

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Victoria Counsell
Interim Headteacher
Millpond Primary School
Waverley Street
Easton
Bristol
BS5 0YR

Dear Ms Counsell

Special measures monitoring inspection of Millpond Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13–14 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 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.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint up to two newly qualified teachers in key stage 1 and lower key stage 2.

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 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 second monitoring inspection on 13 June 2018 to 14 June 2018

Evidence

I observed pupils' learning and behaviour jointly with senior leaders. I met with senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), the parent and family support worker and a group of pupils. I also met with the school improvement officer for the local authority and spoke to the chair of the interim executive board by telephone. I scrutinised pupils' work jointly with senior leaders and considered a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding.

Context

It has now been confirmed that the school will join the Cabot Learning Federation (CLF) multi-academy trust by September 2018. You have been appointed to the substantive headship and will become school principal from September 2018. A vice-principal has been appointed for September 2018. The associate headteacher currently assisting you will step down at the end of this academic year. Several staff continue to be absent because of sickness or maternity leave.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school is now more secure than at the time of the previous monitoring visit. When I last visited, it was not certain that the school would be sponsored by CLF. Consequently, governors, the local authority and the multi-academy trust, despite having pupils' best interests at heart, were not 'pulling in the same direction'. This is no longer the case. CLF has been approved as sponsor for the school and the transition process to convert the school to an academy is now at an advanced stage. Consequently, partners with strategic responsibilities are acting with common purpose and better supporting school leaders.

The interim executive board (IEB) had only just been formed at the time of my previous visit. Since this time, it has proven to be an effective body, which has helped to steer the school in the right direction. Members of the IEB have relevant expertise and experience, in areas such as teaching, finance and holding organisations to account. Helpfully, the IEB includes representatives of CLF and the local authority. This ensures that there is strategic consistency and a united focus on key issues, such as teaching quality and outcomes, in the lead-up to academy conversion.

You have grown and developed in the role of headteacher since my previous visit. Your preparedness, knowledge of the school and understanding of strategic matters have increased in the intervening months. This has strengthened your resolve and increased your confidence. You continue to work constructively with the associate headteacher, supported by local authority and CLF partners. Consequently, leaders feel positive and confident about the school's progress and future direction. There is

no complacency among leaders; self-evaluation is honest and objective. You recognise that there is further work to do to get the school to where it needs to be. Despite continuing challenges facing the school, your increasing resilience and determination are helping you to confront them.

One such challenge is continuing staffing instability. At the time of the previous visit, you believed that staffing was set to become more settled. However, this has proven not to be the case. In large part, staff absences are for reasons beyond your control. In response to circumstances, leaders have redeployed staff and made changes to the timetable to best meet pupils' needs. Although the school continues to improve, the pace of improvement is slower than desired because of the unsettled nature of staffing.

Because of the staffing situation, there has been no development of middle leadership since my previous visit. Those most suited to leadership development have simply not been in school. Fortunately, the greater stability resulting from the sponsorship arrangements has cushioned the impact of staffing turbulence. The local authority and CLF have provided expertise and staffing to cover shortfalls in leadership, teaching, finance and human resources. You anticipate, with the appointment of the new vice-principal, that you will be in a stronger position to develop middle leadership next academic year.

Curriculum development has not been rapid since my previous visit. This is for two reasons. Firstly, leaders responsible for leading this work have had to postpone plans because they have been required to teach more to cover absent colleagues. Furthermore, the priority has been to ensure that basic aspects of teaching practice are strengthened before considering curriculum matters. Nevertheless, tentative steps have been taken, so that staff are beginning to plan with greater depth and breadth in mind. They are now considering how best to interlink different bodies of knowledge within topics that interest and excite pupils.

Engagement with parents and carers and the local community is a strength of the school. You understand that effective communication is vital, given the school's context. Much of your work since the previous visit has been focused on developing meaningful relationships with parents. You recognise that pupils' readiness for learning and experience of school can be improved through productive partnership with parents.

Safeguarding continues to be effective. This is because designated staff have a detailed understanding of the most vulnerable pupils. They are proactive and persistent in their efforts to secure the support that pupils require. Where this is not easily available, staff are creative in their efforts to meet pupils' needs within school. The designated safeguarding team has further refined the online recording and tracking of pupil referrals, which has led to more effective resolution of cases.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders' focus on improving aspects of teaching practice has led to greater consistency across the school. Staff now have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. They are setting more demanding work in an effort to meet the requirements of the new national curriculum. Across the school, teachers are planning work and activities that more consistently meet the needs of different pupils. For example, in mathematics, the most able pupils are set more challenging word problems that encourage them to develop and explain their reasoning. Lower-ability pupils are provided with additional resources that help them to consolidate learning.

