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30 October 2018

Mrs Nicola Brooke  
Durweston CofE VA Primary School  
Durweston  
Blandford Forum  
Dorset  
DT11 0QA

Dear Mrs Brooke

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Durweston CofE VA Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 12 October 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- embed the approach to the teaching of writing so that pupils' outcomes in Years 1, 2 and 3 are as strong as those seen across the rest of the school
- ensure that assessment information is precisely shared with all leaders and governors so that pupils' outcomes can be closely monitored and leaders' actions accurately evaluated
- ensure that governors make sure that the headteacher prioritises the continued pace of school improvement over classroom commitments.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, the inspector held meetings with the headteacher, representatives from the governing body, the literacy leader and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), and spoke with a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The inspector evaluated leaders' priorities for the current year on the school improvement plan. The inspector visited classrooms and scrutinised pupils' workbooks to consider progress in writing. The inspector also considered the school's assessment information to evaluate pupils' attainment and progress over time.

The inspector evaluated the school's use of performance management for leaders, the pupil premium strategy for the current academic year and the school's attendance information to ascertain progress in this area since the previous inspection.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, the headteacher, who was previously appointed on an interim basis, has now been employed in a permanent capacity. There have been appointments of a new SENCo and a class teacher in key stage 1. At the time of the monitoring visit, the headteacher had a teaching commitment due to teacher absence but this is due to end shortly, enabling her to prioritise school improvement.

At the previous inspection, members of the governing body were very new and unfamiliar with their roles and responsibilities. However, governance is now more established and stable. There is a clear understanding of governors' roles and responsibilities.

## **Main findings**

Following the previous inspection, you have developed clear plans to improve areas for improvement that were identified by inspectors. These included strengthening the quality of leadership and management, reducing the absence rates of disadvantaged pupils and providing opportunities for pupils to develop their writing.

You have identified the areas of school performance that are a priority for the current academic year. These are closely linked to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You were right to recognise that pupils' progress in writing in recent years has been harder to improve. There have been improvements but not to the same level as seen in reading. To rectify this, you have overseen a change to the teaching of writing. This is at its early stages but there are signs that these changes are having a positive impact, particularly in Years 4, 5 and 6. Pupils are quickly becoming familiar with the new approach to writing and can demonstrate in their books how this is improving their writing. Pupils are

becomingly increasingly confident in using a range of ambitious vocabulary, and their sentences are varied and interesting. Pupils are aware of how to adapt their writing style according to what they are writing, and are beginning to demonstrate their personal writing style.

However, in Years 1, 2 and 3, this has taken longer to become embedded. Pupils still rely heavily on teachers' modelled writing, which means that, when this support is not in place, pupils struggle. Pupils' writing shows some inconsistencies in spelling and punctuation, which is the result of not being knowledgeable enough about how to apply these in context. In some pupils' books, it is evident that teachers' expectations of pupils are not high enough. For instance, where basic errors occur, these remain unchallenged. You acknowledge that a lack of teacher stability in these year groups has contributed to the differences in writing quality.

Another area for improvement at the previous inspection was to reduce the absence of disadvantaged pupils. In recent years, absence rates for all pupils have reduced and are currently in line with national averages. Absence rates for disadvantaged pupils improved in 2017 but, in the last academic year, rose to slightly above national averages. It is evident that you have clear systems in place to reward strong attendance, as well as measures to ensure that pupils are not unnecessarily absent, including not authorising term-time holiday requests and the use of fixed-penalty notices, but you acknowledge that further improvements are necessary for disadvantaged pupils.

Finally, you have focused on improving aspects of leadership and management. Part of this work was to ensure stability in school leadership, where previously this was not the case. You were interim headteacher at the last inspection and, in February 2018, this role became substantive. You have established a strong culture of respect across the school and you have worked hard to ensure that leaders have settled into their roles. Your impact has been limited at the start of the academic year, due to an increased teaching commitment. You recognise that, while this has been far from ideal, you are better placed to focus on school improvement priorities in the future.

You have improved the effectiveness of leadership and management through the appointment of a new SENCo. She is focused on ensuring that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well and make strong progress. She has developed clear systems to promote this.

You have an effective literacy leader. She is clear about standards across her subject and can talk confidently about her actions to improve teaching, learning and assessment. You recognise that she needs to more fully evaluate how successful the new approach to the teaching of writing is. This will allow her to recognise weaknesses as they arise and act swiftly to support teachers to bring about change. You acknowledge that it is vital to consider pupils' progress when scrutinising pupils' workbooks.

You set targets for leaders that are closely linked to leaders' roles and responsibilities and that are drawn down from school improvement priorities. However, where targets are set linked to pupils' outcomes, these not as precise as they could be, nor do they reflect pupils' prior attainment. The management of the performance of school leaders does not fully allow leaders to focus on where particular weaknesses arise throughout the academic year and act accordingly to bring about improvements.

Lastly, a key aspect of leadership and management was the work to develop the knowledge and expertise of the governing body. Governors benefited from the support of a national leader of governance. This support was withdrawn when it became clear that governors were increasing their effectiveness. Governors have increased their understanding of their roles and responsibilities and these are structured according to individual governors' strengths. They have timely access to pertinent information before meetings, allowing time to evaluate the information and ready themselves with key questions they wish to pose to leaders. For example, governors challenged leaders regarding pupils' progress in mathematics. The information that governors receive gives them an overview of school performance. However, governors acknowledge that information about pupils' outcomes should be more precise. This will allow them to challenge underperformance, should it occur, while also acknowledging and celebrating success.

### **External support**

Leaders have been supported by the local authority through the Dorset Education Advisory Service, through half-termly visits to the school which evaluate the progress made since the previous inspection.

Furthermore, it has supported the governing body as members become more established in their roles. The headteacher is also set to benefit from attending a course for new headteachers and from the support from an external mentor.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, 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**