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12 February 2018

Victoria Counsell  
Millpond Primary School  
Baptist Street  
Baptist Mills  
Bristol  
BS5 0YR

Dear Miss Counsell

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Millpond Primary School**

Following my visit with Sarah McGinnis, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 31 January and 1 February 2018, 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.

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 regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bristol. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Smith

**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:
  - securing leadership capacity in the school so that leadership is not reliant on external support
  - equipping leaders to take effective action to eliminate inadequate teaching
  - establishing clear systems to check on the progress of groups of pupils so that whole-school effectiveness can be measured accurately
  - ensuring that governors receive accurate and detailed information that enables them to hold the school to account
  - ensuring that governors know the impact that teaching has on pupils' progress, and check more rigorously on the performance of specific groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, the most able and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities
  - insisting that teachers' assessment is accurate and that they use it to plan work to meet the needs of pupils
  - insisting that expectations of teaching staff are consistently high and the requirements of the national curriculum are fully met.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment urgently by ensuring that teachers:
  - take sufficient responsibility for the learning and progress of groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, the most able and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, so that their progress is consistently good
  - have consistently high expectations of what all groups of pupils can achieve
  - set work that challenges pupils and deepens their understanding so that middle-attaining pupils and the most able make good progress.
- Improve the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils by:
  - ensuring that rates of attendance improve for all groups of pupils
  - rapidly improving the attendance of pupils who are persistently absent
  - teaching pupils to take responsibility for their learning and how they behave, so that persistent low-level disruption in lessons is eradicated and exclusion rates fall.

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

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 31 January 2018 to 1 February 2018**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors jointly observed learning with senior leaders, scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and groups of pupils. Inspectors held meetings with the chair of the interim executive board, a representative from the local authority and representatives from a multi-academy trust which has expressed interest in sponsoring the school. Inspectors also scrutinised pupils' work.

### **Context**

At the time of the previous inspection, the interim headteacher had only been in post for a short time. She left the school at the end of September 2017. The current interim headteacher and deputy headteacher took up posts in October 2017. Both leaders are employed by the Cabot Learning Federation. Three teachers left the school in December 2017. Another two teachers are on long-term sick leave. One teacher is on maternity leave and another is due to start maternity leave soon.

The governing body disbanded in December 2017 and was replaced by an interim executive board as the school awaits sponsorship by an appropriate multi-academy trust.

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

You and the acting deputy headteacher are committed and purposeful in your work. In the short time you have both been in post, you have set about building on improvements implemented by the previous interim headteacher. Consequently, systems and procedures that are new since the previous inspection are now in place. These systems have improved safeguarding and pupils' behaviour, raised expectations of what pupils can achieve and introduced greater consistency across the work of staff.

Leaders are succeeding in eradicating the weakest teaching and improving the practice of staff. However, their efforts have been hindered by a high level of staff turnover, which has weakened the impact of staff training and professional development. Leaders have been building on 'shifting sands', which, through no fault of their own, has made it difficult to establish changes to teachers' practice. As a result, although progress has been made, improvement has not been as rapid as leaders would have hoped. More positively, however, you tell me that staffing is now more settled for the rest of the academic year. In light of these findings, I would expect to see evidence of accelerated progress during further monitoring visits to the school.

However, difficulties around recruitment and retention mean that no middle leaders are in place to lead mathematics and English. Specific leadership of these areas, informed by a high level of subject knowledge, is necessary to drive up pupils' achievement. Currently, senior leaders monitor these areas so that they are 'ticking over', but leaders readily acknowledge that their options have been limited because of the difficult staffing situation.

The local authority has overseen the formation of an interim executive board, in an effort to drive progress at greater pace. Its remit is to focus single-mindedly on teaching and learning and the achievement of pupils. To this end, the interim executive board consists of members who have the relevant skills and experience to achieve this aim. In the recent past, governors have been providing a greater degree of challenge to leaders, as evidenced by full governing board minutes. These minutes record the specific and detailed questions that governors ask about achievement, the quality of teaching and other aspects of the school's work. Before disbanding, the governing body had benefited from an external review of governance, which enabled it to sharpen its practice and provide greater accountability, as explained above.

