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

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

Following my visit with Gareth Simons, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 12–13 June 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March 2017. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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.

Having considered all the evidence, I recommend that the school may appoint one newly qualified teacher in consultation with me before the next monitoring visit.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the Blandford Education 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 second monitoring inspection on 12 June 2018 to 13 June 2018

Evidence

Inspectors conducted visits to classrooms. A range of pupils' writing and mathematics books were scrutinised alongside subject leaders. Inspectors also took account of pupils' reading records, considering the frequency of reading opportunities available to them. Inspectors also met with pupils to discuss their attitudes towards learning and their views on reading.

Inspectors scrutinised key documents, such as recent pupil information and attendance statistics. Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and leader for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, middle leaders, designated leaders for safeguarding and the parent support advisor. Inspectors worked alongside the leader for the pupil premium and considered the effectiveness of leaders' strategy to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Inspectors also spoke with the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the Blandford Education Trust.

Context

Staffing has remained mainly stable since the previous monitoring visit. Consistency in the staffing of Year 5 has provided pupils in this year group with much-needed stability.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders have worked effectively to bring about improvements across the school. Their evaluation of the school's performance is accurate and based on regular monitoring. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have rightly placed their focus on improving the impact and capacity of middle leaders. By doing this, senior leaders share their expectations with a greater number of staff. Middle leaders are implementing senior leaders' vision effectively and strengthening their message of improving outcomes for pupils. Middle leaders talk with increasing awareness about the standards in their subjects. They have accurately identified where further improvements are needed and are acting on this information. Middle leaders are strong classroom practitioners, and have identified how the impact of their actions must transcend their own classroom.

Leaders have acted effectively to ensure a consistency in the teaching of writing and mathematics. In doing so, it has made it easier for middle leaders to monitor the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment, as now all teachers are following leaders' approach to the teaching of writing and mathematics. Leaders' monitoring is accurate. Where weaknesses are present, leaders are beginning to act

to bring about improvements. While the approach is now consistent, there are still weaknesses in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. Leaders acknowledge that if standards are to continue to improve, teachers must use assessment information to meet the needs of all pupils. This means that Leaders must continue to monitor closely the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school.

While the consistency of teaching of writing and mathematics has improved, leaders recognise that the approach to the teaching of reading requires revision. The current strategy lacks precision and does not build on pupils' existing reading knowledge. Leaders are currently trialling a new approach to the teaching of reading in Years 5 and 6. This has been effective, resulting in improved pupils' outcomes. Leaders have plans to 'roll this out' across the school. They must implement this quickly for the beginning of the next academic year. This approach requires more than teachers' compliance. To be successful, it requires strong subject knowledge and an astute understanding of pupils' needs. Leaders have promoted pupils' reading and encourage pupils to read widely and often. This relentless focus has resulted in all pupils reading frequently at home.

The SENCo has worked effectively to improve the systems in place for supporting pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. The SENCo acknowledges the importance of checking the quality of targets for these pupils. Furthermore, she acknowledges that she must monitor closely the provision for these pupils and subsequent progress against their targets.

The use of the pupil premium requires attention. Until recently, its effectiveness has hinged heavily on the quality of teaching. However, leaders acknowledge that they must act to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and make better use of additional funding. The pupil premium report lacks precision as it is unclear how funding will improve outcomes for pupils. In addition, targets are often vague and make it extremely difficult for teachers, leaders and governors to assess the effectiveness of their actions. While the gap is not widening between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, neither is it closing. The review that leaders sought to evaluate the effectiveness of their actions did not have the rigour required to sharpen leaders' focus. Leaders and governors acknowledge that they must be more proactive in evaluating the use of the pupil premium.

Leaders and teachers have benefited from external moderations by the local authority. These opportunities have confirmed teachers' assessments of pupils and served as a reliable baseline to work from as pupils move through the school.

Governors' awareness of school performance continues to go from strength to strength. The trust's efforts to take on some aspects of governance has helped to concentrate governors' focus more exclusively on improving pupils' outcomes through high-quality teaching, learning and assessment. Governors can demonstrate how their challenge to school leaders is beginning to bear fruit.

