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10 January 2019

Mrs Elizabeth Peters  
Headteacher  
Okeford Fitzpaine Church of England Voluntary Aided School  
The Cross  
Okeford Fitzpaine  
Blandford Forum  
Dorset  
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Dear Mrs Peters

**Special measures monitoring inspection of Okeford Fitzpaine Church of England Voluntary Aided School**

Following my visit to your school on 17 December 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March 2018.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose and responds appropriately to the issues identified at the last inspection. However, in places, it lacks sufficient detail for governors to hold leaders stringently to account. In particular, key dates, success criteria and other helpful milestones are not precise enough. This means there is a lack of clarity for leaders and governors to know when actions have been successful.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring

inspection.

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

Stewart Gale  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2018

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
  - governors ensuring that external support is secured to support current leaders to secure onward improvement to teaching, learning and assessment and pupils' achievement improves rapidly so that it becomes good
  - ensuring that assessment is accurate in all classes across the school
  - ensuring that leaders' checks on teaching and learning are thorough and that teachers act on advice quickly, so that pupils who have previously underachieved catch up quickly
  - ensuring that national curriculum requirements are met
  - ensuring that staff plan interventions systematically so that pupils who have previously underachieved catch up.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
  - teachers use their assessments of what pupils know, can do and understand, so that they make consistently good progress in reading, writing and mathematics
  - teachers plan work that makes sure pupils can apply their writing skills and pupils can write with the accuracy and depth expected for their age
  - teaching enables pupils to gain a strong understanding of what they read
  - phonics teaching enables pupils to read well and apply their phonics skills to their spelling
  - teaching in mixed-age classes supports pupils to learn effectively
  - teaching makes sure that the most able pupils, disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities make consistently good progress
  - off-task behaviour or low-level disruption are eradicated so that they do not act as barriers to pupils' progress.
- Improve the quality of provision in the early years by ensuring that:
  - assessment is accurate and used to plan work that meets children's needs well
  - teachers and additional adults support children's learning by making pertinent assessments and deepening children's understanding.

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 the pupil premium should be undertaken in

order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 17 December 2018**

### **Evidence**

The inspector worked closely with the headteacher throughout the day. To inform the evidence, the inspector undertook a range of inspection activities. These included: talking with some pupils and parents to understand their views of improvements since the last inspection; observing parts of lessons in both main classes and Year 2; meeting with Year 6 pupils; hearing some Year 2 and Year 6 pupils read; evaluating the quality of reading records and assessment information held by teachers; and scrutinising some examples of pupils' work in books (including learning journals in the early years). The inspector also checked the school's single central record and documentation for safeguarding. He also spoke with different members of staff to evaluate their understanding of safeguarding processes and procedures. The inspector reviewed key documentation, including the school development plan, records of governors' visits and the school's summary self-evaluation form. He evaluated the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve attendance. Finally, the inspector also spoke with: the local authority adviser; a representative group of school governors, including the chair of the governing body; the supporting external headteacher who is fulfilling a mentoring role for the new headteacher; and he met with the chief executive officer (CEO) of Sherborne Area Schools' Trust (SAST).

### **Context**

Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed and took up the post in April 2018. There have also been changes to teachers appointed within the school. The headteacher teaches in the key stage 2 class for three days of the week. The governing body has remained relatively unchanged, including retaining the same chair of the governing body. The school has received an academy order and governors are progressing their talks, with an intention to join SAST as soon as possible. This is expected to be no later than the summer term 2019 and within the current academic year.

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

The school is taking effective action at this time, in large part due to the efforts and determination of the new headteacher. Since her appointment, she has taken the advice of external experienced partners, including a mentor headteacher from a local primary school and support from the local authority. She has begun tackling the issues identified at the last inspection. In the first instance, she has worked well with other staff, pupils and parents to improve the ethos and culture of the school. Pupils are now settled and willing to come to school. Pupils say that behaviour, particularly in lessons, has improved markedly, particularly in key stage 2. The headteacher is determined and resilient. She is also vastly improving communication and has quickly earned the trust and respect of the school community, including

parents who describe her as 'awesome'.

However, the school's capacity to secure further improvements at pace remains greatly diminished. Currently, beyond the expertise and knowledge of the headteacher, there are limited resources and few other viable options to boost leadership capacity. For example, as well as a heavy teaching commitment for a whole key stage, the headteacher is leading core subjects, safeguarding, special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and the pupil premium agenda. This workload for one person is unsustainable and creates vulnerabilities for the future.

