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Mr Andrew Wilson
Executive Headteacher
Marden Vale CofE Academy
William Street
Calne
Wiltshire
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Dear Mr Wilson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Marden Vale CofE Academy

Following my visit with Tracy French, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 27 to 28 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 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 June 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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose

the school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to 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 director of education for the Diocese of Salisbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wiltshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by ensuring that:
 - the trust board and governors hold leaders to account for outcomes and standards in the school more robustly
 - safeguarding processes are effective in minimising risk to pupils
 - improvements are planned precisely so that actions taken are highly effective
 - all staff have suitably high expectations of pupils' conduct and their progress
 - the curriculum is broad and balanced so that pupils can achieve well and have a greater understanding of a range of issues relating to their personal development
 - the leadership of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is sufficiently rigorous and strategies are implemented effectively to support strong pupil progress
 - relationships with parents are strengthened to restore trust in the work of the school
 - middle leaders are suitably skilled so that they can support the drive for rapid improvement
 - trust directors and governors fully evaluate the impact that additional funding is having on improving the outcomes and personal development of disadvantaged pupils.

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - making sure that teaching staff and adults who support pupils in lessons have the subject knowledge and behaviour management skills that they need
 - using assessment information to plan work that matches the learning needs of all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils
 - challenging the most able pupils to reach the highest standards
 - identifying pupils' knowledge and understanding accurately so that gaps in learning are reduced
 - insisting on high expectations of what pupils can achieve.

- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - reducing the incidence of poor behaviour and lack of engagement in learning
 - improving the attendance of pupils and reducing the proportion who are

persistently absent

- ensuring that relationships between pupils are positive so they understand how to play cooperatively together.

Evidence

Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, interim headteacher, deputy headteacher, and other members of the school's extended leadership team. Discussions were held with the trust improvement director, trust hub lead, the chief executive officer and two trustees of Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust (DSAT). An inspector also met with three members of the local governing board. Inspectors also talked with staff, pupils, and parents. An inspector conducted a telephone call with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors evaluated the progress made against recommendations identified in the previous inspection report.

Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at social times and conducted visits to classrooms to observe pupils' progress and their attitudes to learning. Pupils' work across a range of subjects and year groups was scrutinised. A range of other documentation was looked at, including the school's improvement plans, minutes of governing body meetings, and academy director visits. Inspectors checked a wide range of information about safety and safeguarding, and the school's single central record of checks on staff recruitment.

Context

Significant changes in staffing have taken place since the school was deemed to require special measures in June 2018. A new interim headteacher was in post for one term from September 2018 to January 2019. The current headteacher is contracted until January 2020. The executive headteacher has remained constant. He leaves in April 2019. A new full-time deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2018. During the autumn term there was a consultant leader of SEND (SENCo) in place until the substantive SENCo took up post in January 2019. A family support worker/attendance officer has been in post since January 2019. A number of teaching staff have left the school. Seven new teachers joined the school in September 2018. A national leader of governance (NLG) led the local governing body from September 2018 until February 2019. The NLG has now left. A new chair has recently been appointed. She is also a trustee of DSAT.

The external review of governance took place across the autumn and spring term. Final recommendations were made in February 2019. An external review of the school's use of the additional pupil premium funding also took place in February 2019.

Leaders have put into place a school-wide curriculum which covers a broader range of subjects than was previously on offer. The implementation of the curriculum beyond English and mathematics was not examined as part of this visit and will be examined in more detail in subsequent visits.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive headteacher has been successful in bringing stability to the leadership of the school. He has been instrumental in enabling the school to better safeguard pupils and improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes. It has taken time to stabilise staffing and put leadership systems in place to steady the daily running of the school.

The current headteacher has gained the confidence of staff and pupils quickly. As a result, the pace of improvement is quickening and bringing about sustained improvement. Leaders are working determinedly to raise expectations of what staff and pupils are capable of. This is most effective in the teaching of phonics and mathematics. Pupils now access a curriculum that is much better planned and organised and covers a wide range of subjects. Leaders' actions are proving successful in developing teachers' subject knowledge and skills. However, senior leaders and governors recognise the need to drive improvement at a more rapid pace over the coming months.