Learning support assistants are more effective in their roles as a result of training they have received. They work in partnership with teachers, who deploy them with careful consideration of pupils' needs, particularly of those who have SEN and/or disabilities. I observed learning support assistants ask considered, open questions, which helped pupils search for answers. In one case, when a pupil provided a correct answer, the learning support assistant asked him, 'How did you work that out?' This question prompted the pupil to consider the steps that led to the correct answer.

Staff have worked successfully to produce high-quality learning environments across the school. These environments are stimulating and colourful, acting as an additional learning resource for pupils. They also model pupils' best work to inspire and motivate others. Classrooms encourage pupils to become more independent learners and to enjoy and celebrate their learning.

Teachers are more consistently providing feedback, in line with the school's policy, which highlights how pupils can improve their work. Advice is clear and 'pupil friendly'. However, some pupils do not act on the guidance they receive as well as they might, which hampers their learning.

The presentation of pupils' work has improved in some areas, although is variable across the school. The quality of presentation tends to reflect the quality of teaching. For example, the high-quality presentation observed in Year 6 English books mirrors strong teaching and high expectations.

Pupils' behaviour for learning is not consistently strong across the school, although steadily improving. Teachers are ensuring that classrooms are orderly environments. Consequently, most pupils follow instructions, listen attentively and cooperate with each other. However, not all pupils are keen to participate in whole-class activities, such as discussions, or enjoy their learning sufficiently.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders set high expectations for pupils' behaviour and staff consistently apply the behaviour policy. Consequently, there have been fewer exclusions from school.

Pupils reported that, in the main, behaviour has improved and that there is less bullying. They feel that the school is a safer environment for these reasons. During breaktimes, I observed pupils playing harmoniously and safely. They are accepting of each other's differences and value the multi-cultural nature of their school. The school feels like a happy place.

Pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged or have SEN and/or disabilities, continue to receive a high level of pastoral support. The SENCo and the parent family support worker work closely together to anticipate and meet the needs of the most vulnerable pupils. Many pupils face difficulties including poverty, unsuitable housing, poor grasp of English and problems presented by cultural barriers. Staff tackle these issues head-on because they understand the negative impact they can have on pupils' readiness for learning. Consequently, staff work not only with pupils directly but also with family members through various initiatives. For example, staff run bespoke parent groups to develop a better understanding of local issues affecting pupils. These initiatives help to strengthen links with the community and build parental trust.

Attendance has improved significantly during the course of the year. Overall attendance is now in line with the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is higher than their non-disadvantaged peers and the national average. The persistent absence of a minority of pupils has also fallen, so that this too is in line with the national average. Attendance has improved because of the determined, relentless efforts of staff to engage with parents and impress on them its importance. This work has been complemented by a system of rewards for good attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

The school's own information shows that the attainment of pupils at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics is set to rise in 2018. Leaders acknowledge, however, that achievement will not be in line with national averages. Nevertheless, progress information indicates a marked improvement on 2017 outcomes for these year groups.

Other information suggests that attainment and progress are improving in other year groups also, with the exception of Year 4 and Reception. Leaders have noted underperformance in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 4, and are taking action to remedy this. You have been able to take prompt action because assessment information is now being used more effectively than at the time of my previous visit. The CLF 'black box' approach to data analysis is enabling you to follow more closely the progress of different groups of pupils. However, this system had only been introduced recently at the time of the previous inspection, which limits the amount of information available to draw on.

Improvements described by the school's assessment information are evident in pupils' books. These show that pupils across the ability range in most year groups

are making more rapid gains in their learning. This is because they are being set more appropriate tasks and provided with the tools to do well.

The number of children in Reception Year who will achieve a good level of development is expected to fall. In large part, this is because this year's class does not fit the school's typical profile and many children have high-level needs. The number of pupils succeeding in the national phonics check is expected to rise and be closer to the national average.

Pupils who have SEN benefit from effective support, described in other sections of this letter. This support is ensuring better readiness for learning and increasing progress, although attainment is still low.

There is little difference in the quality and presentation of work of disadvantaged pupils and their peers. However, there is a lack of consistency overall in pupils' presentation and the pride they take in their work.