Governors are keen and willing. They engage with the local authority and welcome external support to help them. However, governors still lack essential knowledge and understanding of their roles and responsibilities to be effective. Although they have their own action plan, this adds very little value because governors are uncertain about the extent of their challenge and support in school. There have been a few visits, usually undertaken by the chair of the governing body. However, these are not sufficiently strategic and lack impact over time.

Governors and those responsible for leading the school were recommended to complete a governance review. This was completed in October 2018 by a recognised national leader of governance who is also the chair of the board for SAST. This identified continuing weaknesses in governance. At this time, governors feel frustrated because they feel they have not been given clear guidance as to how they should improve. It is a matter of urgency for the school to address so that governors can play a key role in driving improvement.

The headteacher has taken action to implement some key initiatives to improve teaching and learning. For example, she has ensured that a daily phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) programme has been implemented and there is an agreed approach to the teaching of writing. There has also been a new approach to the curriculum developed across the school, aimed at broadening pupils' experiences and promoting enjoyment. However, whilst these are productive in starting to tackle weaknesses identified at the last inspection, there is much work needed to evaluate these strategies and ensure that effective practice is well established to bring about the desired impact.

The local authority completed a pupil premium 'health check' in December 2018. This was helpful in identifying some pertinent generic issues relating to teaching, learning and assessment. However, it did not provide the necessary detail or evaluation required for leaders to know what they must do to improve outcomes for pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding. As a result, school leaders still do not have a plan or strategy in place for supporting disadvantaged pupils, including those eligible for pupil premium funding.

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

All teaching staff have moved on since July 2017 with further changes in 2018. There are some new teachers in the school since the previous inspection. However, the quality of teaching remains much too variable, with significant weaknesses in key stage 1 and the Reception Year.

In the key stage 2 class, the introduction of the headteacher and her influence has stabilised the quality of teaching in most lessons. Pupils are motivated and keen to learn. The classroom is well organised and pupils have work set that is now meeting the majority of learners' needs. Teachers check pupils' work and offer helpful next steps and guidance to enable pupils to make progress. However, the quality and effectiveness of teaching is not consistently good enough across the range of subjects and with different teachers. For example, the standard of pupils' writing in their English books is far superior to that seen in topic books. The same pupils produce writing in science that is poor, with little care and attention given to the quality or construction of what is being written. Furthermore, the quality of reading records and assessment keeping is not yet good enough. This means teachers are not identifying or planning high-quality activities to ensure that pupils are having their needs met in terms of their reading.

The most concerning part of the school in terms of the quality of teaching and provision remains in the key stage 1 and Reception class and is a high priority to address. Teaching, learning and assessment in this part of the school remain inadequate. Teachers are not identifying and targeting pupils to receive the high-quality and well-matched support they need to make rapid gains. Expectations of pupils are still too low. For example, Year 1 pupils are retracing steps and knowledge that should already be secure, such as naming common shapes. Additional adults do not provide effective challenge or support to raise the quality of teaching and learning. Information about pupils, including those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan is not used effectively to tailor suitable activities to meet the range of pupils' needs. Furthermore, the physical environment is not well managed or organised to provide children's full entitlement for learning in the early years foundation stage (EYFS). In particular, the outdoors provision is grossly underdeveloped and bare. This restricts the children's ability and entitlement to learn, play and enjoy the outdoors. Furthermore, activities and areas inside are not well labelled or equipped to support the children's development across the early years curriculum. Consequently, children are not showing the independence and resilience needed to learn well, including the most able children.

Finally, there remain other critical weaknesses that impede pupils' learning and progress. First, the class structure and arrangement for pupils in Year 2, as a temporary solution, is having the effect of diluting some of the wider issues in key stage 1. The pupils in this provision were focused and being supported to make some progress. However, this is not a credible long-term solution and needs urgent consideration. Second, teachers are not yet focusing well enough on pupils with

SEND or those vulnerable in other ways, such as disadvantaged pupils. Individual learning plans and assessment are not being used well to identify what the pupils need to learn next. This still holds too many vulnerable pupils back and prevents them from reaching the standards of which they are capable.

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

Older pupils told the inspector that behaviour in the school has improved this year. They feel that behaviour in lessons and at other times of the day, such as in assembly, has changed for the better. They understand why behaviour and conduct are important and how these reflect the school's values and the 'ready, respectful, safe' initiative that has been introduced. Other visitors and governors also confirm that the school's ethos and culture have improved. Pupils are welcoming and mostly take care of each other well. However, pupils say that some behaviour at breaktimes is bothersome and disruptive. This unsettles some pupils who frown upon this when it is passed off as a 'joke'.