Much good work has been done by the trust to upgrade the school's safeguarding systems and processes. Safeguarding audits and monitoring visits have been used precisely to target aspects that need strengthening. Leaders have implemented a full range of training and support to ensure that the systems and processes are up to date and in line with current legislation. This work is mostly effective. However, leaders' actions have not yet reduced pupils' exclusions sufficiently. Leaders' record-keeping regarding pupils who attend the school part-time is not as good as it should be.

The new SENCo is putting operational systems into place to improve the leadership and impact of the provision for pupils with SEND. This work is already paying dividends. Additional interventions and teaching are beginning to support these pupils to catch up. However, this work is very recent. The SENCo has not yet had opportunities to monitor pupils' learning or the progress that pupils make in class. This hinders leaders' ability to support staff to bring about the key improvements that are required to improve the teaching and learning for these pupils.

There has been considerable improvement to the provision in the additional resource base. Workbooks show appropriate progress for these pupils. The resource base manager has a clear understanding of pupils' needs and has high expectations. Pupils' progress is checked rigorously, and teachers routinely adapt teaching to meet pupils' needs well, particularly in mathematics. However, resource base leaders do not have a clear understanding of how well the pupil premium funding is spent for its pupils.

The academy improvement director's visits are providing precise challenge and holding leaders to account for bringing about rapid improvement. As a result, much of the school-wide systems are functioning as they should. For example, procedures and systems to improve teachers' assessments are resulting in teachers'

assessments that are increasingly accurate. Detailed systems have gone into place to check pupils' attendance with much greater rigour.

The local governing board has undertaken key training to improve their understanding of the school's performance. Governors are beginning to undertake more focused school visits to challenge leaders about the impact of school improvement initiatives. However, the trust, and governors, do not yet evaluate the impact that additional funding is having on improving the outcomes and personal development of disadvantaged pupils well enough. Leaders, including the trust, are not yet successfully addressing this aspect of weakness identified at the last inspection. Over the last four weeks, current leaders have been taking rapid action to respond to the many actions that are required.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving steadily. The teaching team is now more stable. Most teachers are new since September 2018. Leaders have improved their structures and processes to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This has brought about greater consistency in presentation of workbooks and is gradually raising teachers' expectations and pupils' compliance to school policies.

Much work has gone into place to improve teachers' subject knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics. This has been most effective in improving the teaching of mathematics and phonics.

Leaders' actions are beginning to have a positive impact on the way in which teachers plan learning over time and use their assessments of what pupils can and cannot do. However, this work is recent and so the impact of leaders' comprehensive staff training package to improve teaching is most evident over the last term. Consequently, improvement to teaching and learning has not yet been sustained to reverse the widespread underachievement caused by previously weak teaching.

There remain considerable differences in the quality of teaching, assessment and learning across the school. Where teaching remains weak, the underachievement of pupils is not being reduced quickly enough. In too many classes, middle-attaining pupils underachieve in reading and writing. Leaders have not followed up their checks on teaching to ensure that planning addresses gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills precisely enough. More work is required to ensure that teachers are given practical guidance and support so that their teaching focuses on the right aspects to enable pupils' prior underachievement, and the gaps they have in their knowledge, to be diminished successfully.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Senior leaders have made a good start in implementing the recommendations of the previous inspection. The family support worker/attendance officer is working determinedly with families and external agencies to improve pupils' attendance. A new system, in place since January, is showing positive signs of reducing persistent absence. Approximately half of these pupils are improving their attendance because of the robust and tenacious challenge and support this term. However, disadvantaged pupils still do not attend regularly enough.

