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Mr Daniel Lasbury-Carter
Blandford St Mary Church of England Primary School
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Blandford Forum
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Dear Mr Lasbury-Carter

Special measures monitoring inspection of Blandford St Mary Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 31 January–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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer or equivalent of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Salisbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dorset. This letter will be published on the

Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nathan Kemp
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to raise pupils' outcomes by ensuring that:
 - teachers have high expectations of pupils in reading, writing and mathematics, including for the most able
 - teachers check pupils' learning and take effective action to build on pupils' previous skills, knowledge and understanding
 - teachers' subject knowledge is used effectively in supporting pupils' progress in spelling, punctuation and grammar in writing
 - teachers effectively develop pupils' problem solving and reasoning skills in mathematics
 - teachers use accurate assessment information to ensure that work is well suited to the different needs and abilities of pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the most able pupils
 - teaching assistants make consistently positive contributions to support pupils' learning
 - teaching motivates pupils and holds their interest to improve pupils' learning attitudes and behaviour in lessons
 - teachers insist on high-quality work, including in pupils' handwriting and presentation.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders' evaluations of the school's work are checked rigorously and are accurate enough for leaders to be held to account
 - governors provide effective support and challenge to school leaders
 - governors probe deeply and ask the right questions to bring about sustained improvement
 - governors implement an effective strategy to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils across the school, including the most able
 - governors establish an effective team of middle and senior leaders to build capacity for sustained improvement
 - those with responsibility for improving outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well trained and can deliver and check this aspect of the school's work effectively
 - subject leaders know and understand their roles and responsibilities well

enough to contribute effectively to school improvement

- the curriculum is used to raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics by ensuring that pupils regularly apply these skills through a wide variety of subjects and across the school day.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the 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 2018–1 February 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the deputy head and the leader for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, middle leaders, designated leaders for safeguarding and the family support worker, parents, the chair of the governing body, the director of trustees and the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Blandford Education Trust.

Context

Since the Section 5 inspection, there have been various changes in staffing. Since September 2017, a new leader responsible for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has been appointed. There has also been changes to those who are responsible for leading literacy and numeracy across the school. Changes to teaching staff have been frequent, but leaders acknowledge that more steadiness is now needed, particularly in Year 5 where there is currently significant instability for pupils.

Governors have undertaken a review, led by a national leader of governors, which was recommended at the last inspection. This has resulted in a change to roles and responsibilities – in short, ensuring that the local governing body has only two clear foci: the quality of education and safeguarding. Trustees and the CEO of the trust have since taken on wider school responsibilities to help governors maintain this sharp focus on standards.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the last inspection, you, the governors and representatives of the trust have acted quickly to ensure that the quality of education within the school improved dramatically. You have high expectations for the school and the pupils it serves, and speak passionately about the direction of the school. A key shortcoming was the lack of an effective curriculum, which resulted in weak progress, particularly in writing and mathematics. In order to tackle this, you have ensured that middle leaders are in place across the school to oversee these specific subjects and establish consistency in teaching. This has resulted in some much-needed structure which was missing at the last inspection.

You acknowledge that, although middle leaders are now in place, their impact is not yet manifesting itself consistently across teaching, learning and assessment. While they are well aware of where strengths and weaknesses lie, their actions to improve standards are now the next step. Leaders acknowledge that actions based on

accurate monitoring will be essential as the school continues its journey of improvement. In some cases, teachers require further support to improve their practice and leaders are now better placed to provide this. However, in other instances, leaders need to make sure that the school's approach to teaching, learning and assessment is consistent, and that high expectations of what pupils can achieve are non-negotiable.

You have worked within the trust to establish accurate assessments of pupils, recognising this as essential to school improvement. This information will prove invaluable once teachers use it to meet pupils' various needs. Your work has also highlighted the impact that historical poor teaching has had on particular cohorts of pupils. You have rightly prioritised improvements in these cohorts and acknowledge that a delay in this work is not appropriate.

You have appointed a new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) in the school to improve outcomes for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. The SENCo is building systems which are cohesive and consistent across the school. She has plans in place to gain an accurate overview of pupils' progress. She has worked with teachers to set smart targets for pupils and these are well designed to meet the needs of pupils. Although this work is very much in its infancy, there are signs that it is making a difference. The SENCo rightly identified the need to ensure that class teachers take responsibility for meeting the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities in their classroom and is beginning to hold teachers to account. She has identified the need to regularly check how teaching, learning and assessment meet pupils' needs as well as various provisions of support, such as specific interventions.

You have worked with middle leaders and the SENCo to try to tackle the areas identified at the last inspection. But, because there is a lot to do, there is a risk of some initiatives and changes not taking root. Leaders acknowledge that monitoring of all areas needs to be thorough and frequent so that they can establish whether systems are fully embedded or require more input. Leaders recognise that most, if not all, of the changes rely on first-quality teaching and consistency. You have a motivated team and its actions to date show that team members have a good understanding and are keen to attain the high expectations you wish to instil.

A governors' review has been completed since the last inspection. This has resulted in effective streamlining of governors' focus and attention. At the last inspection, governors admit that there were too many factors which distracted them from closely monitoring the quality of education. Through a much-needed redistribution of roles and responsibilities, governors are already speaking with much more clarity and awareness of the areas for development across the school. Governors speak with newly instilled focus which bodes well as they embark on overseeing much-needed school improvement. Governors acknowledge that they must ensure that weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' outcomes are brought to the fore and leaders held to account.

