others than mathematics, English and, to a lesser extent, science. This hampers the progress that pupils make and their readiness for transition into the secondary school. Despite the positive start that has been made to raise standards at key stage 2, not all staff have a clear enough understanding of how the curriculum changes can best be used to extend, develop or reinforce pupils' learning. For example, in mathematics the most able pupils do not receive work that is challenging enough. These pupils have to sit through or complete work that is too easy before they tackle challenging work. Too often, teachers' weak understanding of mathematical concepts means that the most able pupils complete tasks with bigger numbers rather than being offered learning that deepens their conceptual understanding in mathematics. Similarly, while the teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar is becoming a regular feature of learning, it is not yet enabling pupils at key stage 2 to demonstrate the sophisticated sentence structure and precision that is expected for their age.

External support

The local authority has given strong support through the setting up and continued support of the IEB. The IEB has played a significant role in helping the school to move forward on its improvement journey. It has acted swiftly to secure good-quality leaders and remedy significant weaknesses in safeguarding and the quality of teaching. The IEB is equipped with the necessary skills and expertise to maintain the momentum of improvement.

The support brokered to improve teaching and to develop the curriculum has met with mixed success. In particular, work in the primary phase is not yet improving teaching with the rapidity needed to improve standards swiftly in key stage 2.