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27 June 2018

Mr James Pope  
Marlwood School  
Vattingstone Lane  
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Bristol  
BS35 3LA

Dear Mr Pope

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Marlwood School**

Following my visit with Jenny Maraspin, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 6–7 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 school’s previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school’s improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children’s services for South Gloucestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Lovett  
**Her Majesty’s Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2017.**

- Improve leadership and management at all levels by:
  - urgently improving governance, so that school leaders are held rigorously to account for pupils' progress and for the spending of targeted funding, including for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding
  - improving senior and middle leaders' skills by providing them with training to carry out their roles effectively
  - ensuring that middle leaders are held to account for the progress of pupils in the areas they lead
  - improving the rigour of the performance management of staff
  - developing the curriculum so that it meets the needs of all pupils
  - improving communication with parents
  - developing a culture of sharing good practice that exists within the school and implementing the systems required to achieve this.
- Improve teaching, and raise pupils' achievement, by:
  - taking urgent action to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of
  - ensuring that teachers provide learning which meets the needs of all pupils, based on accurate and appropriate assessments of their prior understanding
  - ensuring that the needs of different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are met
  - providing pupils with activities that deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding, particularly for the most able.
- Improve the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils by improving the attendance of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, to at least the national average.

An external review of governance and the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 6 June 2018 to 7 June 2018**

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, inspectors visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' books with school leaders to monitor learning. They examined school and trust documentation and met with the headteacher, the chief executive officer of Castle School Educational Trust, which sponsors the school, and members of the interim executive committee (the local governing body). They also met with senior and middle leaders, other staff and with groups of pupils. During this visit, inspectors focused in particular on the leadership of teaching, learning and assessment and on attendance.

### **Context**

The school continues to address issues caused by falling rolls and the subsequent financial constraints that this brings. Trust and school leaders have completed a staffing restructure which will be implemented in September 2018. The school continues to contend with a high degree of staffing turbulence and has a number of temporary and short-term staff in place. Leaders are confident that this situation will ease in September and that the school will benefit from stable staffing.

The leadership team has been strengthened. The trust recently moved a senior leader from another school over to Marlwood to take on the role of deputy headteacher. An assistant head who was previously seconded from another school in the trust has now joined the staff on a permanent basis.

There is no longer any sixth form on site. Pupils wishing to continue their studies into the sixth form do so at one of the other schools in the trust.

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

The headteacher has tackled the underperformance of staff robustly. The weakest teaching has now been all but eliminated. However, leaders have been less successful in improving the overall quality of teaching. The rate of improvement is too slow.

The report of the inspection in May 2017 challenged school leaders to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve. Leaders and teachers have embraced the challenge and they have worked hard together towards this. However, their efforts have had limited impact. This is because they have not been successful in helping teachers develop effective classroom techniques. The result is that teachers know what they need to do but they do not all know how to do it. For example, teachers have been focusing on giving feedback to pupils on how to improve their work. However, the feedback is often not effective because teachers do not have the skills to make it consistently precise enough to help pupils.

Although there are pockets of effective practice across most areas of the school, this initiative is not having the impact it should.

Leaders and teachers initially reacted vigorously to the previous monitoring visit in January. They recognised the need to raise the standards expected of pupils and in the weeks following the visit there was a perceptible improvement, which is evident in pupils' books. However, leaders at all levels did not monitor and reinforce the improvement with sufficient persistence and over time this has faded away.

Leaders have not ensured that all teachers and pupils have a clear understanding of the assessment and target-setting processes. Leaders and teachers are preparing for a new, trust-wide, key stage 4 assessment structure that will be in use from September 2018. Currently, however, in many cases the grades pupils receive for their work bear little resemblance to their target grades or to the overall progress they are making. Teachers and pupils take little notice of the target grades that pupils are given.

The trust and the headteacher have recognised that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not improving rapidly enough. Consequently, the trust has recently appointed a senior leader from one of the other schools in the trust as a deputy headteacher to lead teaching, learning and assessment. This has increased capacity substantially. There are plans in place but it is too soon for there to be an impact on the quality of teaching. A key challenge for school leaders is to ensure that this increased capacity leads to a rapid improvement in classroom practice.

Middle leaders are held to account for the progress of pupils in their departments. They meet senior leaders regularly and discuss barriers to improvement. However, middle leaders are not consistently effective in equipping teachers with the skills to improve the quality of learning in their subjects.

The interim executive committee (the local governing body) is well informed by school and trust leaders. Members are skilled and committed to improving the school. They recognise the need to increase the rate of improvement if the school is to be successful when reinspected.

