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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 to your school on 6–7 November 2018 with Paul Smith, Ofsted Inspector, 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 third 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.

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 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 of the third monitoring inspection on 6 November 2018 to 7 November 2018

Evidence

Inspectors conducted visits to classrooms. A range of pupils' writing and mathematics books were scrutinised. Inspectors 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 the school's development plan, pupil progress information and attendance statistics. Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and the literacy and mathematics leaders. Inspectors worked alongside the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and the leader for the pupil premium to consider the effectiveness of leaders' strategies to improve outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils. Inspectors also spoke with the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Blandford Education Trust.

Context

Staffing has remained mainly stable since the previous monitoring visit. At the time of this monitoring visit, a supply teacher was covering the Year 1 class. The school has had pupils' work moderated by the local authority across the early years and key stages 1 and 2.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders' actions have resulted in positive improvement to both pupils' progress and attainment. Outcomes for pupils have improved over time across the school. Leaders monitor pupils' progress closely and while they acknowledge the successes that have been achieved, there are some year groups where pupils' progress is not as rapid and there remain gaps in pupils' understanding.

There is growing capacity across the leadership team. Roles and responsibilities are clear, and progress is evident. The leadership team work together well and have the same high expectations. Over time, their actions have resulted in greater consistency across the school and better outcomes. Where previously teachers lacked direction, this is now not the case.

The role of middle leaders continues to improve. First and foremost, they have developed their practice, setting a positive example for others. They lead literacy and mathematics well and are beginning to address pockets of weaker practice. Leaders are more regularly monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. However, monitoring places too much emphasis on

the strategies teachers are using, rather than the impact they are having.

The revised approach to the teaching of mathematics has brought greater consistency to the teaching of mathematics and in ensuring that pupils access the full mathematics curriculum. However, teachers are not yet consistently challenging pupils, particularly the most able.

The SENCo ensures that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive support closely tailored to meet their needs. Targets are precise and focus on rapidly promoting pupils' progress. Support is well managed, and staff more often provide interventions that are matched closely to pupils' needs to ensure progression.

Governors have strengthened their knowledge of the school's performance and are increasingly aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, governors are not yet effectively using this knowledge to assure themselves that improvements continue. While governors assure themselves on the effectiveness of safeguarding through robust scrutiny, it is not yet clear how they are challenging or questioning leaders to eliminate weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment and improve pupils' progress. Furthermore, governors have not evaluated the impact of the pupil premium funding in the previous academic year.

The use of the pupil premium is not yet embedded across the school. While staff have created provision packs for each pupil with interventions evidenced, it is not clear how these should improve pupils' progress. Leaders acknowledge they need to simplify these plans and make greater links with the school's strategy for the academic year. As it stands, disadvantaged pupils' progress is inconsistent and not good enough.

Pupils do not yet access a wide, varied curriculum. Pupils' general workbooks do not demonstrate the same level of care as seen in writing and mathematics books. In addition, opportunities for pupils to learn in subjects such as history, geography and science rely heavily on them copying text into their books, which slows their progress. There are also gaps in the frequency that pupils access a wider range of subjects, other than literacy and mathematics. The curriculum currently limits pupils' opportunities to develop their knowledge and deepen their understanding.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to improve but there is more to do. Leaders know where teaching is weaker and can demonstrate how they are attempting to bring about improvements. Leaders are demonstrating increasing accountability for pupils' progress and have shown how they have influenced improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.

Teachers deploy support staff with increasing effectiveness. For example, where support staff are most effective, pupils' language and comprehension in literacy and

fluency in mathematics are improved considerably. In these instances, teachers use questioning effectively to probe pupils' knowledge and understanding, and learning is facilitated well. Support staff know what it is that teachers are tasking them to do and there is an unrelenting focus on promoting pupils' progress. However, in some cases, teachers do not provide support staff with clear expectations. It is then not clear how pupils might benefit from the additional support provided.

The teaching of writing is improving, there is greater consistency in the approach and standards are rising. The quality of writing in books has risen. Nevertheless, the opportunities for pupils to write at length and the impact on improving progress for lower-attaining pupils are not yet consistently strong. There is growing evidence that teachers are responding to the needs of pupils, where before this was lacking.

The new approach to the teaching of reading is embedding well across the school, particularly in upper key stage 2. Where strongest, teachers are skilled in questioning pupils' knowledge and understanding. Pupils engage in meaningful discussions about an author's choice of language. They are increasingly confident when answering questions about the text they are reading. Teachers' questions are timely and probing. As a result, pupils have strong attitudes toward reading and read regularly at home and in school.

The teaching of phonics is not yet consistent. Occasionally, there is a lack of focus, where it is not clear what staff intend the pupils to learn as activities are not precise enough. To ensure that pupils keep up, staff tend to try and cover a lot of learning in one session, but this can be difficult for pupils, leading to confusion.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' presentation of their work has gone from strength to strength. As expectations have risen, pupils have continued to meet this. Handwriting is improving, and general pride has increased. However, this is not yet consistently strong across the curriculum.

Pupils behaved well in the majority of lessons visited during this inspection. It is apparent that pupils are growing in confidence to discuss their learning and share what they have been doing. In the few instances where teaching, learning and assessment are weaker, low-level behaviour and lack of engagement are evident because adults' expectations of pupils fall short and activities do not challenge pupils enough.

Pupils care for one another and are proud of the school. Pupils aim to do well and enact the school's values in their everyday lives. Pupils are keen to demonstrate that reading is a big part of school life and is highly valued.

Outcomes for pupils

Over time, the proportion of children leaving the Reception class achieving a good level of development has been consistently above the national average, including in 2018. Across the Reception Year, children make strong progress. Most children are well prepared for key stage 1.

By the end of key stage 1, the proportions of pupils working at expected age-related standards have increased over the past three years in reading, writing and mathematics. While many pupils are currently working at levels above national averages in reading and writing, standards remain below in mathematics.

The proportion of pupils working at the expected age-related standard and the higher standard by the end of key stage 2 has increased over the previous three years and, in 2018, it was above the national average. This is because pupils are making stronger progress over time.

Current pupils are making increasingly stronger progress but there are still pockets of inconsistencies which hamper pupils' progress over time. In addition, there are pupils in upper key stage 2 with considerable catching up to do due to gaps in their learning. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils.

External support

Leaders have benefited from opportunities across the trust, including moderation of pupils' work and the sharing of ideas, particularly in writing and mathematics. In addition, the trust supports school leaders to bring about improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The trust also continues to support the local governing body. This work has been effective. However, the trust recognises that it is ultimately responsible for the lack of progress in leaders' use of pupil premium funding.