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28 March 2019

Mr Del Planter  
Marlwood School  
Vattingstone Lane  
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Bristol  
BS35 3LA

Dear Mr Planter

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

Following my visit with Trudi Baker, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 20–21 March 2019, 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 fourth 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 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 board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, 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 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 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 pupils, based on accurate and appropriate assessment 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 20 March 2019 to 21 March 2019**

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, inspectors visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' books to monitor learning together with senior leaders. They examined school documents and met with the headteacher, the chief executive officer (CEO) and members of the interim executive committee (local governing body). They met with senior and middle leaders, a group of staff and with a group of pupils. In this visit, inspectors focused on the impact on teaching, learning and assessment of the initiatives introduced by school leaders.

### **Context**

Staffing has been much more stable than noted in previous visits. However, the deputy headteacher will be moving to another school at Easter to take on a headship. The trust has moved to replace him with a colleague from another trust school.

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

The interim headteacher has been in post for almost two terms. When he first took on the role, he set out his vision, identified priorities and established his way of working. The last monitoring visit report remarked on the renewed impetus for improving teaching and learning. However, it noted that much remained to be done. There have been significant improvements in virtually all areas of the school since then. This is very largely the result of the leadership of the headteacher, supported by his senior team and staff. The senior team is small but works together cohesively. Senior leaders have well-defined roles and carry them out effectively. There has been significant growth in their effectiveness as a team and as individuals.

The headteacher has shared a very clear vision for the school with staff and pupils. Nobody is in any doubt as to the school's priorities and the expectations on them. The headteacher has secured 'buy-in' from staff, pupils and parents. Staff report to inspectors that they understand what is asked of them and, crucially, how they should set about it. Consequently, they feel able to make the necessary improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. Staffroom morale is high.

The leadership of teaching is increasingly strong. Leaders have rightly focused on a few key aspects of teaching. They make it clear to staff what they want and provide advice and support to allow them to achieve it. Staff appreciate this clarity. Leaders ensure that their ideas for improving teaching are grounded in published research. Staff are confident that what they are asked to do is part of a long-term strategy and will not change. As a consequence, they are committed to making changes in

their practice.

Leaders are now monitoring the quality of teaching very effectively. This is leading to improvements in classroom practice across the school. Leaders have brought together three factors that make it effective. Firstly, they have devised robust systems of checking regularly on the quality of work in pupils' books and on classroom practice. This gives them a clear and detailed view of strengths and weaknesses. They also make it clear to staff that improving teaching is their top priority. One middle leader spoke positively of the 'remarkable energy' of the headteacher and senior team. Finally, they ensure that the tone of feedback is supportive and developmental for teachers. This positive tone is appreciated by staff, who consequently are keen to talk about ideas that will improve their teaching.

Middle leaders are reacting well to the headteacher's expectations. Some are new in post or temporary. However, most are keen to be a part of the school's development and to work closely with senior leaders as they model monitoring and evaluation exercises.

There have been significant improvements in the leadership of assessment. Working with leaders from other schools in the trust, leaders and teachers are working together effectively to introduce a framework for assessment for key stage 3 pupils. Parents, pupils and staff all agree it is a substantial improvement on the previous system. It is early days, and leaders and teachers acknowledge that the system is not perfect. They are now working together to modify and improve it.

Although there has been less staffing turbulence in the last few months than previously, leaders are still wrestling with some issues caused by temporary appointments and the challenges of recruitment. The headteacher and trust CEO have worked together to minimise the impact of these difficulties. For example, the trust is planning to increase the support for the mathematics team from other schools in the trust.

Leaders are making changes to the curriculum so that it better matches the needs of all pupils. They have made the decision to ensure that all pupils receive their entitlement to a broad curriculum throughout key stage 3 by removing the 'fast track' option of a GCSE in Year 9. This will give them more time to prepare for their GCSEs in key stage 4. While 'fast track' was originally introduced with the best of intentions, it narrowed the curriculum in key stage 3. Leaders have also reorganised languages so that pupils study fewer languages but in greater depth. Taken together, these two decisions will give pupils opportunities to achieve higher standards.

The trust is now planning to develop the current interim executive committee (IEC) into a local governing committee. This will put the school on the same governance footing as other schools in the trust and is an appropriate step as the school

improves. In the meantime, members of the IEC are effective in holding school leaders to account. They are knowledgeable about the school's performance and its strengths and weaknesses. They have a positive and appropriate relationship with school leaders and the leaders of the trust.

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

The quality of teaching is improving. This is because teachers are responding to the simple and clear focus that leaders have set. Leaders ask teachers to make sure that they ask good questions in their classes and to give feedback to pupils that helps them to improve. There are still inconsistencies between departments in the quality of questions asked, but there is a significant improvement. Teachers are using questioning for two specific purposes. First, they use it to check whether pupils understand. Most teachers are now doing this effectively. However, fewer modify their teaching in response. Some teachers are also using questioning techniques to encourage pupils to think more deeply. There are areas of the school where the improved quality of questioning has had a significant impact on the progress pupils make. In languages, for example, pupils are making good progress as a result of the work teachers are doing.

Teachers are also focusing on ensuring that pupils know how to improve their work. There have been improvements since the previous inspection. Most pupils are now receiving advice on the next steps in their learning. However, too often, the advice is insufficiently clear and precise to be valuable. Teachers tell pupils regularly what they need to improve, but rarely how to improve it.

Many teachers are now expecting more of their pupils, particularly in key stage 3. This raised expectation is supported by the new assessment framework that leaders have introduced. Nonetheless, expectations remain too low in a few subjects. Mathematics is a cause for concern. Here, teachers are not setting high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. In most subjects, teachers are asking more of most groups of pupils. However, the most able few, who should be capable of the very highest GCSE grades, are still not getting the additional challenge they need to push them on.

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

The improvement in attendance noted in previous reports continues. Absence levels are still a little above average, but the figures are distorted by the near total absence of a very small number of pupils. The systems to check on attendance are strong with a good level of support for families that face additional barriers in maintaining good attendance.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are improving as the quality of teaching improves. Pupils are generally keen and positive. They are showing substantially more pride in their work than previously.

## **Outcomes for pupils**

Standards are beginning to rise in most subjects. Pupils are producing some good-quality work in English and languages, for example. However, there are still pockets where the standards achieved are not good enough. In mathematics, in particular, the level of work is not challenging enough.

Pupils' standards of punctuation, spelling and grammar are generally in line with other schools in key stage 4. It is not as strong in key stage 3.

## **External support**

The school is supported well by the trust. It gets most of the support it needs from it. Trust leaders have ensured that the school has sufficient leadership capacity to grow and improve. They have also successfully steered the school through a period of uncertainty and brought stability. This allows the school's leaders to focus on the essentials of improving teaching and learning.

The trust is also supporting weaker departments in the school to ensure that they too have the capacity to improve.

The key stage 3 assessment framework has been developed across the trust's schools and Marlwood is the first to implement it. It is playing an important part in raising expectations. The impact of the framework may be even greater when staff from other schools in the trust join the school's middle leaders in evaluating the introduction of the framework.