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Mr Daniel Farthing  
Headteacher  
Bulwell St Mary's Primary and Nursery School  
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Dear Mr Farthing

### **Short inspection of Bulwell St Mary's Primary and Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 19 March 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since your predecessor school was judged to be good in January 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Bulwell St Mary's Primary and Nursery School became a member of the Transform Trust in August 2016, and in September 2017 you became the headteacher of the school.

Pupils told me they are happy to come to school. They get on well together and are confident that concerns are dealt with quickly and effectively. One pupil said, 'Everyone is valued. I do feel that there is a culture of respect.' Pupils appreciate the range of visits, particularly residential visits, and visitors to the school. They enjoy taking part in the numerous sporting and music opportunities, and they acknowledge the influence of the school council in improving the range and quality of play equipment available at playtimes.

Pupils are motivated learners. They know what they need to do to improve their work further and are given opportunities to do so. Where pupils require additional support, you have ensured that staff are in place to meet their needs. Classrooms are stimulating and highly engaging places to learn. Teachers provide displays which support pupils' learning effectively. Pupils' work is presented to a high standard and is celebrated around the school. The leadership team has created an exciting and well-resourced library which is well used and accessible to pupils even beyond the normal school day.

You are developing your staff and leadership team effectively through appropriate professional development opportunities. Staff are enthusiastic and highly committed. Together, you have identified the key priorities for improvement and have ensured that staff have a higher expectation of what pupils can achieve in lessons and over time. Senior and middle leaders meet regularly to check pupils' progress and use this information to improve the quality of teaching. They acknowledge that there is still work to do in reading, writing and aspects of mathematics, where initiatives are developing.

Leaders of mathematics and English are relatively new to post, and while they are checking the impact of the initiatives, occasionally this is not done precisely enough to make sure that it is highly accurate across the school. During our tour of the school, we noted that in some classes in key stage 2 teachers were not effectively designing tasks to ensure that the most able pupils made the progress of which they are capable in writing and mathematics. Pupils' books showed that some tasks did not challenge these pupils sufficiently.

The governing body provides effective support to the school. Governors are ambitious for the school. They have a good understanding of what the school does well and what it needs to do to be even better. They make regular visits to check on the school's work towards meeting its priorities and they understand the importance of holding leaders to account.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed, well organised and kept securely. Policies are reviewed and regularly updated. Recruitment procedures are followed and are thorough. Training is up to date.

Leaders have developed a strong and effective culture of safeguarding. Staff make prompt referrals of concerns. Strong pastoral and multi-agency work provides timely support to vulnerable pupils and their families. Leaders' understanding of local issues is used to good effect.

Pupils feel safe because of the guidance made available to them through the curriculum and as a result of pastoral support. They receive regular reminders about keeping safe online. Visitors, such as the police and fire service, support the work of the school. Themed weeks help pupils to learn about internet safety. Pupils value the role of the 'buddy' and 'play ambassador' systems should they feel lonely or face friendship issues.

### **Inspection findings**

- During the inspection, I looked at the quality of teaching and learning in English and mathematics, particularly in key stage 2. In 2018, there was a fall in the proportion of pupils matching the national average in reading, writing and

mathematics at the end of key stage 2.

- To improve reading skills, you have introduced a whole-school shared reading programme with links to writing. Adults regularly teach pupils skills in defining the meaning of relatively unfamiliar vocabulary. Our observations showed that where the definition and use of vocabulary was taught well, pupils went on to create opportunities in their own writing to use a wider and more sophisticated vocabulary to good effect. Adults use texts from the wider curriculum to engage pupils in stimulating comprehension tasks. They use a range of resources to help pupils learn and practise skills of ever increasing complexity. In a very few instances, there is an inconsistency in matching a task to a pupil's ability and pupils do not make consistently good progress in this subject.
- Together, we visited the Reception class. You explained that a proportion of pupils were entering Reception with a limited range of vocabulary and with weaknesses in sentence construction. With some groups, fine motors skills were slow to develop and writing skills were delayed. We looked in pupils' learning journeys and workbooks and found that the most able and most able disadvantaged children were using phonic knowledge effectively to write simple sentences. A proportion of children were selecting words carefully to make improvements to their writing. Adults were using an appropriate range of resources to help other groups of children learn and record their sounds proficiently.
- You have improved the number and range of fiction and non-fiction books available for reading throughout the school. The range and level of challenge of reading books are closely monitored by adults to ensure that pupils use their phonic and comprehension skills effectively. You have made improvements to the library. The book stock includes a range of interesting and challenging books for pupils to use to practise their phonic and comprehension skills. The school's assessment shows that, for many pupils, progress is equally as strong in reading as it is in writing and mathematics.
- During the inspection, we looked at pupils' work in books and on display. In key stage 2, pupils write with increasing regularity and at length. Books show that skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar are taught regularly and systematically to give structure to writing and to make it more effective. The curriculum is being used to engage pupils in interesting writing tasks. Leaders are developing cross-curricular work still further to improve the regularity, the range of and purpose for writing. However, this modification is recent and is not securely in place across the school.
- In mathematics, you have refined teaching to increase fluency in arithmetic and to deepen and broaden pupils' knowledge and understanding of mathematical processes to solve problems of increasing complexity. Work in books and discussions with pupils show that increasing proportions of pupils are able to solve complex number problems confidently, apply concepts to unfamiliar situations and explain their methodology. In key stage 1, for example, pupils were using a range of calculations to answer mathematical problems. Observations of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work showed many examples of pupils analysing questions and applying reasoning to increasingly demanding

mathematical problems. However, subject leaders do not check well enough that teachers use their knowledge of what pupils know when planning the next stage in their learning.

- Recently, you have made modifications to the school's assessment system for teachers to evaluate pupils' attainment and progress at key points through the year. You and the leadership team have been swift in evaluating current provision and implementing strategies to bring about improvement. Current assessments show that the majority of pupils are achieving in line with age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. Discussions with subject leaders identified that these leaders haven't yet developed their skills sufficiently well to ensure that the strategies they implement are fully successful across the school.
- Published information shows that attendance in 2018 had risen to being above the national average. This was an improvement on the previous two years. You have implemented a range of strategies intended to reduce the number of absences and persistent absences. Fines have been issued for poor attendance including for those who take holidays during term time. Rewards are given to those pupils who attend regularly. The attendance improvement officer works closely with families to make sure that their children attend school regularly. Current attendance information indicates that rates for persistent absence continue to decline but that attendance is not as high as at the same point in 2018. Leaders and governors know that they must remain rigorous in their approach to sustaining a high level of attendance.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they refine the skills of subject leaders further in leading and checking improvements in their area of responsibility
- the improvements to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 2 are consolidated and continued so that a greater proportion of pupils reach the higher standards
- they continue to work with parents in improving pupils' attendance.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Southwell, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Nottingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Moore  
**Ofsted Inspector**  
**Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I had meetings with you and I also met with five governors, including the chair of the governing body, and the chief executive of the Transform Trust. I spoke with parents before school and with a group of pupils about their school experience. I listened to a group of children read. I visited all classes, some jointly with you and others with both you and the deputy headteacher. Together, we looked at a sample of pupils' books. I met with leaders with responsibility for English and mathematics and those with responsibility for non-subject areas. I evaluated the school's documentation about pupils' achievement, planning for improvement and attendance. In addition, I checked the school's safeguarding arrangements and records, including the school's record of recruitment checks on staff. I took account of the 14 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and reviewed the four responses to the staff questionnaire. There were no responses from children to the online survey.