However, for governors to fully understand the impact of leaders' actions, they must sharpen up targets for improving outcomes and subsequent reviews. At times, targets are too broad and lack precision, particularly when evaluating the impact of the pupil premium.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The approach to teaching, learning and assessment has become more consistent. Teachers are increasingly aware of leaders' approaches to improving the quality of learning opportunities. This is beginning to show itself in the quality of work in pupils' books. Since the last monitoring visit, most teachers have raised their expectations of pupils' presentation and handwriting. Pupils' books show a marked improvement, demonstrating a greater pride in their learning. There is more to do to ensure that this is now consistent across the whole school as, on occasion, teachers' expectations dip below those of school leaders.

Leaders have introduced a set of 'non-negotiables' to aid consistency and raise standards across the school. They have helped to remind pupils of basic expectations, such as their use of full stops and capital letters. While the 'non-negotiables' have been largely effective, their implementation still requires refinement. At times, teachers place too much emphasis on them. This can take pupils' attention away from the intended learning and inadvertently put a ceiling on what teachers expect from pupils. For example, teachers repeatedly setting learning goals which require pupils to apply full stops and capital letters to their writing, when they have already achieved this, hampers pupils' progress.

Teachers' understanding of what pupils can achieve has improved, leading to more effective attempts to meet the needs of pupils when planning learning opportunities for pupils. However, it is now necessary for teachers to increase how this informs their decision-making during lessons. In some classes, there is not enough challenge for the most able pupils. Pupils' books demonstrate how they are not yet being pushed sufficiently to achieve their best. Teachers are not yet consistently using assessment information to meet the needs of all pupils in lessons.

While teachers' support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has improved, targets are often too broad and not realistic within the stated timescale. This has limited the impact of teachers' support and made it more difficult for teachers to evaluate the impact of their interventions. Over the course of the academic year, most targets have become more accurate, closely aligning with the needs of pupils. However, it is vital that targets for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities remain high in quality and be precise if pupils' progress is to improve.

In lessons, the teaching of reading is too hit-and-miss. In adult-led sessions, adults encourage pupils to think deeply about what they have read, and pupils benefit from such sessions. However, pupils who work independently are not as well supported and activities do not focus consistently on reading. Recently, pupils in

Years 5 and 6 have benefited from the trialling of a new approach to the teaching of reading. Pupils speak enthusiastically about this approach, explaining how it has informed the range of books that they read at home.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare continue to improve. Pupils' absence is reducing and is now below the national average. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent also continues to fall. However, while disadvantaged pupils' absence rates are reducing, there is more to do before this reaches the national average for this group.

When in school, pupils conduct themselves well. They are becoming increasingly confident to share their ideas. In most pupils' books, presentation has improved dramatically since the previous monitoring visit. In lessons, pupils demonstrate an improved willingness to learn. This is strongest where the quality of teaching captures pupils' interests and offers suitable challenge.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes for pupils are improving across the school. Children in the Reception Year are well placed to begin life in key stage 1. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development is above the national average. Similarly, by the end of Year 2, the proportions of pupils working at expectations for their age are above national averages. While the number of pupils assessed as working at expectations for their age continues to grow, progress from starting points is not as strong as required. Leaders acknowledge that while outcomes are improving, they could be significantly stronger if the quality of teaching, learning and assessment were more consistent. While there is strong practice in some classes, it is often sandwiched between weaker practice. This stalls pupils' progress. Pupils' work in books reflect this variability in quality.

Where there is poorer teaching, the progress of some pupils remains weak. Leaders have identified each of these pupils, and plans are in place to provide targeted support. Disadvantaged pupils continue to make progress which falls short of expectations.

External support

Leaders have benefited from opportunities across the trust, including moderation and the sharing of ideas, particularly in writing and mathematics. The trust has worked alongside school leaders to act on findings from the previous monitoring visit, particularly the appointment of a temporary Year 5 teacher. The trust continues to support the local governing body. This work has focused governors' attention on school performance and improving outcomes for pupils.