Leadership to ensure that pupil premium additional funding is used effectively continues to improve. The external review has now been carried out and leaders have improved their plans in the light of its recommendations. There is an expectation that every teacher understands the additional support individual disadvantaged pupils need to succeed. This is a positive step and is having an effect for some pupils. However, it is not yet part of everyday practice for teachers and so some of this group of pupils continue to underachieve.

The turbulence caused by the financial constraints of falling rolls has been well handled by the headteacher. Staff remain determined and committed to improving the school, despite the challenges that they face.

Leaders have used the opportunities presented by the relatively small size of the school to good effect in their design of the curriculum. For example, the physical education and performing arts department (PEPA) timetable is set up so that every pupil gets their entitlement of the range of subjects. In addition, teachers can organise classes flexibly to meet the needs of particular groups of pupils, such as talented musicians, or those who need more practice with their drama skills.

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

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment does not consistently meet the needs of all pupils in the school. Teachers have been charged with raising their expectations of what pupils can achieve. This has had limited success. Scrutiny of pupils' books showed a wide variation in what is expected of pupils and what teachers will accept as a reasonable standard. In some subjects, notably English, pupils are expected to write extended answers that are well structured and thought out. Teachers give precise feedback that allows pupils to reflect on their work and improve it further. Pupils know that teachers in this subject expect a lot of them and they respond positively. However for the same pupils, in other subjects, particularly history and geography, teachers accept superficial answers. Pupils learn that less is expected of them in these subjects and so standards are lower.

Teachers have been focusing on raising standards by showing pupils how to improve their work. In English, and in some mathematics and science lessons, this is having a positive impact. In English, for example, teachers give precise and specific advice that allows pupils to improve their essay answers. Pupils are now used to this quality of feedback and they know what is expected of them. The result is that standards are rising. Too often, however, the advice in other subjects is not precise enough to guide pupils effectively.

In many subjects, pupils are often asked to describe or remember rather than explain and analyse. This prevents them from developing the ability to think deeply about a topic or problem and structure an extended response. This is particularly affecting the most able pupils, who often do not reach the standard of work of which they are capable.

Leaders have ensured that every disadvantaged pupil has a 'pupil passport' that highlights the pupil's needs. The passport also flags up potential strategies that teachers can use to help that pupil. This is a potentially powerful strategy that is not yet working to its full capacity. This is because not all passports are complete and not all teachers are using them as well as they could.

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

Leaders and teachers are putting a great deal of emphasis on improving attendance. The importance of attending school is repeatedly emphasised in assemblies and tutor groups. As a result of this, attendance is slowly improving.

Leaders are also now following up pupils' absence more determinedly. However, far too many disadvantaged pupils are still persistently absent. The next challenge for school leaders in improving attendance is to ensure that all members of staff follow the school's policy in chasing up absent pupils with equal vigour.

Pupils' pride in their work is directly related to the quality of teaching they receive. When they are engaged and motivated, they produce high-quality work. However, when teachers ask little of them, they sit back and deliver poorly presented and incomplete work.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Standards in pupils' books are still typically too low. The variation in quality between a pupil's books in different subjects is clear evidence that pupils can achieve more than they are currently doing in a number of subjects.

The most able pupils continue to underachieve because, in most year groups, they are not being given regular opportunities to show what they can do. However, the most able in Year 7 are now being challenged more consistently. There are signs that teachers are beginning to build on the improved standards that pupils bring with them from primary schools.

Standards are consistently highest in English. Here, teachers are setting work that encourages pupils to think carefully about their writing. As a result, pupils are able to write extended passages, using a good vocabulary. Standards in other subjects remain too variable. There are examples of good progress in mathematics and science, among others, but in many subjects progress remains slow.

### **External support**

The trust recognises that teaching and learning must improve quickly. It is working closely with senior leaders to improve the school's rate of progress. Trust leaders are particularly focused on addressing the contextual and financial difficulties that the school faces. This is successful in allowing the headteacher to direct more time and energy to improving teaching and learning. The trust has also moved an experienced leader into the school as a deputy headteacher to lead teaching, learning and assessment. This increase in capacity has taken some time to accomplish. Trust leaders are aware of the urgency of implementing their current plans more rapidly.

Teachers benefit from the opportunities to share ideas and moderate standards across the trust. This is helping to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve.

Trust and school leaders are also taking part in collaborative work with other schools in the local authority and with a local teaching school. There are activities

taking place to support the development of middle leaders, but these are yet to have an impact.