In lessons, pupils in key stage 2 interact positively to share ideas and support each other. They show positive learning behaviours and an appetite to learn. However, in the other class, pupils do not show the same eagerness. Younger pupils are not developing sufficient curiosity and independence to learn well, including in their personal, social and emotional development.

Pupils feel safe. They are confident that staff will intervene and help them if needed. Pupils understand and know what bullying is and say this is not a problem at Okeford Fitzpaine. Most pupils play and mix well together in this small school. Pupils also have a secure understanding of how to stay safe in different situations or contexts, such as when working online. They also appreciate the work of staff to support them at key times of the year. For example, pupils show a good understanding of their responsibilities and how they should behave at Halloween.

Overall, the safeguarding arrangements and effectiveness found at the last inspection have been maintained. In addition, there have been some improvements to site security. This has meant that accessibility and the movement of pupils is now well managed. Governors check the single central record and ensure that staff are trained in current requirements for safeguarding. The headteacher is tenacious and resilient. She takes prompt and effective action to work with, or refer cases to, other agencies. This has raised the quality and effectiveness of safeguarding in the time that she has been in post. There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff typically know what to do and how to respond to pupils to ensure their safety in different situations. There was only one example where a member of staff lacked clarity and was unsure about what to do in the event of a pupil making a disclosure to them.

The headteacher has also overhauled the systems and work around attendance. Also, more pupils enjoy school and want to come. This is seen in improving



attendance figures seen in the school this term. In addition, the proportion of pupils with high persistent absence has reduced significantly. However, the absence rates of some key groups, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, remain too high. Similarly, the marked decline in the proportion of those who have persistently high absence is not yet good enough, so too many pupils still miss significant amounts of their educational entitlement. There have been no exclusions.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

The school's assessment information is still unreliable, as seen, for example, in reading assessments and checking these against pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. In key stage 2, pupils are starting to gain increasing confidence to be working at expected standards. For example, pupils in Year 6 are mostly able to read complex numbers and explain what numbers to three decimal places mean. They understand arithmetic and can solve age-appropriate problems involving number, using long multiplication and division. However, pupils new to key stage 2 are further adrift. There are still gaps in knowledge that hold too many pupils back and hinder their progress. Furthermore, pupils do not have an extensive range of vocabulary, which prevents them from understanding and comprehending key parts of texts.

In the Reception Year and key stage 1, pupils are continuing to be off-track and do not compare favourably to national benchmarks. For example, in 2018 too few pupils met the standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check. This was also reflected in the number of children reaching the expectations for successful development by the end of the EYFS. Only 12% of children achieved a good level of development in the early years. Pupils' command of and ability in basic number, communication and language, as well as for reading and writing, is too weak. Consequently, pupils are not well prepared for transitional phases and the next steps in their education, including the most able pupils. Pupils with SEND are not yet being ably targeted or supported to make strong progress, including those with an EHC plan, because of weak practice in teaching, learning and assessment.

The school has now identified all of those eligible for the pupil premium grant. The headteacher is starting to hold teachers to account and in January 2019 will have face-to-face meetings to agree targets and next steps for pupils. Currently, weaknesses in the school's systems mean that leaders have not got a robust view or account of the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most able or with SEND.

### **External support**

The headteacher is working extensively with different partners, mostly through the local authority and the North Dorset Teaching School Alliance. Additional ongoing mentoring and advice is being provided by a headteacher of another local primary school. This is highly valued and appreciated by the headteacher. Partners are

communicating and aligning their work in support of leaders and in a bid to tackle weaknesses identified at the last inspection. The CEO of SAST and local authority adviser are keenly involved and share a good understanding of the unique needs of the school. However, at this time, the external support is having variable impact. The headteacher has implemented a raft of new initiatives that are improving behaviour and attendance. Other recently implemented strategies, for example phonics sessions, have not been evaluated closely enough to check that they are working well. Other strategic weaknesses, such as having a robust pupil premium strategy, have not been developed consistently.

Further to the visit, leaders and governors should take rapid action to:

- improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the key stage 1 and Reception Year
- build internal capacity by ensuring that governors understand what they need to do and are becoming proficient in checking and evaluating the work of the school
- improve teachers' use of assessment to implement appropriately tailored individual plans for targeted pupils, including those with SEND and disadvantaged pupils.