Much work has been completed to improve pupils' adherence to the school's behaviour policy. This is paying off. Leaders ensure that there is better consistency and observance of the behaviour policy in lessons and around school. Systems have been strengthened to support pupils who present challenging behaviour. However, rates of exclusions are still exceptionally high. This is in part due to the higher expectations in place at the school. However, leaders have not yet done enough to stem the high rates of pupil exclusions. Systems in place to reintegrate pupils back to lessons after time out of class are detailed and well thought out. This is proving successful for a number of pupils. However, some pupils remain in nurture provision for too long. While pupils are developing important skills to get ready for learning, these pupils are not sufficiently exposed to the curriculum they need to catch up.

Where teaching is closely matched to pupils' needs, pupils behave well and show high levels of resilience and are catching up. However, where teaching is too inconsistent and does not meet pupils' needs well enough pupils demonstrate poor levels of concentration and their learning falters. Some children sit and wait for adults to notice that they have stopped working and do not have the resilience to tackle the trickiest work with independence. This is not picked up by some teachers. As a result, pupils' underachievement persists and pupils' gaps in learning are not tackled quickly enough.

Pupils told inspectors that behaviour at lunchtimes and around the school has improved markedly because teachers are consistent in applying the school's behaviour systems.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders' actions are beginning to have a positive impact on raising standards across the school. Published pupil performance information at the end of key stage 1 and 2 showed some improvement in 2018. At the end of key stage 2, pupils' progress in reading and writing increased to average from well below average in the previous year. However, pupils' attainment remained below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.

Too few pupils entered key stage 2 this year with the knowledge and skills that are expected for their age. Approximately half of the current pupils needed to catch up in reading, writing and mathematics. Teaching for these pupils is not yet remedying

their prior underachievement well enough in writing.

Much work has already been completed to develop teachers' subject knowledge in English and mathematics. This is beginning to improve the progress that pupils make. Leaders' current work to develop teachers' skills and knowledge in assessing what pupils can do, know and understand is paying off. Teachers' assessments are now usually accurate. However, teachers do not use this information consistently well to plan and sequence teaching that is closely matched to pupils' needs. This hinders the progress that current pupils make. Consequently, pupils who have previously underachieved are not yet catching up quickly enough.

Pupils in upper key stage 2 make inconsistent progress. Some pupils are making strong progress because of the stronger teaching they now receive. However, inconsistent teaching from class to class means that pupils' underachievement persists. The school's arrangements for teaching in upper key stage 2 do not ensure that the lower-attaining pupils are exposed to work that challenges them. As a result, lower-attaining pupils are not catching up quickly enough. Leaders have not picked this up swiftly. As a result, some pupils are making rapid progress while others are falling further behind. Too few pupils are working at the standards expected for their age.

Across the school pupils' progress is better defined in mathematics than in reading and writing. Pupils' basic number skills are developing and increasingly pupils are expected to explain their thinking in mathematics. Leaders have provided support to ensure that teaching is planned successfully in sequences so that pupils gain new knowledge and practise and apply their mathematical understanding through reasoning and solving problems. However, this is not yet embedded in all classes and inconsistency remains across key stages and classes. Pupils are making strong progress in mathematics in the additional resource base.

The teaching of phonics at key stage 1 is improving. The changed teaching arrangements in place this year are proving successful. As a result of systematic teaching more pupils are equipped with the knowledge and skills to read accurately. The proportions of pupils who met the required standard in the phonics screening check in 2018 increased markedly. However, there remains insufficient opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their phonic knowledge and skills to their writing, with the accuracy required.

External support

A range of support has been brokered by DSAT for the school from a range of organisations. This has included leadership support, and support to improve teaching, learning and assessment. There has also been a comprehensive package of support to bring about better safeguarding of pupils. This work is proving successful. Current external support is helping teachers to develop their subject knowledge in English and mathematics. It is also providing clarity to middle leaders

about their roles and responsibilities. The school has utilised the external support from the local authority to develop the provision in the additional resource base well.

The multi-academy trust has also provided internal support through its academy improvement director and hub improvement leader. This support is proving increasingly effective in enabling leaders to build momentum in improving the quality of teaching.