Leaders are clear about what they want to achieve and have a detailed understanding of the school's key areas for improvement. You make no excuses for underperformance. Correspondingly, the school development plan records objectives, specific actions and monitoring measures. As a 'live' working document, you revisit it at intervals to consider its continuing impact. Helpfully, actions are marked red, amber or green to indicate progress. The development plan shows, as leaders acknowledge, that there is still a lot of work to do.

Safeguarding continues to be effective. Since the previous inspection, leaders have established an online system for the recording of referrals of concern. This enables designated staff to track carefully the complex, challenging cases that arise. These staff work positively with external agencies to ensure that pupils receive the support they require. They and the wider staff know pupils well and are vigilant for signs of upset or neglect. Checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children are comprehensive, well organised and up to date.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

The quality of teaching is improving, despite the rate of change being slower than desirable for the reasons outlined above. Leaders have taken action to eradicate inadequate teaching, stabilise staffing and provide staff with training and coaching that develop their expertise. Professional development for staff is now yielding greater returns, in part because staffing is now more stable. Greater consistency of practice is particularly evident in key stage 1.

Staff across the school are fully aware of the importance of planning activities that meet the needs of pupils of different abilities. Consequently, they provide different

groups of pupils with different resources to assist them. For example, lower-ability pupils in Year 2 who were writing a story were provided with opening sentences for different paragraphs to help them structure their writing. Teachers direct teaching assistants well to ensure that they help the pupils who need their aid most. However, this work is not always successful. Sometimes, activities do not fully stretch the most able. The 'scaffolding' and guidance provided to the most able pupils sometimes stifles their creativity rather than inspiring them to reach beyond limits.

Teachers across the school are now more adept at providing feedback to pupils that enables them to improve their work. It is common practice for pupils to identify mistakes and re-draft their work with improvements. Pupils value the feedback from teachers that highlights strengths and clearly points out pupils' next steps. This practice is helping pupils to move ahead with their learning.

Learning environments have improved since the previous inspection. Classrooms are now more stimulating and vibrant, celebrating pupils' work and acting as another resource to help pupils. Pupils reported that 'learning walls', which display useful information about different subjects, help them to learn. Inspectors observed one pupil in Year 1 consulting a wall display for ideas about story characters.

Pupils across the school have positive attitudes to learning. They enjoy their learning because staff attempt, successfully in the main, to meet their needs and appeal to their interests. They benefit from strong relationships with staff, who encourage pupils to participate during lessons. Consequently, many pupils feel comfortable and confident in the classroom. However, this sometimes leads to them calling out to answer questions, which can be disruptive for other pupils. Pupils' attitudes to learning still require improvement because some pupils are too dependent on staff. They do not work well enough independently, and require too much prompting or cajoling from staff to press on with their work.

Leaders have introduced more robust systems for monitoring pupils' progress and improving the accuracy of teachers' assessment. However, systems are new and there is little evidence of impact so far. Nevertheless, you are intelligently using the information at your disposal gained from the termly tracking of pupils' progress. Through this, you identify pupils who are achieving below their potential in different subjects and year groups. You are using this information to plan support and help pupils to catch up. You present this detailed information to governors to ensure that they have a comprehensive understanding of the performance of different groups of pupils.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Leaders have undoubtedly succeeded in improving aspects of pupils' behaviour. The school community has galvanised itself around the 'Millpond Standards', which have respect, tolerance and cooperation at their heart, among other attributes and

qualities. Pupils coexist with each other in a harmonious way. They are respectful and polite to each other, staff and visitors. Pupils frequently greeted inspectors with a smile and held doors open for us.

Staff look after pupils well, including the many who are disadvantaged. They work successfully to welcome and integrate pupils from different countries. The school's breakfast club is attended by over 100 pupils, nearly half of the pupil population. The parent support adviser, the SENCo and other staff go to great lengths to form positive relationships with parents and carers and the local community. Consequently, parents attend school for classes that improve their employability skills and enable them to support their children's learning, for example in mathematics. The most vulnerable pupils, with high-level social, emotional and behavioural needs, attend a nurture group. In these sessions, pupils learn to cooperate and take turns. They learn practical skills, such as cookery, and access the curriculum in ways that would not be possible in mainstream classes.