Trust leaders have offered a range of support for leaders and governors, and leaders feel involved with other schools across the trust, which has helped to inform the new direction of the mathematics curriculum. Representatives from the trust aspire to improve, and quickly. They have overseen many changes and recognise that the school now requires much-needed consistency. They recognise that there is an urgent need to stabilise staffing in Year 5 and have vowed to action this with immediate effect. I will focus on this in my next visit.

The school has had a pupil premium review, highlighting how to effectively ensure that disadvantaged pupils receive the support needed to make improved progress. The current academic year's pupil premium grant has been distributed to overcome barriers to learning and there are some successes emerging, including improved attendance for these pupils. However, academic targets and intentions for spending are based on the assertion that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently strong, which it is not. Leaders acknowledge that until this is rectified, the impact of any spending will be significantly reduced. For some pupils, specific interventions are required to meet their needs. Leaders have identified that this requires more training for staff and have plans in place to 'upskill' specific staff who will be providing this support.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There have been significant changes to staffing since the last inspection which have resulted in turbulence. Leaders are now aiming for much-needed stability and feel assured that there is a stronger team of staff in place. However, there is still much work to do to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. During this visit, it was noted that too much time is wasted across the school day which could be used more effectively to improve pupils' outcomes.

You have set out, alongside your leaders, the school's approach to teaching mathematics and writing which has added some much-needed structure. In mathematics, all teachers are now following the school's approach but this is not yet established enough to meet the varying needs of all pupils. Leaders acknowledge that now the accurate assessments are in place and the teaching approach is consistently applied, teachers must adapt activities to meet the needs of all pupils, particularly higher- and lower-attaining pupils.

The school's approach to writing is not implemented consistently. Where followed well, pupils make progress from their starting points and learning activities are well informed. However, where this is less successful, sequences of lessons seem muddled and teaching does not support pupils to acquire the skills required to become effective writers. Looking ahead, leaders have planned training for staff to ensure that they are clear on the approach to the teaching of writing and can apply this methodology effectively. There is stronger practice in the school which leaders acknowledge needs to be shared.

At the last inspection, an area identified as a weakness was the presentation and handwriting in pupils' workbooks. Although this has improved, not all teachers are consistently following the school's assessment policy. Teachers are accepting work which is not good enough. Where teachers are providing feedback to pupils about the need to improve their work, the impact of this is variable. Consequently, pupils do not consider the feedback and poor presentation continues.

Another aspect identified at the last inspection for improvement was the deployment of support staff in lessons. In some classes, teachers deploy support staff effectively and provide specific direction to support pupils to good effect. In other classes, support staff are not utilised well and through this lack of direction become ineffective in supporting pupils in lessons, resulting in a barrier to improvements.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

You have successfully reduced rates of absence and persistent absence across the school. You have clear systems in place which ensure that you closely monitor those pupils who are vulnerable to poor attendance and, when needed, intervene in a timely manner to bring about improvements.

Where concerns about a pupil arise, well-trained staff know how to effectively communicate such concerns. You have an operational system in place for record-keeping, which helps to inform when it is necessary to engage the support from external agencies. This results in well-informed and timely referrals.

Staff who are responsible for safeguarding act effectively to ensure that pupils are safeguarded against any potential risks. Through the sterling work of your family support worker, the number of referrals to external agencies has reduced. This is because families are directed to effective guidance and early help support which leads to prevention of incidents, thus reducing the number of concerns about pupils.

At the last inspection, it was noted that pupils were not always motivated or interested in their learning, which had an impact on pupils' attitudes and behaviour. It is clear that behaviour across the school has improved, with incidents of low-level disruption rare. However, there is still more to do with regards to promoting a love of learning and motivation. As the quality of teaching, learning and assessment improves, so will pupils' attitudes and interest.

Outcomes for pupils

2017 saw an improvement in pupils' outcomes across both key stages 1 and 2 when compared with 2016 outcomes. However, leaders are not taking comfort in these outcomes because there is still much to do. Leaders have acted to ensure that assessments of what pupils can do are accurate. This has uncovered specific year groups where the proportion of pupils working below expectations for their age

remains high. Although outcomes are improving, there is still much to do to ensure that pupils make strong progress.

Where pupils' outcomes are strong, these are predominantly found in Years 2 and 6. You acknowledge that too much pressure is on these teachers for pupils to catch up and overcome previously weak teaching. Currently, it is those pupils who are lower or higher attaining who are the greatest disadvantaged. These pupils do not yet benefit from improvements and activities which will provide much-needed challenge to closely match their needs. Outcomes for these pupils have yet to improve.

External support

The trust has brokered support for the school to help improve the quality of education it provides. This has included providing support for the headteacher and middle leaders as they aim to work with leaders in similar positions across the trust to raise standards and share good practice.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders ensure that there is a consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics and writing, and rapidly tackle areas of inconsistency or underperformance.
- Teachers have high expectations of all pupils and ensure that activities closely meet the needs of pupils, ensuring that presentation and handwriting are consistently strong and that staff are effectively deployed to provide further support or challenge.
- Leaders prioritise improving first-quality teaching throughout the school and urgently tackle instability with staffing in Year 5.