Behaviour is orderly, in the main. Pupils move through corridors sensibly. They respect each other's personal space when playing outside during breaktimes. On occasion, I witnessed some boisterous running, but this was rare. Pupils who spoke with me feel that behaviour is not a concern, although cited instances in class when low-level disruption distracts them from their learning. As one pupil put it, 'You can't always learn what you need to.'

Attendance is improving. During this academic year, pupils' overall attendance has been above average. Attendance by different groups of pupils is also improving because of the work of the parent support adviser and engagement with parents. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has risen over time so that their current attendance is now better in most year groups than that of pupils who are not disadvantaged. However, rates of persistent absence for this group of pupils are still too high.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Improvements to teaching and behaviour are beginning to improve pupils' outcomes, although outcomes are variable across year groups. The school's own progress monitoring information indicates that, broadly, the number of pupils predicted to achieve at the level expected of them is rising in most year groups. Leaders acknowledge, however, that pupils' achievement will still be below national averages by the end of this academic year.

The picture of generally rising achievement, as presented in progress information, is also evident in pupils' work. However, this is more apparent in key stage 1, specifically Year 2 books. In English, pupils are writing at length for different purposes and audiences. They are now learning more effectively to apply grammar and punctuation correctly. Teachers' expectations are higher, and this is evident in the high level of presentation they demand of pupils. Pupils set their work out

neatly and use cursive handwriting that becomes increasingly more disciplined over time. In mathematics, pupils are now learning to solve problems and explain their reasoning at an earlier age. Pupils in Year 6 have only just recently been given more work to develop reasoning skills after leaders recognised that this was lacking.

Despite concerted, and increasingly successful, efforts to improve pupils' English and mathematical skills, the wider curriculum is not developed well enough in both key stages 1 and 2. This is because the curriculum is not mapped out clearly enough to show what pupils are expected to know and do. As a result, leaders and teachers do not plan well enough for pupils' learning to develop coherently as they move up through the school. This is apparent in pupils' inquiry books, which show that pupils move erratically from topic to topic. There is no apparent sequencing, and topics appear to be randomly selected. For example, pupils in Year 6 completed one piece of work on Isambard Kingdom Brunel before studying electrical circuits in the next piece. Following this, pupils produced work on Black History Month. Teachers do not sufficiently reinforce pupils' understanding in one particular area before they move on to the next.

Leaders are now more aware of the needs of disadvantaged pupils and barriers to their learning. As a result of the review of pupil premium additional funding, leaders are now measuring the impact of their strategies to reduce the impact of disadvantage more robustly. Teachers are becoming more adept at planning for the needs of individual pupils and using teaching assistants to support individuals in a more focused way. Staff are tracking pupils' progress more effectively and reporting this progress to governors. Armed with better information, governors are now in a stronger position to advocate or challenge specific strategies. Nevertheless, leaders need to carry out further work to ensure that the most able disadvantaged pupils achieve their potential. Furthermore, the impact of this work on raising pupils' achievement is not yet fully evident, as some strategies have only been recently implemented.

Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are well supported by the SENCo. She is passionate about her work and committed to raising the achievement of these pupils. The SENCo reports that clearer lines of accountability and better organisational structures are helping her to be more effective in her role. Consequently, the pupils for whom she is responsible receive more timely intervention and support to boost their progress. Pupils' current progress and achievement suggest, however, that further work is required to ensure that the quality of academic support matches the quality of pastoral support.

### **External support**

Since the previous inspection, leaders have received, and continue to receive, strong support from the local authority and the Cabot Learning Federation, that has expressed interest in sponsoring the school. This support has helped to shore up senior leadership, although these arrangements are not permanent. Support is also

enabling staff to develop their practice and professional expertise. However, the length of time it is taking to formalise arrangements with a sponsor is unhelpful. As time marches on, lines of accountability are becoming more blurred. Each involved party is acting out of moral purpose and has the best interests of pupils at heart. Nevertheless, the current situation is preventing leaders from making more rapid progress to improve the school. Efforts to recruit substantive leaders have been hampered by the current lack of sponsor, which, in turn, makes longer-term planning more difficult and slows momentum. It also means that the school is still highly dependent on external support. This situation is a source of frustration for all parties, including governors.